

The Role of Learner Autonomy for Learning English Out-of-class in Chinese Universities

by

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Abstract

Out-of-class learning constitutes a significant part of language learning since it provides a realistic setting which is quite different from in-class and instruction-based teaching and learning. Most language educators believe that learners should be responsible for their own learning and use opportunities to practise language actively outside the classroom. This paper aims to define learner autonomy and identify the benefits and difficulties of learner autonomy in learning a second language as well as investigate the tendencies of different types of autonomous out-of-class English learning activities Chinese students choose and the reasons for these choices. A review of literature revealed that among autonomous learning activities outside the classroom, students tend to choose receptive activities more than productive learning activities. The reason relates to the difficulties students face in developing their autonomy; teachers thus play a significant role in providing students with an autonomous learning environment and proper instruction.

Keywords: English learning, learner autonomy, out-of-class learning activities, second language experience

1. Introduction

I first became interested in the role of learner autonomy for learning English as the result of my experience with an autonomous language learning activity called “English Corner.” This was an activity I used to attend regularly during my college studies. According to Gao (2009), English Corner refers to regular meetings that English learners voluntarily organize in public places to practise oral English. At my university, English Corner was a voluntary activity that three to four students formed as a group in which they practised spoken English once a week at a fixed time in a classroom or outdoor location. A Canadian teacher from the Faculty of Foreign Language attended every week and students who were interested in having conversation with him actively participated. As the Canadian teacher provided assistance with speaking and made corrections in students’ pronunciation, students—especially those with non-English majors—were motivated to participate in the activity every week. In addition, members who shared the same interest formed a group and became friends, which motivated me to keep attending this out-of-class activity as we naturally formed a supportive learning community. However, in my experiences, most students came to English Corner eagerly in the beginning but soon lost interest. I was curious as to why this happened because I experienced English Corner as being very interesting and motivating. This provoked my thinking about how to enhance learner autonomy and keep students involved. English Corner is only one example of autonomous learning.

In this paper, I will investigate further into out-of-class English learning forms and activities and also consider the influence of teachers during students’ learning processes. I will first define learner autonomy and out-of-class learning and describe the relationship between learner autonomy and out-of-class learning. In addition this inquiry will identify the

benefits and difficulties of autonomous learning that have been reported in the research literature, and investigate the different types of out-of-class learning activities and the reasons students choose them.

According to Guo (2011), learner autonomy refers to a learner taking charge of his or her own learning. Out-of-class learning is one application of learner autonomy (Benson, 2007); that is to say, learner autonomy generally goes hand in hand with out-of-class learning (Balçıkanlı, 2010) and out-of-class learning serves as a platform in which students could fully develop their learner autonomy. A traditional Chinese class is dominated by its teacher in most cases, so through out-of-class learning activities, students have the chance to take charge of their learning and therefore to develop their capacity for learner autonomy.

A more teacher-centred instructional mode is a traditional teaching method that is widely adopted in Chinese schools. The “traditional” approach involves teachers delivering and directing a formal class lesson according to an exam-oriented curriculum plan and textbook at school with parents supervising the students’ homework at home. This mode is dominated by the teachers and as students are occupied with following the instructions of the teacher, they have few chances to develop learner autonomy.

English is one major subject for students in China. However, English learning and practise is focused on reading, reciting texts, and following teachers’ instructions in the classroom and students have few chances to participate in out-of-class English learning activities, including the organization of English conversations. Such direct-instructional approaches are more beneficial for success in exams than communication in realistic situations, according to my experiences. Additionally, it is far from sufficient for learners to

practice a second language if they only rely on classroom instruction in most settings of learning English as a foreign language (Xiao & Luo, 2009). Therefore, out-of-class English learning activities provide students with opportunities to practise spoken English than does in-class learning and they help to improve students' competence in oral English.

When a student fully develops the capacity for learner autonomy through out-of-class learning activities, they are able to make learning plans according to their own situations reasonably and effectively including creating opportunities to practise their English. Also, since the content of the textbooks used in class are set, a variation of English topics that might appeal to students' needs and interests could be added in out-of-class activities. Nunan (1991), who studied several successful language learners from all kinds of contexts, indicated that applying their developing language skills out-of-class was vital for their second language development. Moreover, as Lai, Zhu, and Gong (2015) stated, language learners who had greater autonomy in learning held a stronger belief in seeking language-practicing opportunities outside of the classroom and had greater confidence in their language proficiency. As a result of such research it appears that learner autonomy helps to increase students' confidence and facilitates becoming successful learners.

On the one hand, out-of-class learning breaks the limitations of traditional teacher-centred learning. It also provides a context for a combination of out-of-class learning activities and in-class teaching and learning. According to Xiao & Luo (2009), out-of-class learning activities function to provide learners with a more natural and authentic linguistic environment in which they can practise what they have learned in class. Out-of-class English learning activities also provide more opportunities for learners to develop their autonomous

learning abilities (Xiao & Luo, 2009). Once students take charge of their own learning, make appropriate learning plans, and begin to learn actively, additional opportunities to improve language learning will arise and their language ability will significantly improve.

Additionally, as Pearson (2004) stated, much more is known about what language teachers and learners do in class than what learners do outside the classroom to develop language proficiency. That is to say, research on language learning is generally confined to classroom instruction, including pre-selected curriculum and activities. Thus, a study about students' learning in out-of-class learning activities, and how learner autonomy affects students' behaviours during the process of these learning activities should be investigated.

My research questions are:

- (1) What is learner autonomy and out-of-class learning?
- (2) What are the types of out-of-class language learning activities?
- (3) How do the features of autonomy influence students' choice of out-of-class language learning activities?
- (4) What are the benefits and difficulties for implementing learner autonomy in out-of-class language learning activities?

Research for this project was mainly through the ERIC Database and the UVic Library. I defined my topic as "the role of learner autonomy for learning English out-of-class in Chinese universities." As a result, my key search terms were identified as "learner autonomy," "out-of-class learning," and "English learning." First, I searched "learner autonomy" and hundreds of articles appeared. After I put "English learning" in the second line, the number of articles decreased. Then I added "out-of-class learning" in the third line,

and there were only about 20 articles. I also searched “autonomous learning” instead of “learner autonomy” and “out-of-class language learning” instead of “out-of-class learning” to obtain more articles. When I searched for articles specifically for one aspect of my research, I put the wording of the sub-heading in the searching line for more different articles. For example, when I was working on “motivation,” I searched for articles with the key words “motivation” and “learner autonomy.” Sometimes, when I found that a researcher was often cited in this area, I searched for more articles he/she had published, for example, Phil Benson and David Little. Then, I began to choose the articles published after the year 2000 because these articles had new findings in this area. There were only about 9 articles I used that were published between 1989 and 1999 because these articles had distinctive supportive evidence that I could use in my research; for example, those of David Nunan, who is a famous linguist in the area of English language teaching. In the end, there were about 50 articles used in this review.

To sum up, having been an English learner for more than ten years, English learning for me was more about following teachers’ instructions and completing writing, listening, and reading tasks for examinations more than it was about speaking. As Butler (2011) stated, there has been mounting criticism of the traditional approaches such as the grammar translation and audio-lingual methods to English language teaching in Asian countries including China. These traditional ways of teaching fail to help students develop a high level of communicative ability in English. In addition, English learning activities were mainly carried out in the classroom and dominated by the teacher. As a result, students learn passively and may fail to achieve a large degree of learner autonomy. This study will define

learner autonomy and out-of-class learning, identify different types of out-of-class learning activities and the benefits and difficulties in developing learner autonomy in these out-of-class language learning activities, analyze the features of learner autonomy that influence students' choice of different out-of-class language learning activities, and investigate effective strategies to facilitate students to develop their autonomy in out-of-class learning activities.

2. Defining Learner Autonomy

Most definitions of learner autonomy are based on Holec's definition. For example, Little (2006, p.1) and Nunan (2003, p. 193) both refer to Holec who defines learner autonomy as the "ability to take charge of one's (own) learning." Benson (2011) also refers to Holec and claimed, "on the basic definition of learner autonomy, there has been a remarkable degree of consensus around the idea that autonomy involves learners taking more control over their learning" (p. 16). Besides, Benson (2007) also claims that variations on this definition abound, for example, "take charge of" is often replaced by "take responsibility for." In other words, when learners have the ability to take charge of their own learning, it implies that they accept full responsibility for their learning. However, this definition is limited since language learning has the potential for sharing the learning responsibility with others, as language itself is a social tool for communication. Language learning is inevitably a shared social activity. For example, while learning English, when I am searching for information on English websites, I have no control over the content of website. In this case, I cannot take full responsibility for my learning. Moreover, when I am watching and trying to imitate native English speakers on English TV shows in the dormitory in my university, I

always unconsciously ask my roommate about the meaning of words that come up in the shows. In this way too, I am sharing the full responsibility of my English learning with my roommate. Therefore, in language learning, the degree of learner autonomy depends on the different learning situations of learners.

