EFL/ESL Children's Autonomous English Learning

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Students are ultimately responsible for their own English learning inside and outside of their English classrooms. It is not realistic to expect an English teacher to teach them all the knowledge that they need to know (vocabulary, phrases, sentence structures, grammars and cultures…etc.) within limited classroom sessions. Therefore, it is crucial for students themselves to have strong motivations and desires to learn, to explore the world of English, and to learn new vocabulary, usages, and knowledge on their own. Eventually, students can progress to learn on their own without the guidance of teachers; and students can become their own teachers.

Literature Review of Autonomous Learning

Holec (1979) stated the following about an *autonomous language learner*:
The *autonomous language learner* takes responsibility for the totality of his learning situation. He does this by determining his own objectives, defining the contents to be learned and the progression of the course, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring this procedure, and evaluating what he has acquired. Objectives are specific to the learner, and the learner's communicative needs determine the verbal elements chosen.

Little (1996) pointed out that Holec (1981) defined *learner autonomy* as "the ability to take charge of one's learning", meaning that the learner is responsible for

setting goals, defining his or her own contents and progresses, selecting methods, monitoring the procedure of acquisition and doing self-assessments.

Krashen (2004) mentioned that "Our goal in foreign language pedagogy is to bring students to the point where they are *autonomous acquirers*, prepared to continue to improve on their own." According to Krashen, an autonomous acquirer "will understand ways of making input more comprehensible (e.g. getting background information, avoiding obviously incomprehensible input)…An autonomous acquirer is not a perfect speaker of the second language, just good enough to continue to improve without us…and to continue to grow."

The Importance of Promoting Children's Autonomous English Learning

It's important for students to move from dependent learners to independent learners, from passive learners to autonomous learners. Then, the students do not have to rely on the help of others (such as the teachers, parents, adults…, etc) to learn. In other words, students can teach themselves and learn on their own. Students can learn much more, without any limits. The students will have more self-confidence, satisfaction, and sense of achievements if they can learn by themselves and become self-taught learners.

Ways Children Can Do to Improve Their Autonomous English Learning

What can children do to learn English autonomously? There are many ways for them to learn English on their own with only little or even no help from the parents or the teachers. The following are some of the methods suggested by the authors:

1. **Watch English TV programs, videos and movies**

TV programs, DVDs, movies in English are widely available nowadays, but the students need to appreciate these English learning opportunities and get more exposures in order to benefit.

It is suggested to the children that when watching DVDs, they can make good use of English caption if they want to practice reading, vocabulary, and matching words with sounds. They can also switch off the caption if they just want to practice listening and understanding the contents.

2. **Go online to utilize English-learning websites for children**

Nowadays, many children know how to use GOOGLE to search for information on the web. Children can find and use English-learning websites for learning and practices.

3. **Use school libraries and local libraries more often and check out children's English books**

4. **Read children's English books or kids' magazines**

English books and kids' magazines can be found in many bookstores and libraries.

5.   Listen to English songs from CDs, radio stations, Karaoke, or the Internet

Some students purchase Pop music CDs or oldies CDs and learn many English songs on their own. Some students even use their Home Karaoke Systems to learn English songs. Also, many songs are available in music-video forms on YouTube. There are also many songs in mp3 formats that the children can download to listen.

6.   Listen to English-learning CDs and audio-books

7.   Read English comics in newspapers, magazines and books

8.   Utilize traditional/electronic/online English dictionaries

Students should use dictionaries to look up words that they don't understand. They need to try to learn new words by themselves.

9.   Chat with, talk to, ask questions to, correspond with, make friends, or keep pen pals with someone who speaks English

10. Join English learning or English speaking clubs at school /attend English Summer Camps/visit English speaking countries

11. Practice writing in English more often when using Facebook, MSN, e-mails…etc.

12. Keep an English journal or diary to practice writing

Conclusions

As Littlewood (1998) pointed out in his book *Foreign and Second Language Learning*, "individual learners are different from each other…have their own personalities, motivations and learning styles." Everybody is so different in terms of having his own interests, needs, learning styles and pace. As Littlewood said, "each person is ultimately responsible for his own learning and needs to engage his own personality in the educational process." We teachers should encourage and help students to become self-motivated, autonomous, and life-long learners for their benefits.

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