

## PHÁT HUY TÍNH TỰ CHỦ CỦA NGƯỜI HỌC TRONG NHỮNG LỚP HỌC KỸ NĂNG VIẾT TIẾNG ANH

Nguyễn Thị Hà\*

*Trong số các yếu tố như người học, người dạy, giáo trình và phương pháp giảng dạy, thì người học đóng vai trò quan trọng nhất trong bất kỳ một quá trình học tập nào. Nói một cách khác, người học muốn thành công trong quá trình học tập cần phải có trách nhiệm với việc học của chính mình. Đối với người học, đặc biệt là người học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ, sự chủ động trong học tập đóng vai trò không nhỏ. Do đó, giáo viên cần phải phát huy được tính tự chủ của người học trong những lớp học tiếng Anh nói chung và những giờ học kỹ năng viết tiếng Anh nói riêng. Vì viết là một kỹ năng đòi hỏi người học cần phải suy nghĩ và bày tỏ quan điểm về một vấn đề nên giáo viên cần tạo nhiều cơ hội hơn nữa để học sinh tư duy và đưa ra ý kiến. Bài viết bàn luận những khái niệm về tính tự chủ trong học tập, vai trò của người dạy và người học trong những lớp học mà người học có tính tự lập trong quá trình học tập. Ngoài ra, bài viết còn đưa ra một số gợi ý để phát huy tính tự chủ trong học tập kỹ năng viết tiếng Anh.*

**Từ khoá:** tính tự chủ, kỹ năng viết.

*In any process of learning the learner takes the most important role of all the factors In any process of learning, learner plays the most important role among such factors as teacher, learner, course material and teaching methods. In other words, learners who want to be successful in the learning process need to take charge of their own learning. Therefore, it is important for learners, especially those of English as a foreign language to have great autonomy in learning. It is also important for teachers to promote the learner autonomy in English classrooms in general and English writing classrooms in particular. As writing is a productive skill, learners in English writing classes should be encouraged to be autonomous and given more opportunities to think critically, to initiate learning and express themselves. This paper aims at discussing the concepts of learner autonomy, and the roles of teacher and learner in an autonomous classroom. Furthermore, it suggests ways to promote learner autonomy in learning writing skill.*

**Key words:** autonomy, writing skill.

## PROMOTING LEARNER AUTONOMY IN EFL WRITING CLASSROOMS

### Introduction.

Learner autonomy plays a prominent role in learning in general and learning a foreign

language in particular. The necessity of autonomy in education was emphasized by some educators such as Holec (1981), Little (1991), and Benson (2001). According to these educators, students who are able to take charge of their own learning have more

\* ThS., Khoa Ngoại ngữ, Trường Đại học Sư phạm Kỹ thuật Hưng Yên

chance to succeed academically and are more motivated than those who do not have effective strategies in learning by themselves. The role of autonomy in the success of learning in general and learning foreign languages in particular is undeniable. Dam (1995) stated that learners' active participation and responsibility for their own learning process are crucial in the field of foreign language learning. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to foster learner autonomy in learning foreign languages. It is beneficial to enhance learner autonomy in language education as "learning should be more focused and purposeful, and thus more effective both immediately and in the longer term" when the learners take part in the decision-making process (Little, 1991, p. 8). As the learners are responsible for their learning process, the pressures from learning that are often found in traditional teacher-centered method should be minimized.

Why should autonomy be enhanced in learning writing skill? Of the four skills, writing is considered as one of the difficult and tedious skills to teach, learn or acquire for non-native as well as native learners (Kim and Kim, 2005). It is obvious that some learners finish their writing task as required by their teacher since they are not motivated to write. Learners are not good at developing ideas, presenting their ideas in English clearly and coherently. It is hard for teacher to engage learners in autonomous learning, and it is also a challenge for learners in mastering writing skill if they lack learning autonomy. In order to master writing skill, a productive skill, it is essential for learners to take responsibility

for their own learning in linguistic skills such as vocabulary, grammar, paragraph organization, coherence. Therefore, promoting learners' autonomy in EFL writing classrooms is a necessity for improving learners' writing skill. The aim of this article is to discuss the concept of learner autonomy, the role of teachers and learners in an autonomous classroom and how to promote learner autonomy in EFL writing classrooms.