Both metacognitive and affective dimensions are involved during the autonomous learning process. According to Little (2006), when learners begin to take charge of their own learning and accept the responsibility for their learning process, it not only involves the metacognitive dimension of the learning process but also an equally important affective dimension. In the metacognitive dimension, there are always metacognitive moves, for instance, setting aims and goals; choosing learning materials, methods, and tasks; organizing materials; carrying out the tasks; choosing criteria for evaluation (Thanasoulas, 2000). There are also metacognitive strategies like planning, organizing, and reflecting on language learning (Guo, 2011), or goal setting, self-assessment, other forms of reflection on language learning, and language use (Little, 2009). Learners who make use of effective metacognitive strategies are able to set their own needs and objectives, choose materials and resources in accordance with their goals, and monitor and evaluate their own progress over time (Victori & Lockhart, 1995). All of these researchers include the same metacognitive strategies, including setting goals, choosing and organizing learning materials, and reflecting on language learning. There are some differences in emphasis; for example, self-assessment is emphasized in Little's statement. Strategies are described more specifically in Thanasoulas's statement than in those of the other researchers. All in all, all these specific metacognitive strategies could be included into three aspects: planning, monitoring, and evaluating.

The affective dimensions of learning are also important when learning a language. Thanasoulas (2000) pointed out that learner autonomy also involves affective and social components, such as learners' motivation, beliefs, attitude, and self-confidence of language learning. Pearson (2004) also listed affective factors, which may influence learner autonomy and learning outcomes including learner beliefs, perceptions, and expectations, learner identity, and motivation. These two research papers both contain learners' beliefs and motivation in affective factors. The difference is that the former emphasizes the learners' attitude and self-confidence of language learning (which are learners' inborn qualities and attributes), while the latter emphasizes the learners' perceptions, expectations, and learner identity (which are acquired through learning).

Learners who are more autonomous in learning are likely to acquire more positive beliefs and perceptions toward language learning. Therefore, they are more confident and motivated to learn and thus may have higher expectations for their learning. Both metacognitive and affective dimensions are identified as significant factors that would influence the development of learner autonomy. Regarding the metacognitive dimension, learners could make conscious efforts, such as identifying metacognitive strategies. Regarding the affective dimension, learners could be trained to alter passive affective factors into active ones; for example, lack of motivation could become motivation.

Since a component of autonomous language learning is to share the learning responsibility with others and this social component is involved in learner autonomy, according to Thanasoulas (2000), "interdependence" is also a valued factor in autonomous learning. Palfreyman (2003) claimed that learner autonomy refers to the ability of learners to

work together for mutual benefit and take shared responsibility for their learning, which also includes collaboration with teachers. This shared responsibility indicates that learner autonomy involves students learning either independently or interdependently. In the same light, Little (2009) also claimed that autonomous learners do things for themselves, but they may or may not do things on their own. In other words, learners could cooperate with peers or require assistance and advice from teachers or others.

According to the definition of learner autonomy in language learning, different learners may have different degrees of learner autonomy according to their unique needs. That is to say, a language learner who is learning autonomously could choose to learn on their own or in collaboration with others. When learners are able to take the whole responsibility for themselves they are able to learn independently. When autonomous learning requires cooperation between peers or with teachers, learners may begin autonomous learning by sharing their responsibilities and learning interdependently and in collaboration with peers as well as obtaining assistance from teachers.

Different learners gain autonomy in different ways according to their different needs. Learners who are able to take charge of their learning are likely to take full responsibility for their learning and adopt more metacognitive strategies. Those learners who prefer to collaborate in autonomous learning could choose to cooperate with others or gain support and assistance from teachers and peers to proceed with their learning. In addition, as learners take charge of their own learning, in order to make the most of available resources, students could develop their autonomy in several situations, especially outside the classroom.

2.1. Defining out-of-class learning: one mode of implementing learner autonomy

Autonomy takes many different forms since different learners enact autonomy in different ways, which allows for a variety of the kinds of autonomy that should be aimed at in particular contexts (Benson, 2011). One of the contexts is learner autonomy beyond the classroom. As Benson (2007) stated, modes of practicing autonomy beyond the classroom include self-access, CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), distance learning, tandem learning, study abroad, out-of-class learning, and self-instruction. Benson (2007) claimed that the relationship between learning beyond the classroom and autonomy is complex. On the one hand, all of the above-listed modes of learning involve autonomous learning; while, on the other hand, these modes also demand a capacity for autonomy (Benson, 2007). That is to say, when some learners are less capable of autonomous learning, they may have difficulties during their learning process. In this case, teachers may provide assistance for them to solve problems. For example, teachers could provide instructions to direct the students in their autonomous learning. In this case the teacher's roles are as coach, facilitator, or advisor rather than just an information deliverer (Guo, 2011). Moreover, teachers should provide adequate support and concern for students both socially and psychologically (Tavares, 2012). When teachers transform their traditional in-class roles and provide adequate assistance, a truly collaborative and supportive out-of-class learning environment will be established for students (Yan, 2007). In this case, students could better implement their autonomy during out-of-class language learning activities and achieve more success under the guidance of teachers. For example, when I am searching for useful English written phrases from English websites during my autonomous learning, I may ask a teacher for recommendations of websites that have valuable English phrases I could copy and learn.

Therefore, teacher support is of great necessity when learners have problems during their autonomous learning processes.

Out-of-class learning is one of the modes of learning beyond the classroom. Benson (2013) defined out-of-class learning as any kind of learning that takes place outside the classroom and involves self-instruction, naturalistic learning, and self-directed naturalistic learning. Self-instruction implies that the learner studies alone, with little or no contact with teachers or speakers of the target language. It can also be understood as any deliberate effort by the learners to acquire or master the language content or skills. Naturalistic learning refers to direct communication with users of the target language. Self-directed naturalistic learning means that the language learners create naturalistic learning situations for themselves with the intention of learning the target language, and the focus of attention is on communication or on learning something other than the language itself. In his work, Benson also provides more detailed examples of these three classifications. Listening and writing about academic and professional knowledge, such as phonetics and vocabulary are self-instruction language learning activities. Learners acquire professional knowledge of a language by conducting these activities deliberately without the intervention of teachers or peers. Writing emails, practicing spoken language, or having face-to-face contact with foreigners are examples of naturalistic language learning activities. Communicating by e-mail is a natural, authentic form of interaction as opposed to the artificial classroom exercise of writing to an imaginary person. Surfing the Internet, listening to English songs and radio, reading English newspapers and books, watching English television, movies, and videos, and playing computer games in English are self-directed naturalistic language learning activities. Learners create naturalistic

learning situations, for example, viewing communication between actors and actresses on television and in the movies, to begin their self-directed oral English learning.

Both self-instruction activities and self-directed naturalistic learning activities may involve independent or interdependent learning due to communications that occur during the learning process. Naturalistic learning activities are processed as interdependent learning. As a result, all three activities may involve communication and cooperation among peers as well as support from teachers.

The research on learner autonomy in out-of-class learning is significant. Bayat (2011) stated that out-of-class learning is significant in the practice of autonomy. That is to say, out-of-class learning provides learners with ample opportunity to participate in learning and to develop learner autonomy, and learner autonomy also facilitates learners to engage more in out-of-class language learning activities. On top of this, while learners engage in out-of-class learning activities, they may adopt effective metacognitive strategies to improve their learning efficiency and adjust affective factors as well as pursue independence or collaboration when conducting autonomous learning. In this way, their autonomous learning capacity may gradually progress.

To be specific, there are many types of resources learners could easily access for out-of-class learning activities, such as the school or public library, bookstores, online learning resources, or foreign language teachers and native speakers. Learner autonomy refers to learners taking charge of their own learning, therefore learners are responsible for their learning behaviours when they are engaged in out-of-class learning. That is to say, learners choose and make use of learning materials from these resources and adopt different

metacognitive strategies, including making learning plans, selecting learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes, with different attitudes and perceptions, different levels of motivation and confidence. In this way, learners set out to learn. They participate in out-of-class language learning activities independently or in collaboration with peers, and begin autonomous learning. In this case, when learners are engaged in out-of-class learning activities actively, learner autonomy may be developed at the same time.

3. Benefits of Learner Autonomy in Out-of-Class Language Learning Activities

The benefits of learner autonomy in out-of-class language learning activities are discussed from four aspects. First, an out-of-class language-learning environment offers more language-practicing opportunities and facilitates students in becoming successful learners. Second, the adoption of effective metacognitive strategies allows students to become successful learners. Third, some affective factors help to strengthen students' confidence in learning. Fourth: students' interdependence in learning help to build a supportive learning community.

The first benefit is that the language-learning environment provides learners with more language-practicing opportunities, which may facilitate students to become more involved in learning and thus become successful learners. According to Pearson (2004), students rate language practise above teachers' instruction in terms of importance for successful language learning. This suggests that learners value language-practise opportunities and out-of-class language-learning activities more than classroom instruction. Moreover, out-of-class environments are linked with real-life applications. Richards (2015) similarly claims that out-of-class language learning environments "offer a wider range of affordances for language

use and second language acquisition than are generally available in the classroom” (p. 15). Language learning becomes more relevant when learners use dozens of opportunities to practise in a realistic context (Ferdous, 2013). These studies indicate that language practices in a realistic setting serve as a gateway for the cultivation of successful learners. Since English practicing opportunities and conditions are limited in class, out-of-class English learning offers more opportunities for the knowledge learned in class to be practised further. Students could obtain access to whatever resources are available for them; for example, they could perform self-instruction through exercises books bought from bookstores, or self-directed naturalistic activities by listening to conversations between native speakers downloaded from the Internet, or naturalistic activities by speaking with native speakers they come across at coffee shops or other places native speakers get together in cities. When learners actively seek out-of-class learning opportunities and are able to make full use of out-of-class learning resources, they may achieve success in learning and become more interested in learning because learning becomes more relevant in this way.

The second benefit is that language resources and practise opportunities exist in the language-learning environment and this helps learners to become more successful in learning when they adopt metacognitive strategies to organize and plan their learning process. According to Bayat (2011), good learners are always aware of their learning strategies and adapt these strategies in various learning situations. That is to say, learners are successful when they are able to use different metacognitive learning strategies according to different and effective learning conditions flexibly therefore making learning more efficient. Effective metacognitive strategies include setting a personal goals and criteria for evaluating learning

outcomes (Wenden, 1998). Constantly reflecting on their learning process also enables learners to identify the reasons for their successes and failures and learn from both their own and others' mistakes (Rodriguez Manzanarez & Murphy, 2010; Marefat & Barbari, 2009). Once learners benefit from adopting these effective metacognitive strategies and taking control of their learning, according to Victori and Lockhart (1995), learners will see themselves as initiators of their own learning and will have faith in their own potential as language learners (p. 224). In other words, when learners begin to take charge of their autonomous learning and achieve success in autonomous learning, they will realize that they are responsible for their own success. As they recognize themselves as successful learners, they in turn adopt more effective metacognitive strategies in order to take full advantage of available out-of-class language-practicing opportunities and take steps to make their learning more organized and efficient.

The third benefit is that learners may become more confident and motivated in autonomous learning as learner autonomy involves affective factors, including learners' beliefs, attitude, motivation, and self-confidence. According to Balçikanlı (2010), autonomy in out-of-class language learning activities provides students with a sense of confidence and encourages students to make decisions for themselves. Moreover, when learners are learning autonomously during out-of-class language learning activities, they tend to hold more positive beliefs about English learning in terms of both the perceived value of learning spoken English and their expectations for learning English (Wu, 2012). As a result, when a positive attitude towards language learning was developed, students were motivated to continue to learn more autonomously (Cotterall, 1999). To be specific, the out-of-class

language learning experiences enable students to practise and use English in a realistic setting, which strengthen students' beliefs that what they have learned will be relevant to real life.

During learning processes, with proper instruction from teachers, students are able to make use of effective metacognitive learning strategies including making learning decisions and plans for themselves. Once learners achieve some success with autonomous learning, they will be more confident and are encouraged to continue autonomous learning as they are taking control of their learning. When they begin to hold positive attitudes towards their autonomous learning during this process, they are more motivated to learn autonomously.

The fourth benefit of out-of-class learning is that a supportive social community is built during the autonomous learning in out-of-class language learning activities. As "interdependence" is a necessary element of learner autonomy, autonomous language learning activities in the out-of-class setting may be conducted among peers in communities. In this case, relationships and experiences of learners in their communities must be taken into consideration (Borrero & Yeh, 2010). The reason for this consideration is that this will develop students' English speaking ability, their feelings about success, and a stable interdependence relationship (Borrero & Yeh, 2010). As a result, the learners' participation in the community enhances their autonomous learning (Gao, 2009). When deeper social ties are established, these in turn facilitate the development of the out-of-class learning community (Hughes, Krug, & Vye, 2011). When every member of a community learns and cooperates interdependently, learners share their responsibilities and make up for each other's shortages in learning. In this case, their learner autonomy is strengthened through a stable

interdependent relationship among community members and a supportive learning community is established.

All in all, the benefit of learner autonomy in out-of-class language learning activities is that when learners begin to take charge of their learning and accept responsibility for their learning in an out-of-class learning environment in which language practicing opportunities are available, they could begin their learning by making use of these opportunities. Once they achieve some progress with autonomous learning, they regard themselves as potentially successful learners and are encouraged to continue with it. They may adopt more effective metacognitive strategies with which to take charge of their learning process. Teachers may offer suggestions for learners to proceed with their autonomous learning more efficiently if necessary. Moreover, autonomous learning will take place within the community so that the interdependent learning will enable learners to cooperate with and exchange learning strategies with their peers.

Apart from learning independently outside the classroom, learning interdependently may facilitate students to become successful learners. Take community building as an example. When learners establish an English-learning community, they may organize English language-relevant activities, for instance, a choir competition, an English speech contest, English debate, or volunteer activities in which English is practised within the broader community. While participating in these activities, learners share mutual responsibilities and benefits as well as the feeling of succeeding as they are working toward the same goal. In this case, every member of this community is influenced by the same affective factors including motivation, beliefs, attitude, and self-confidence or some other factors. Even if some

members are less motivated or less confident, they all influence each other and everyone will be encouraged. Learners could discuss which metacognitive strategies to use for the activity; for example, setting a goal, selecting relevant materials for preparing the activity and effective strategies for using the materials, and choosing an appropriate criteria for success with the activity. This interdependent learning method enables learners to not only share experiences about their different approaches to autonomous learning but also to compensate for their own weaknesses so that they can become successful learners. At the same time, an intimate relationship among learners is built through these activities, which makes the community more stable and supportive. Therefore, communities in out-of-class language learning activities serve as a good platform for learners to implement interdependence in learner autonomy.

Learners may benefit from both learning independently or interdependently by performing autonomy in their own ways. Different learners choose distinctive learning methods and types of activities according to their own personal qualities and needs. Learners could conduct a self-instruction activity independently in the library, for example, learning new English words to increase vocabulary. They could take part in a naturalistic activity; for instance, practicing spoken English with a native English conversation partner, to improve spoken competence. Therefore, learners could conduct different autonomous learning activities according to different goals and needs either independently or interdependently. As long as learners find the most suitable and effective ways to participate in out-of-class learning activities, they may achieve efficiency in autonomous learning.

4. Different Types and the Reason for Choosing Out-of-Class Learning Activities

In this review, three kinds of out-of-class language learning activities have been identified. So far all of this research was conducted in western cultural settings, which are less teacher-centred than those in China. There has also been research on Chinese university students' choices of different types of activities and their reasons for choosing these activities when they engage in autonomous learning.