### **Learner autonomy**

The term autonomy in language learning has been a topic of interest for many researchers in the past decades (Little, 1991; Benson 2001; Dam, 1995). However, different writers have defined the concept in different ways. According to Holec (1981), learning autonomy refers to "the individual learners' acceptance of responsibility for their own learning". Learners cannot accept responsibility for their own study if they do not have any ideas of what, why and how they are trying to learn. They must have some initiatives to direct their learning process. In other words, Holec assumes that autonomous learners are those who are able to determine the learning objectives, find the suitable learning strategies, monitor their acquisition and evaluate their experience. Besides, he believes that the ability to take charge of one's own learning is not indigenous; therefore, autonomy needs to be encouraged, promoted and should be a goal of education that learners, teachers and institutions should work together to achieve. Trinh (2010) also has a similar definition with more details. Learning autonomy concerns the right ways



in identifying the learning motivation, the self-management for own study to have positive learning attitudes, and making fine adjustments in all learning activities and assessment activities for one's own education. According to him, the learners' ability in learning autonomy may help them be able to work independently and cooperate with their classmates. Similarly, Little (1991) considers learner autonomy as 'a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action.' In autonomous learning, the learners take charge of all the decisions concerned with their learning and also the implementation of these decisions. They are able to decide what their objectives in learning are, select the most suitable techniques, monitor their acquisition and evaluate their experience. Learners who are autonomous in their learning are more likely to achieve their learning targets and maintain a positive attitude to learning in the future.

### **Role of teacher and learner in autonomous learning**

The emphasis of learning autonomy is on the role of learners rather than the role of teachers. Teachers' roles are changed and moved to new ones in an autonomous language classroom. Language teachers are not the transmitters of information any longer. They play the role of a counselor and a facilitator who manages the activities in the classroom and maintains learning environment that encourages learners to view learning as a lifelong process (Lowes & Target, 1999). In an autonomous environment, teachers play the role as a

guide to assist learners learn by exposing them to the target language and providing opportunities for them to practice in class as well as at home. The role of learners is changed when teachers become a guide and a supporter. Their role is to take charge of their learning by selecting learning techniques, controlling the learning process and assessing the learning outcomes (Holec, 1981). Hence, learners in an autonomous learning are not passive receivers of knowledge. They become active by taking part in all aspects of the learning process and they need to make some decisions and control over their own learning. Autonomous learners are those who understand what they want to learn and why they are learning the subject. The role of teachers for autonomous learning is to help learners assume the responsibility for making decisions of their learning in:

Determining the learning objectives;

Defining the contents and progressions;

Selecting appropriate methods and techniques to be used;

Monitoring the procedure of acquisition and implementation;

Evaluating what has been acquired. (Holec, 1981, p. 3)

The important thing in implementing autonomy in classroom is to assist learners to find the learning methods that best suit them. However, to help learners choose their suitable methods, teachers should be aware of the importance of differentiation. Differences in learners' ways of learning and learners' needs should be considered. Moreover, the fact that learners have

different skills, abilities and backgrounds should be looked at as all of this affects their way of learning.

In order to take on new roles such as counselor, manager, organizer, material developer, and evaluator, teachers in an autonomous language class need to change their attitude and conceptualization to make them less authoritative. Moreover, Wright (1987) states that the role of teachers in an autonomous classroom implies two functions: a management function and an instructional function. While the management function is related to the social side of teaching, the instructional function is the task-oriented side. Teachers with these two functions are expected to determine learning goals, select class materials, evaluate learning progress, and group language learners, etc. When taking the new roles, the focus is shifted from teachers to learners.

#### **Enhancing learner autonomy in EFL writing classes**

It is obvious that writing is a means of recording and reformulating knowledge and developing ideas. Wade (1995, as cited in Al-Hazmi, 2006) persuasively states that writing is an essential element in critical thinking instruction, since it promotes greater self-reflection and the taking of broader perspectives than does oral expression. However, motivating students to write frequently and enhancing their autonomy in the writing class can be a hard task as students do not have sufficient background knowledge and are unable to present their ideas coherently. Therefore, suitable written assignments and approaches

should be used to stimulate classroom writers to enhance their active learning spontaneously.