The research that was found indicated that out of the three kinds of out-of-class language learning activities, self-directed language learning activities and naturalistic language learning activities were found to be implemented the most by Chinese university students. According to Wu's study of 263 ESL learners at the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (2012), the self-directed naturalistic language learning activities that students reported most often include: watching English films and television and English reading and listening activities. Similarly, Hyland's (2004) study of 238 participants in the faculty of education at a university in Hong Kong reported that self-directed language learning activities like writing emails, reading academic books, and surfing the Internet were the most common out-of-class activities participants engaged in rather than naturalistic language learning activities such as face-to-face interaction. In Chan, Spratt, and Humphreys's study (2002), 508 undergraduate students in Hong Kong rated sending e-mails and watching English movies as the most frequent activities performed for learning English. Similarly, in Pill's (2001) study, 15 English learners in Hong Kong reported that during out-of-class language learning activities, reading and listening activities are taken part in more commonly than speaking activities. According to the categories of out-of-class

language learning activities explained above, reading academic books, surfing the Internet, watching English movies and listening to English songs all fit into the category of self-directed naturalistic language learning activities and writing emails fits into naturalistic activities. All these studies indicate that learners participate in receptive activities more than in productive activities.

In these four research studies, the activities students participate in most commonly are weighted differently. In Hyland's (2004) and Chan et.al.'s (2002) studies, writing emails are rated first. Other activities are rated in differing order. Second, English reading activities are recognized most times as the most frequent activity adopted by students. It is possible for students to participate in all these activities in a way that involves no communication. Moreover, students are likely to not experience anxiety when participating in these activities due to the independent nature of the learning methods. Writing emails is classified as a naturalistic language activity because it requires a receiver, who is also a practicing partner. However, when they are writing emails, students are not anxious about being judged by others because they have time to self-correct and may avoid making mistakes. This suggests that Chinese university students may prefer activities where anxiety could be avoided when they are choosing out-of-class language learning activities during their autonomous learning.

Moreover, in the case of Hyland (2004), students mentioned that although speaking English was a fairly common activity for them, they rarely found opportunities to speak in English outside the classroom. The same reason is identified by Pill (2001); in terms of access to English, participants suggested they did not have the opportunity to practise either with friends or native speakers of English in order to implement naturalistic language

learning activities. These two reasons both suggest an inadequate language environment for participating in productive English learning activities.

Furthermore, when these students were asked whether there were any activities they would like to take part in to improve their English but have not taken part in, self-instruction and self-directed naturalistic language learning activities were most often identified. Their reasons for not taking part in these activities related to either time management or a lack of interest (Hyland, 2004). A similar reason is reported in Chan et.al.'s (2002) study. Students attributed their infrequent autonomous out-of-class English-related practise principally to a lack of motivation and, to a lesser extent, a lack of time (mainly because of the heavy workload of their discipline). As students are occupied with a heavy workload, they may have little time for out-of-class activities, which may lead to low motivation for participating in these activities. These difficulties refer to teaching mode limitation and lack of motivation.

Lastly, Pearson (2004) stated, students in the study indicated that they lacked confidence and were unsure about their naturalistic activities in out-of-class language learning. Pearson suggested that it could be a mistake to assume that learners themselves know best how to take charge of their own learning. Besides, learners also have different degrees of capacity for autonomous learning. This is due to a lack of knowledge and instruction about learner autonomy in out-of-class language learning.

In addition, some studies indicated that those out-of-class language-learning activities students engage in most often are not the ones that are most useful in improving their English. For example, in Hyland (2004)'s research of 238 participants, although writing emails was ranked as the most common activity, it is ranked low as a useful tool for improving students'

English. The most useful activities in Hyland (2004)'s study include reading newspapers and magazines, academic books, and novels. In another study, Suh, Wasanasomsithi, Short, and Majid (1999) report that watching television was identified as the most frequent activity students take part in to improve their English outside of class. A couple of the participants found this activity had little impact on their English conversation skills. However, this activity does help to improve English listening skills. Moreover, according to Wu (2012), although watching English films and television, along with English reading and listening activities, rated as the most popular activities, they were not rated high in terms of their usefulness. Making contacts with foreigners was regarded as being more useful in improving English skills. In these findings, these self-directed naturalistic language learning activities and one naturalistic activity that students reported as taking part in the most to improve their English were also judged to be not very effective by the students. The reasons are that students do not learn "real English" by writing emails, according to Hyland (2004). Moreover, students indicate that they can hardly understand some of the English films and television they watch (Suh et al., 1999). In other words, these activities are more useful for quick, informal communication than for academic written English or naturalistic English conversation. However, students may benefit more from these activities when they make concrete and effective learning plans on their own while performing these activities, including specific metacognitive learning strategies; for example, choosing learning goals, organizing learning materials, and reflecting on language learning, and make good use of resources around them as well as obtain timely assistance from teachers.

In general the students recognized a variety of reasons for choosing these language-learning activities in order to develop their English skills even though such activities may not have contributed much to their language learning. There are contextual limitations including an inadequate language environment, teaching mode limitations, and lack of knowledge and instruction, as well as affective factors including language anxiety and lack of motivation. This phenomenon of students most commonly engaging in out-of-class language-learning activities that are not those most useful for improving their English skills could be attributed to a lack of knowledge of how to efficiently implement autonomous learning.

5. Difficulties of Chinese Students Developing Learner Autonomy in Out-of-Class Language Learning Activities

The difficulties of learner autonomy in out-of-class language learning activities will be discussed in greater detail from two standpoints. First, out-of-class language learning contextual limitations include an inadequate language environment, teaching mode limitations, and lack of knowledge and instruction about how to learn autonomously. Second, some affective factors that impede the development of learner autonomy include language anxiety and lack of motivation.

According to Little (2009), one of the challenges of implementing language learner autonomy is an inadequate English-language environment. Students in Çelik, Arkın, and Sabriler (2012)'s study practised English speaking less due to a "lack of access to the sources available to practice speaking" (p. 111) and few chances to apply English. This restrains students' autonomous English learning because students have no chance to apply their

English in real life situations (Wanli, 2009). In other words, students may be unable to find English application opportunities in real life; Hyland also suggests this (2004). Students in the study mentioned that although speaking English was a fairly common activity for them, they rarely found opportunities to speak English outside the classroom. The same reason is identified by Pill (2001); in terms of access to English, participants suggested they did not have the opportunity to practise either with friends or native speakers of English to implement naturalistic language learning activities. Consequently, although practicing English in a realistic setting makes learning more relevant and facilitates students in becoming successful learners, there are limited opportunities to use English in some parts of China as English is a second language in the Chinese-speaking environment. Take the native speakers, for example. In China, it is common to have more foreigners living in developed big cities than in developing smaller cities. In this case, it might be easier for learners who intend to practise English to find a native speaker. In Shanghai, which is one of the most developed cities in China, there are many more English speakers than there would be in a remote northwest city. Therefore, an inadequate English-speaking environment is a big problem for developing learner autonomy in out-of-class language learning for Chinese students in China.

The second limitation to out-of-class learning is that of teaching mode limitation. Chan et al. (2002) argued in their study in Hong Kong that, although Chinese students are fairly motivated, they are less willing to learn autonomously due to the fact that students believe it is their teacher's responsibility to lead their learning. As a result students have "a strong preference for a dominant teacher role and thus a relatively less autonomous student role" (p.

12). Wanli (2009) similarly claimed that the traditional examination-oriented teaching mode in China greatly impacts the students' English learning, because the students are used to passively accepting and copying knowledge from their teachers. Little (2009) argued that one of the challenges of implementing learner autonomy in out-of-class learning is the rigidity of the curriculum, text, and exams at school. These features of school courses create pressure on students' workloads and as a result students have little time for out-of-class learning activities (Xiao & Luo, 2009). Unless these students are highly motivated, their in-class demands conflict with spending extra time learning English out of class.

The third limitation is a lack of knowledge and instruction from teachers about how to learn autonomously. The reasons students fail to learn autonomously include not having proper guidance or ongoing support as well as insufficient instruction on learning autonomy (Reinders, 2014; Turner, 1989). Little (2004) set up self-access facilities for university students, providing them with resources for developing autonomous learning skills. However, he found in his study that not many students visited the self-access facilities and those who did rarely seemed to know how to learn autonomously. Since students lack the ability and experience to tackle problems encountered while experimenting with autonomous learning outside of class, they may end up feeling less confident in their ability to learn autonomously the more they try (Yan, 2007). That is to say, even if learners are willing to take the responsibility to learn autonomously, without proper guidance on how to properly implement autonomous learning, students may fail to learn and thus lose confidence. Therefore, without sufficient instruction and assistance, students will not understand how to take responsibility for their own learning and can't be expected to develop learner autonomy in an out-of-class

language-learning environment. Moreover, without guidance and much experience it is difficult for them to choose effective metacognitive strategies according to their own learning situations when they are learning autonomously. To overcome this, teacher support is of great importance in order to provide learners with instructions about how to solve the problems they might encounter during their autonomous learning. In this case, interdependent learning may be more useful than independent learning.