It is believed that group writing can be used to enhance learners' autonomy in learning writing skill. The study of Arumugam, Supramaniam, Mello, and Christ Dass, (2013) which investigated the effects of group-writing on learners at an institution of higher learning proved that group-writing not only empowers learners, provides them with autonomy to control and regulate their own learning but improves learners' writing performance as well. Chen (2004) perceives group-writing as an empowering approach which provides students with autonomy and control to organize and regulate their learning of writing skills. It has been shown in the study of Kaur (2006) that collaborative work in ESL classrooms increases learner involvement in groups, leading to a better acquisition of the writing skills as it provides chances for learners to actively communicate in real, meaningful contexts, and extends language acquisition beyond what is provided by teachers. Group-writing is recognized as pedagogical practices in which students are grouped and encouraged to collaborate to participate in discussing the different aspects on a given topic. A major principle of group-writing is that learners achieve their success by providing help, sharing resources and encouraging each other's efforts. It is claimed that group-writing when adopted in small group activities provide students with opportunities to practice the target language naturally. Therefore, group-writing is considered as a powerful tool to enhance



learners' writing competence in the English language (Chen, 2004). Group-writing is believed to be an effective instructional approach in ESL writing classroom which helps learners have good grasp of skills, write more effectively and become autonomous writers.

Another approach that can be used to help language learners to be responsible and assume responsibility for their own learning in EFL writing classrooms is peer-feedback. According to Hirose (2008), that students receiving feedback about their writing from their peers helps them become more independent. Therefore, peer-feedback encourages students to adopt a more participatory role in their learning process. It depends on the intention of teachers that students can give feedback on writing aspects such as content, organization, grammar, spelling and mechanics. Peer feedback could be used together with teacher feedback methods which error location or error codes are provided by teachers. Providing feedback on the work of the students' peers offers them a number of distinct advantages. Students develop their awareness and take responsibility as they are reading their peers' writing and responding to it. They learn little or nothing when teachers correct mistakes for them. Therefore, using peer-feedback in writing lessons gives students plenty of opportunities to engage in their writing process. Moreover, peer-feedback encourages greater sense of ownership in learning, develops critical thinking, and boosts critical reasoning (Muncie, 2000). Unlike feedback from teachers, when students receive feedback from their

classmates, they "question its validity, weigh it against his or her knowledge and ideas" and then decide whether any changes should be made (Berg, 1999, p.232). This helps learners to be more responsible for their writing and enhances autonomy in learning. Miao et al. (2006) conducted a comparative study of peer and teacher feedback in a Chinese EFL writing class. They found that students did not entirely rely on or accept the feedback they received from their partners. They suggested this was a positive finding since "the more the students doubted the feedback, the more likely it was that they would develop their own dependent ideas they had for revision" (p.192). They also found that even though teacher feedback was more likely to be taken up by students, peer feedback was related to a greater level of student autonomy. If students are given proper preparation and guidelines in advance, peer feedback could be an effective writing pedagogical tool (Nystrand, 1986). However, in order to enhance learner autonomy, a lot of factors need to be considered. Students do not instinctively know how to successfully work on their own. They need training, and the teacher has to give proper preliminary peer feedback training and be vigilant in the supervision of pair work in the beginning (Berg, 1999a).

Another learning tool which is also used to facilitate students' learning and develop their autonomy is portfolio. Portfolios are purposeful collections of students' work selected by the students with the guidance of teachers to present their learning experience. By using portfolio, it is students

rather than teachers who are responsible for their learning and evaluation. Students' autonomy in learning writing is developed as they can take an active role in their learning process by planning and organizing learning, monitoring and observing their learning, and reflecting on their own learning. This can help raise students' awareness of learning strategies, facilitate their learning process and enhance their self-directed learning. The benefits of using portfolio in fostering students' autonomy are also proved in Khodadady and Khodabakhshzade's study (2012). Their study's findings contribute to the fact that portfolio not only makes learners autonomous in their writing but improve their writing ability as well.

Besides learning writing in the classroom, it is necessary to increase autonomy in learning outside classroom to foster students' writing competence. One of the techniques that can be used to develop learner autonomy outside classroom is face book group. Face book group was proved by Razali and Khatimah (2013) to not only enhance students' interest in learning writing but also promote students' autonomy in learning English writing. Razali and Khatimah conducted a qualitative research with 130 participants to explore the role of Facebook group to students' learning in writing. He specifically created a Facebook group to provide students with a space where they were in control of the content and the direction of learning as well as to provide more opportunities for students to write. In the study, he limited the writing scope into two authentic basic writings, which are writing

comments and writing a paragraph because of the lack of time and participants' competence. Topics which he posted in the group were authentic and different from those in regular classroom learning. Students develop their autonomy in learning by posting in the group and commenting to one another. The research lasted for 30 days in which he used scaffolding approach to help the students learn successfully. Along with the writing instruction, Razali and Khatimah also provided explanation, basic links and a rubric, so that they could monitor their learning as well as their peer learning. The study concludes that Facebook group fostered students' autonomy in learning English writing. It enhances students to practice writing more often and also promotes them monitor the learning process as they found learning writing in the Facebook group more fun and relaxing than routine classroom learning.