To conclude, due to these three limitations, it may be difficult for learners to begin autonomous learning independently without teacher support. As Chinese students are used to following teachers' instructions, it would be helpful for them to learn interdependently rather than independently to begin with—this includes an interdependent relationship between learners and teachers as well as learners and learners. Learners could obtain learning instructions and support from teachers when they have little or no experience with out-of-class autonomous learning, or share learning experiences with other peers who have mastered autonomous learning. For example, teachers could arrange related self-directed naturalistic activities for students in order to develop their autonomous learning skills and promote collaboration among peers, for instance, participating in English plays or an English choir. During the process, teachers should provide students with timely assistance and instructions. When learners gradually become familiar with autonomous learning and become more confident in their ability to learn autonomously, they may continue with independent autonomous learning.

The other major difficulty is affective factors in learner autonomy. There are two affective obstacles: language anxiety and lack of motivation. As affective factors influence

learner autonomy and learning outcomes, when learners are anxious about practicing in the target language, it is difficult for them to master the language and develop learner autonomy.

Pearson (2004) claimed that 106 Chinese participants in the study faced one practical problem, which was the feeling of anxiety when communicating with native English speakers, and that this affective factor might not be easily overcome.

Language anxiety includes two aspects: “face” and “showing off.” According to Wu (2012), Chinese learners may experience language anxiety due to their fear of making mistakes in front of their peers, i.e., losing face. To be specific, the concept of “face” is particularly important in Chinese culture. Losing face implies being unable to function well in a social role (Wachob, 2000). That is to say, making a mistake in a social setting may imply that a learner is not capable of speaking English well. Consequently, in order to save face, learners are unwilling to practise their oral English or speak English in front of their peers to avoid exposing their mistakes. Moreover, learners avoid using English face-to-face in public settings because the use of English is seen as “showing off,” and learners fear negative judgment (Wu, 2012). Similarly, Chinese participants in Hyland’s (2004) study also expressed that they felt constrained when using English in out-of-class learning, especially in public contexts in China, for reasons pertaining to their social identities and fear of criticism. To be specific, participants in that study intended to improve their English in out-of-class learning activities, however, they reported that they felt unable to do so as it would be uncomfortable and a form of “showing off.” Since English oral practise is an essential element of autonomous language learning outside the classroom, this would not only impede the language learning progress and outcomes but also undermine their confidence and

initiative for autonomous learning. Even if there are a lot of English practicing opportunities available outside the classroom, students with language anxiety are not likely to take advantage of these opportunities. However, as language anxiety is an affective factor, learners may find ways to conquer this obstacle by building confidence in speaking gradually under the proper guidance and support of teachers.

The second affective factor is the lack of student motivation to develop learner autonomy. Wanli (2009) claimed students are confronted with problems in autonomous English learning because they lack motivation. “Lack of motivation was often cited as the most common reason for the lack of engagement in autonomous learning activities” (Chan et al., 2002, p. 12). In other words, the less motivation students have, the less autonomous students will be in their learning. Henry, Davydenko, and Dornyei (2015) emphasized that highly motivated learners have highly autonomous learning behaviours. That is to say, with regard to second language learning, the more students see themselves as doing well, the more they want to do better, and the more autonomous language learning activities they will engage in (Wachob, 2006). In other words, the more motivation students have, the more autonomous students will be in learning.

Therefore, due to these two affective factors, it is found that learners are unwilling to practise their English in front of other people even if learning interdependently may facilitate learners to be successful learners. Rather, those learners may prefer to practise English by themselves because speaking English in public may be regarded as a way of “showing off” and may cause anxiety. However, interdependent learning in a community may encourage and motivate learners to actively practise their English and help them to engage more in

autonomous learning. In this way, teachers play a significant role in providing adequate assistance to learners in overcoming their language anxiety both socially and psychologically, which would enable them to engage in both independent and interdependent autonomous learning, for example, by organizing a small learning community. Learners in the language-learning community have similar levels of spoken English. In this way, teachers could help those learners who experience language anxiety by encouraging them to speak in front of peers in small groups at first, then in larger communities, and finally, in public.

6. Limitations and Further Research

This study has several limitations. First, this study was based on the scope of literature reviewed. It is extensive but not comprehensive. A lot of the research was theoretical, and there were fewer studies involving practical teaching experience.

Second, teachers have their own characteristics and approaches. It may be difficult for every English teacher in Chinese universities and education departments to have the patience to care for and support students' autonomous learning practices. Moreover, as education in China is exam-oriented, it is difficult for most teachers to alter their traditional teaching approaches and ideas. Therefore, students may be reluctant to take the responsibility for themselves and learn autonomously.

Further research into learner autonomy for learning English out-of-class in Chinese universities could explore the specific learner's autonomous learning strategies and learning training. Moreover, future research should focus on teacher autonomy due to the fact that when teachers themselves have personal opinions on autonomous learning and teaching, they may be more helpful when assisting students with autonomous learning and will better

understand their learning situations and problems. As the author's university has quite a few out-of-class English learning activities, it is necessary to conduct more in-depth research on their exact effect on students' English learning and students' autonomous learning behaviour rather than just as sources of entertainment. With the results of this research, the school and teachers could better motivate students to learn English by increasing the forms of out-of-class English learning activities and improving students' success by participating in these activities. Moreover, in order to achieve a high degree of learner autonomy and learning efficiency more research should be conducted on learners' characteristics, ages, learning beliefs, and some other factors.

7. Discussion

In summary, this study reviewed literature mainly in three areas: 1) definition of learner autonomy and out-of-class learning as well as the relationship between learner autonomy and out-of-class learning; 2) the benefits of learner autonomy in out-of-class language learning activities related with the out-of-class language learning environment, metacognitive and affective dimensions, and interdependence; 3) different types of out-of-class language learning activities: self-instruction, self-directed naturalistic learning activities, and naturalistic learning. Two types of barriers to autonomous learning were identified through this review: contextual limitations including inadequate language environment, teaching mode limitation and lack of knowledge and affective factors including lack of motivation and language anxiety. Through this study, I have discovered three findings and two gaps in the research.

To begin with, in some articles, authors use the term "autonomous learners" instead of

“successful learners” when they are referring to learners who take full responsibility for their learning. According to Little (1995), genuinely successful learners have always been autonomous. That is to say, a successful language learner may be an autonomous learner, but an autonomous learner is not necessarily a successful learner. Learner autonomy involves affective factors such as motivation. Pearson (2004) identified motivation as an important aspect of learner autonomy that affects students’ out-of-class learning behaviour and learning results. As discussed above, successful learners are defined as being highly motivated in learning and actively engaging in out-of-class learning activities. Successful learners also achieve a certain level of performance in their learning. However, both the degree of autonomy and the level of performance of an “autonomous learner” are unknown. In other words, an autonomous learner could be fully motivated or fairly motivated, and the degree of motivation may affect whether or not the learner is successful.

Second, there exist difficulties in developing learner autonomy in out-of-class language learning activities. One such difficulty is contextual limitations, which include teaching mode limitations and lack of knowledge. In fact, the teaching mode limitation is closely related to Chinese Confucian culture, which has a long history in China. Research by Ho and Crookall (1995) explained that cultural values and norms might act as barriers that impede the development of learner autonomy. In China, influenced by Confucius’ educational philosophy, “both the Chinese teachers and students see themselves as a part of a ‘relational hierarchy’; and this role-relationship is deeply rooted in the Chinese delineation of social hierarchy” (Yingchun, 2009, p. 17). In other words, as authority figures, teachers place great emphasis on developing students’ self-discipline and proper behaviour rather than on any free

expression of opinions or independence (Yingchun, 2009, p. 17). The teacher is the authority figure that takes responsibility for the class, and students are not allowed to question the voice of authority, who is there to hold their hands throughout their learning (Detaramani & Im Chan, 1999). In this way, Chinese students become accustomed to respecting, obeying, and following their teachers' instructions and have few opportunities to develop learner autonomy. Even if they have the chance to implement learner autonomy during out-of-class language learning activities, they may be less willing to learn autonomously because they believe it is their teacher's responsibility to lead their learning and inform them of what they should do. Therefore, as Chinese students are accustomed to a teacher-centred learning approach, teachers could give instructions and support for autonomous learning to students in the beginning of a course, and students would then follow their instructions. Gradually, teachers could require students to transition from learning interdependently to the point where students could conduct both their learning and out-of-class learning autonomously and independently. All in all, students should be allowed time to accept the autonomous learning mode and get used to it.