### Conclusion

It is undeniable that the hardest skill in learning English is writing which requires learners' competency to receive the information, process it, and at least, produce it. Therefore, the demand of autonomous learning in writing is such a crucial issue to be focused on in order to improve students' writing skill. The paper has mentioned approaches that can be applied in EFL writing classrooms to enhance learners' autonomy. Group writing, peer-feedback, portfolio and Facebook group not only help learners become more independent and responsible for their learning but improve their writing ability as well. In these approaches, teacher acts as a facilitator who



gives support to help students move from a lower stage to a higher stage of development and learners become more central in the learning process.

## REFERENCES

1. Arumugam, N, Supramaniam, K, De Mello, G & Christ Dass, L (2013). Autonomous English as a Second Language Writing Through Group-Writing. *Social and Management Research Journal*, 10(2), 2013.
2. Berg, E.C. (1999a). Preparing ESL students for peer response. *TESOL Journal*, 8, 20-25.
3. Benson, Ph. (2001). Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning. Pearson Education.
4. Chen, M.L. (2004). *A Study of the Effects of Cooperative Learning Strategies on Learner Achievement in English As A Foreign Language in a Taiwan College*. ProQuest Information and Learning Company, US.
5. Dam, L. (1995). *Learner Autonomy3: from Theory to Classroom Practice*. Dublin: Authentik.
6. Hirose, K. (2008). Peer feedback in L2 writing instruction. In K. Bradford Watts, T., & M. Swanson (Eds.), *JALT2007 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.
7. Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon. (First published 1979, Strasbourg: Council of Europe).
8. Kaur, N. (2006). English in the Malaysian context in Chapter 3, *Non-Autonomy and Low-English Proficiency among Malaysian Learners: Insight from Multiple Perspectives*. University Publication Centre (UPENA), UiTM.
9. Kim, Y. & Kim, J. (2005). Teaching Korean university writing class: balancing the process and the genre approach. *Asian EFL Journal*, 7(2), 68-89. The University of Auckland. New Zealand.
10. Khodadady, E & Khodabakhshzade, H. (2012). The effect of Portfolio and Self Assessment on Writing Ability and Autonomy. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 3(3), 2012.
11. Little, D. (1991). *Learner autonomy: Definitions, issues and problems*. Dublin: Authentik.
12. Lowes, R., & Target, F. (1999). *Helping students to learn - A guide to learner autonomy*. London: Richmond Publishing.
13. Miao, Y., Badger, R., & Yu, Z. (2006). A comparative study of peer and teacher feedback in a Chinese EFL writing class. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 15(3), 179-200.
14. Muncie, J. (2000). Using written teacher feedback in EFL composition classes. *ELT Journal*, 54(1), 47-53.
15. Nystrand, M. (1986). *The structure of written communication: Studies in reciprocity between writers and readers*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
16. Razali, K & Khatimah, H. (2013). Autonomous learning writing promoted by the use of Facebook group. Retrieved September 14, 2015 from [https://www.researchgate.net/.../259458777\\_Autonomous\\_Learning\\_Writing\\_Promoted...](https://www.researchgate.net/.../259458777_Autonomous_Learning_Writing_Promoted...)
17. Trinh, Q. L. (2010). *Phát triển năng lực tự học trong hoàn cảnh Việt Nam*. [Translated title: Enhancing the learning autonomy in the context of Vietnam]. Retrieved September 14, 2015 from: [http://www.khoavanhoc-ngonngu.edu.vn/home/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1064%3Aphat-trin-nng-lc-t-hc-trong-hoan-cn-h-vit-nam&catid=109%3Ai-mi-ct-a-p-p-ging-dy-vn-hc&Itemid=105&lang=vi](http://www.khoavanhoc-ngonngu.edu.vn/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1064%3Aphat-trin-nng-lc-t-hc-trong-hoan-cn-h-vit-nam&catid=109%3Ai-mi-ct-a-p-p-ging-dy-vn-hc&Itemid=105&lang=vi).
18. Wade, C. (1995). Using writing to develop and assess critical thinking. *Teaching of Psychology*, 22, 24-28.
19. Wright, T. (1987). *Roles of Teachers and Learners*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

(Toà soạn nhận bài viết ngày 23/6/2016, duyệt đăng ngày 10/9/2016)