Third, several factors may have both positive and negative effects on students' motivation and their autonomous learning behaviours. When students are aware of accessible out-of-class learning resources by taking advantage of out-of-class language practicing opportunities and when they make autonomous learning more effective by using metacognitive learning strategies, their confidence in learning will be increased. In this case, students' confidence in their ability to take control over their learning is also strengthened. During this process, once students achieve some success in learning, they regard themselves

as potential successful learners and may be motivated to work harder to achieve more success. The more achievements students have, the more motivated they will become. Therefore, the out-of-class practicing environment, effective metacognitive strategies, positive learning attitude, and a sense of confidence all positively influence motivation.

However, students' heavy workloads may occupy most of their after-school time. This may lead to students having no time and no interest in out-of-class learning. On top of this, the traditional teacher-centred learning methods make autonomous learning difficult for students when they have to take charge of their learning by themselves. Both of these factors decrease students' motivation to learn autonomously out of class. Teachers should help learners to make good use of positive factors and abandon or transfer negative factors. For instance, teachers could transform a portion of homework assignments to include out-of-class learning activities or extra-curricular activities for students. In this case, students would not only have time to participate in out-of-class learning activities but also their interest in these activities may be aroused. Additionally, teachers could share autonomous learning strategies with students and train them to eventually learn independently. When the negative factors are eliminated and positive factors are strengthened, motivation of students may be improved. Therefore, students' autonomous learning ability will be improved and language learning will be more effective as students will be fairly or highly motivated to learn.

Lastly, there are two gaps in the research. The first involves the notion that the out-of-class language-learning environment provides learners with more language practicing opportunities, which facilitate learners to engage more in learning and become successful learners, as these language practices are associated with real life applications. However, when

students are choosing types of out-of-class English learning activities, it is found that students do not participate in naturalistic language learning activities including oral English practise and face-to-face interactions. Therefore, this gap is that students are not able to find out-of-class language practicing opportunities in China or are unwilling to use these opportunities even if there are a variety of opportunities outside of class and these opportunities may lead to success in their learning.

The other gap is that, according to the research, among all the three types of out-of-class language-learning activities, students do not implement self-instruction language-learning activities at all. Besides, some studies indicate that those self-directed naturalistic language-learning activities students engage in most commonly are not the ones that students regard as the most useful in improving their English. The reason is these activities are regarded as leisure and do not provide “real English” learning. Therefore, the reason students choosing out-of-class learning activities that do not provide “real English” learning requires more research.

As a result, in order to better solve the out-of-class language learning contextual limitation including inadequate language environment, teaching mode limitation, and lack of knowledge and instruction about how to learn autonomously and two affective factors including language anxiety and lack of motivation as well as two gaps, the implications and recommendations will be provided to enhance learner autonomy so that students could better implement their autonomous learning during out-of-class learning activities.

8. Implications

Teachers' effort and support as well as their cooperation with the community and the school, play a very significant role when solutions to out-of-class language learning contextual limitations are implemented. First, in order to build an out-of-class learning environment in which English could be practised and used more frequently, teachers may organize some different types of out-of-class English activities according to different learning needs. As suggested earlier, English Corner could be organized once a week for students to gather together and practise their oral English. The number of students participating should be limited to twenty. The reason for this is that a normal class in a Chinese university usually has about thirty to fifty, or more, students. In this situation, teachers are unable to pay attention to each student or invite each of him or her to speak in one class. Moreover, in a teacher-centred class, it is common that teachers lecture for the whole class and students have few chances to talk unless invited by the teacher. Therefore, in the English Corner, each student would have plenty of time to speak and practise as well as receive assistance and corrections from their teacher.

Leading up to English Corner, the school's marketing department could make posters indicating that only the first twenty students who sign up can participate in the activity. Students could take part in English Corner for two hours once a week during a twelve-week period per semester. The specific number of weeks English Corner takes place could be set according to the number of weeks per semester, with two hours being equal to two classes' worth of time, plus a thirty-minute rest that is the same as two formal classes in daytime. In

the first week, teachers and students introduce themselves to each other. At the same time, teachers could prepare for some topics and give the students a questionnaire asking them for topics they are most interested in to aid in developing themes for the remaining eleven classes. These topics will then be discussed among students one by one during the next eleven weeks. Both Chinese and native English teachers will take turns to join in the groups regularly to offer support for the first six weeks. They can be present to correct students' pronunciation and offer vocabulary support. Since students who come to the English Corner have a certain degree of motivation to improve their oral English, they may have no language anxiety or low degree of anxiety. In this case, teachers should encourage students to speak, regardless of errors and circulate to see if any students need individual help. At the end of the sixth week, students will elect one leader for each group with 4 students per group and one leader of the whole activity, for the rest of the six weeks. In the final week, teachers could reward the students who attended English Corner regularly for the twelve weeks, since this is a voluntary activity.

Teachers could also organize a speech competition in the final week and invite students to grade or vote for the speakers and award the winner. Additionally, teachers could invite students to write down three benefits they gain from this activity and three suggestions for improving English Corner. During this process, interdependent learning between students and between students and teachers is achieved and students could witness different degrees of improvement in their oral English.

Apart from English Corner, the school could also organize English debates, English plays, an English choir competition, and some other similar activities to increase out-of-class

English use. I participated in the choir at university. Every time we took part in a choral competition within our province, country, even internationally, we were required to prepare an English song. As the pronunciation of English words had a significant effect on the performance of the songs, we made a great effort with pronunciation because we were motivated to win the competitions. Although every student in the choir come from different university departments and had different levels of oral English capabilities, every member demonstrated good team work; for instance, students who majored in English always helped other members who were not as good in English with their pronunciation. For example, students gathered in groups to practise singing during the rehearsal. In each group, students who were better at singing the English songs took turns to sing with the rest students individually to help them with pronunciation. Moreover, our conductor invited the foreign English teacher from the Department of Foreign Languages to give us pronunciation classes regularly and check the progress of the students teaching each other until the teacher was satisfied. Surprisingly, this process initiated some students to later become interested in learning English pop songs. For example, some members from our choir participated in the Campus Top Ten Singers Competitions and chose to sing English songs for these competitions because their experience singing English songs in the choir both strengthened their skills and increased their confidence in singing English songs. In this way, it is obvious that English chorus expanded students' out-of-class English use.

Additionally, not only out-of-class English learning activities but also autonomous learning facilities should be built in schools. Wanli (2009) suggested that an autonomous language-learning centre should be built, including language laboratories, multimedia

classrooms, and the original film office, etc. Students would be able to choose learning resources freely according to their individual needs in this centre. Besides, the centre should be equipped with both English teachers and technical staff to offer timely help for students. At my university, the English Corner was held in a garden outside so that it needed to move indoors when the weather was bad. Moreover, when a class wants to hold an out-of-class English learning activity, they have to apply for the key to any classroom that is available from the school. Our choir rehearsal room was used both by our choir and the school orchestra. This inevitably resulted in conflicts. Therefore, if an autonomous learning centre is built, both fixed rooms and professional equipment could be provided for students to participate in out-of-class learning activities, which would make out-of-class learning more regularly accessible.

Out-of-class learning activities and in-class learning and exams will not conflict as long as students make reasonable arrangements. For example, in my experience at University, English Corner took place once a week on Tuesday evenings and choir rehearsal took place once a week on Sunday evenings, and they both ended before the final week of exams. Therefore, students did not have time conflicts between activities and exams. In order to keep attendance up, both of these activities rewarded students for perfect attendance. For example, since I took part in the choir for three years, I got a certificate proving my three years' full attendance in the choir and my participation and achievement in all the choral competitions. This certificate not only demonstrates my personal perseverance, which will benefit me in my future job searches, but also provided me with a sense of achievement. Moreover, students are informed at the choir audition that they could ask for a leave no more than three times in

one semester, or they will be dropped from the choir. As long as students arrange their in-class learning and out-of-class activities reasonably, for example, choose only one activity that they are most interested in, out-of-class learning will not affect in-class learning and exams negatively.

All in all, these English activities and facilities aim at expanding the English learning environment so that students can engage in more English learning and practicing activities outside the classroom and have more opportunities to immerse themselves in an English environment. Students will be aware that there are abundant out-of-class English practicing opportunities that they could have easy access to in order to transfer what they have learned in class to a real-life setting and thus improve their English capabilities. Moreover, when students engage in these activities, they use autonomous learning skills that include independent learning and interdependent learning as well as different types of out-of-class English learning activities. For example, with a reading activity, students are more likely to read and write independently and conduct self-instruction or self-directed naturalistic English learning activities. While in the English Corner, students communicate with each other and learn interdependently and conduct naturalistic English learning activities. During the English singing activities, the learning process involves self-directed naturalistic English learning activities including learning English pronunciations of lyrics.

Activities like English Corner also help to build a supportive English learning community as each member cooperates, cares for, and helps each other, which motivates learners to keep attending and to invite more friends to join. When students' English capabilities are improved through these activities, it reinforces to them that their autonomous

learning is also proving to be effective and efficient. That is to say, students' autonomous learning ability is also improved during the learning process. When teachers and schools make an effort to expand the English learning environment for students, and students are able to make use of these English learning opportunities and learn autonomously and efficiently, students can benefit from the learning strategies they learned from the out-of-class learning activities and from in-class learning. Once students achieve some performance both in out-of-class learning and in-class learning, they are motivated to become more involved in learning and thus, become successful learners.

Second, as out-of-class English facilities are built and activities are organized, it is necessary to arouse students' interest in making use of these facilities and participating in these activities. In this light, as the traditional teaching approach involves teachers delivering and directing a formal class lesson according to an exam-oriented curriculum plan, teachers could begin with transforming this curriculum, that is, to combine what is taught in the class with extracurricular activities outside the class.

Wu (2012) also suggests that more out-of-class language learning activities should be incorporated into the curriculum. To be specific, a proportion of class marks could be allocated to out-of-class English learning projects or activities. For instance, the school could set an extracurricular course, which is one proportion of students' final grade, for students to complete during their out-of-class time.

An example of this could be to build an English learning website that could only be accessible to students attending the school in question; they could log in using their student number. This website could contain various English learning resources and exercises

including reading and listening exercises that cover all the content from English textbooks for the different majors and different grade levels of students. For instance, students majoring in English will do exercises pertaining to the content of their professional English texts, while those majoring in other areas will do exercises pertaining to the content of college English texts. These exercises could be an extension of the content from these textbooks. Each exercise would be scored and students would be allowed to choose any of these exercises as long as they achieve a certain score in each period. For example, if a semester is divided into ten periods, each period could include ten exercises for a total of one hundred marks. In order to make this learning efficient, the technical staff should set the system as follows: 1) The system should choose exercises from a test bank in random order for each student; 2) Once a student achieves ten marks, they are unable to continue the exercise to prevent students from performing all the exercises in one sitting and sharing the correct answers with other students; 3) When the accuracy of each exercise gets to 60%, students will then be able to pass the exercise and move on to the next exercise. This system has proven to be a feasible form of English learning at my university. With this test system, students conduct self-directed naturalistic language learning; it is quite different from traditional classes and exams. When students encounter problems during the learning process, they have easy access to the Internet to solve problems with such things as vocabulary. When students become interested in the content of the exercises, they are able to search for more information on the Internet right away. In this case, students can increase their vocabulary, their English reading ability is facilitated through the searching process, and the contents of their English textbooks could be learned and understood much better, which make in-class learning more effective.

Another example is to design projects for students that are intended to improve their English writing and speaking ability. The project could be conducted during students' out-of-class time and be related to English. The project would be written in English and presented in front of all the students so that students are able to exercise both their English writing and speaking skills. For example, the theme of project could be an investigation of Chinese English teachers' current degrees of satisfaction with their careers. In this instance, when students are interviewing English teachers in any school, they are practicing oral English. If there are situations in which students are too shy to communicate with these Chinese English teachers or are experiencing anxiety about making mistakes during the process of interview, teachers who are responsible for these students could accompany them to the interview in order to provide students with timely assistance and encouragement. Moreover, students' teachers could help students to associate with some other Chinese English teachers in the same school or at another school in the same city and communicate with these teachers in advance to explain the students' situation and invite them to help students to complete their project. For the presentation, teachers could list several ways for students to present, including multimedia presentation, prose, a script for a play, etc. Students who choose a script for a play could invite their friends to perform in front of other students and practise oral English. Students who choose a multimedia presentation could use this as an opportunity to practise their English speech-making capabilities. Students who are shy and afraid of losing face could be encouraged to choose prose and practise English pronunciation through reading the prose to other students. During the presentation, students are encouraged to ask the teacher or other students for help or to take their notebook with them while

presenting. For instance, students who choose the multimedia presentation or the script for a play may forget their words during their acting. As long as teachers create a relaxed atmosphere for learning and offer timely and kind help, students will be motivated to practise and make constant progress.

When extracurricular courses and projects are added to school curriculum, learning becomes more interesting and flexible as learning forms become more varied. Instead of traditional rigid homework and exams, students have more choices to learn different things and achieve learning success, especially in projects where there are no standard answers. During the learning process, students will develop their autonomous abilities through self-directed naturalistic learning activities, for example, listening exercises, reading exercises, or searching for information and data online for their projects. Moreover, teachers will no longer play a dominant role, instead, they will act as an advisor, a helper, an information provider, a facilitator, and take on many other roles, for example, they may provide writing guidance when students encounter problems in writing the project report. Students may realize that they are responsible for their own learning by experiencing extracurricular courses and projects. When students benefit from autonomous learning through these courses and projects, they may become more willing to make use of the autonomous learning facilities and participate in those out-of-class learning activities the teachers and schools will create for them.

However, in order to make autonomous learning more efficient, teachers should encourage students and inform them of effective ways to implement autonomous learning. Teachers could begin by identifying some of the learning responsibilities of students and

instil metacognitive strategies to students so that students could carry out autonomous learning gradually and better handle autonomous learning. The school could arrange teacher autonomy training for teachers so that they could build the concept of autonomy first and transfer to students better. Teachers should first identify which areas of responsibility for learning to transfer to the students so they can have greater control over their learning process when they assume responsibility for their own learning. According to Chan et al. (2002), teachers should identify a greater scope for student involvement and contributions they could make to the whole language learning process. To be specific, Nguyen and Gu (2013) suggested that specific areas of transferred responsibility include explicit statements of lesson objectives and self- or peer-correction of errors. Explicit statements of lesson objectives enable students to understand what exactly they should learn in one lesson so that they can make learning plans and take charge of their learning.

I have experienced self- or peer-correction of errors when I was learning English. We corrected our deskmate's homework or that of another student in the class rather than handed in homework books to teachers. Teachers announced the answers and analyzed the questions, and students marked and wrote down the correct answers or took notes on peers' books. When peer-correction was finished, students who marked the books returned them to their owners. This peer-correction activity aroused my sense of responsibility and made me serious about the correction work because I took on the responsibility of the teachers. I didn't take incorrect notes or mark incorrectly as I was responsible for another student's learning.

Moreover, apart from these two areas, one part of assuming responsibility of learning is to have students participate in curriculum planning. Nguyen and Gu (2013) claimed that there

is a lack of student voice in curriculum design, and learners can be empowered to make decisions on how to learn. However, to achieve this goal, it is of great necessity that teachers truly understand students' needs. For example, to begin with, teachers could distribute questionnaires among students asking them what forms of out-of-class extracurricular activities they are fond of and would like to participate in. Then, discussions and meetings will be held among teachers about what changes to curriculum could be made or extracurricular activities could be added according to the result of questionnaires. When students are attending these activities that are organized in accordance with their needs, they may become more interested and involved in learning, thus, are more responsible for their learning.

However, transferring responsibility is not a temporary act; instead, it is a continuous process. According to Little (2004), as students begin to learn more, they assume more responsibility. In this case, teachers should initiate, support, and direct the process and help learners at every stage to identify new learning goals, activities, and materials, and thus new areas of responsibility (Little, 2004). This indicates that teachers play an important role in confirming students' areas of responsibility for learning and directing their autonomous learning, which also includes the use of effective metacognitive strategies.

As suggested in Part 1, all of those specific metacognitive strategies could be put into three categories: planning, monitoring, and evaluating. These strategies are also used for better management of students' learning. Take English Corner as an example. Before the activity begins, as students are planning, they could set one or more learning objectives according to different sessions and individual needs. For instance, for those students who are

shy, the objectives could be: 1) Trying to speak for more than ten times in the first three sessions; 2) Making at least three friends; 3) Being able to speak basic English fluently after the activity is finished. Then, the process of monitoring could involve identifying problems and language errors, searching for solutions to solve problems, and correcting errors. For example, during English Corner, when students encounter problems such as not being able to find an English word to describe what they want to say, they could just carry on because one word has little impact on the meaning of the whole sentence. During the thirty-minute rest, students could discuss solutions for those problems or obtain assistance from teachers in English. Lastly, students can evaluate their learning in terms of either completing the three objectives or leaving them incomplete. Then, students may choose to adjust their objectives to an easier level or more difficult level for the next activity according to their learning experience. Moreover, students could summarize and identify the advantages and weakness of the activity and make adjustments.

During the process of adopting metacognitive strategies, it is important for teachers to provide support for students, for example, to help students to set or adjust an accessible goal or objective, correct errors, and evaluate their performance objectively. However, when students who want to learn autonomously and take responsibility for their learning but are unable to, teachers should direct them in using effective metacognitive strategies appropriately so they can become familiar with and master using these strategies gradually.

As researchers cited in Part 1 suggest, different students may adopt different metacognitive strategies according to their own needs. Students who are more autonomous in learning may use more metacognitive strategies independently and specifically. For example,

students may add choosing and organizing learning materials, self-reflection, and self-assessment to their metacognitive strategies. Therefore, the more metacognitive strategies used by students, the more responsibility they assume, and the more autonomous in learning they are. When students are able to adopt effective metacognitive strategies to handle and manage their learning, they are taking responsibility for their learning. In this case, they may take the initiative to participate in more out-of-class learning activities and make use of autonomous learning facilities to increase their knowledge and improve.

However, even when teachers, facilities, and effective metacognitive strategies are available, affective factors such as language anxiety and lack of motivation may prevent students from taking advantage of these resources to learn autonomously. As Chinese students tend to fear making mistakes and losing face when they are speaking English, teachers could help to improve this situation by altering their in-class teaching style. First, the primary reason students make mistakes in oral English is a lack of basic English theoretical knowledge. In this case, teachers could increase language input. For example, when students are going to practise oral English skills for day-to-day North American communication, teachers could instil some information and example sentences as to how North Americans communicate. For instance, when Chinese people are communicating with friends, they usually start with, “What are you doing?” or “Have you eaten?” or “Are you busy now?” While North Americans usually begin with “How are you?” or “Nice day, isn’t it?” or “How is everything going?” When students understand cultural differences and become familiar with these daily expressions, they will make fewer or no mistakes when they begin an English conversation during their intercultural communication.

After teachers help students to accumulate enough basic vocabulary and commonly used English phrases and patterns, some exercise of imitation, retelling, and role-playing could be added to the class in order to help students practise this new vocabulary, phrases and patterns. What is more, teachers should encourage and inspire students when they encounter problems as well as praise them when they make progress to better motivate and encourage them. What is most important is that when students make mistakes, teachers should pay attention to the way in which they correct students. According to my experience, when students are invited to perform an oral English exercise in class, it is common for teachers to correct their pronunciation or grammar errors immediately. This not only interrupts students' train of thought but also discourages their enthusiasm to learn, which may lead to the student feeling anxious about speaking in English and becoming reluctant to talk. A more helpful way to make corrections would be to speak with the student in private after class, write the student an email, or mark corrections on homework books. As suggested earlier, peer-correction is also a less stressful way of receiving feedback for students. As long as teachers pay attention to students' needs and adjust their teaching strategies continually to make the class more student-oriented, speaking English will not make students anxious.

An easy way to decrease students' fear of criticism when speaking English would be for schools to build autonomous learning facilities with a room intended for practicing oral English. These rooms could be equipped with a blackboard, a table, some chairs and pens, and some English newspapers for students to use. English teachers should be there to take turns to help students when they have problems, for instance, some students may need conversation partners. Students could book the room in advance using the school's website.

These rooms make out-of-class English learning more accessible for those students who intend to learn autonomously and independently. For example, students who are afraid of judgment but need to read English textbooks aloud could practise English in these rooms. They could have the option to take part in self-directed naturalistic language learning activities like reading without fear of losing face in class. Students preparing to perform English plays could book the room to conduct this naturalistic language learning activity interdependently with their group without the interruption of other students.

All in all, students' anxiety about speaking English could be eliminated as long as teachers pay close attention to their teaching methods and provide enough care for students. Moreover, it is also inevitable that students may experience language anxiety when they are participating in out-of-class learning activities without the assistance from teachers. In this case, teachers could offer suggestions for out-of-class learning activities that would decrease students' language anxiety. For example, self-directed learning activities including online exercises are one good way to prevent language anxiety for students. Naturalistic learning activities including English Corner are also a good choice. Students who practise English there may face fewer peers and be more motivated to speak because each student present would be able to practise. In addition, students could be encouraged to go to the autonomous learning centre to get individual help from the teachers there and make their autonomous learning more efficient. As students build their confidence in speaking English in class, they may be motivated to find more chances to practise their English. In this case, they may participate in out-of-class English learning activities to further improve their English.

However, without motivation, even students who participate in out-of-class learning activities several times are likely to give up.

One effective way to motivate students is to advertise employment information to them. My university holds a job fair in which many companies advertise work to senior students twice a year. Some positions have requirements for English capacity. For example, the certificates of College English Test Band Four/Six (CET-4/6) for non-English major students or Test for English Majors Band Four/Eight (TEM-4/8) for English major students are required. In my opinion, not only senior students should be required to participate in the job fair, but students in other grades should also be invited. This way, if students are interested in those positions that require English Band certificates, they have more time to prepare for these future jobs and thus, are motivated to learn English in order to meet the requirements. When they are preparing for these certificate exams, out-of-class English learning activities are a good way for them to further improve their English. For example, students could do their exercises independently first and then seek for help from English teachers at the autonomous learning centre when they have problems with the exercises. As the composition portion is a large percentage of these English certificate exams, schools could also provide an English Academic Writing Centre within the autonomous learning centre so that students could make an appointment with the teachers there to obtain guidance with their writing.

Another effective way to keep students motivated to learn autonomously during out-of-class learning activities is the combination of in-class teaching with daily life. To be specific, teachers need to add more content pertaining to students' daily life to their in-class teaching content. In my experience, my English teacher arranged a period of time for English

songs in one class once a week. As I was interested in the different ways of pronouncing combined words in lyrics, for example, when singing *just say yes*, the pronunciation of “t” should be omitted and the first “s” and second “s” should be sung only once. Since then, I became very interested in English songs and tried to imitate the lyrics, which greatly helped me to improve my oral English pronunciation. As I improved, I became more confident and was motivated to participate in more out-of-class activities to demonstrate my pronunciation and make more progress in my oral English. For instance, I participated in the choir competition and English songs competition held by our school and I became the teacher’s assistant as I had experience in teaching English lyrics in the school choir. During this experience, I made a lot of friends who respected me. For example, after class some students asked me questions that couldn’t be solved in class and naturally we became friends. This indicated to me that what I learnt in class proved to be useful in my daily life and in some out-of-class English learning activities, which motivated me to participate in more out-of-class activities so that what I learned from class could be used and practised more.

Apart from these two methods, the school could also give prizes and honours for some out-of-class English learning activities to motivate students to attend. Moreover, the school could also cooperate with some other universities in English-speaking countries such as Canada and the United States, and build International Exchange Student Programs so that students in Chinese universities have a chance to experience different cultures where English is a first language.

To conclude, students who aim at improving their oral English and participating in the out-of-class English learning activities should assume their learning responsibility actively

and adopt effective metacognitive strategies to manage their autonomous learning. They should seek out-of-class learning opportunities and make full use of them in order to practise. When interdependent learning is involved, students should cooperate with each other and build a supportive learning community together. In this way, students are able to achieve different degrees of learning performance.

Moreover, teachers play a significant role in assisting students so they can master the language during their out-of-class language learning activities and are motivated to learn autonomously. It may seem contradictory for teachers to be involved, since students would then not be completely autonomous in their learning. To explain, according to the definition of learner autonomy in Part 1, autonomous language learning involves the potential for sharing the learning responsibility between students and others since language itself is a social tool. That is to say, learner autonomy in language learning involves both independent and interdependent learning when students both take responsibility or share responsibility. Students choose to learn in either manner according to their needs and the situation. When students come across various kinds of difficulties during their autonomous learning, they can then turn to teacher support and share the responsibility; that is, to then learn interdependently.

When teachers are providing assistance, they should pay attention to the combination of in-class teaching and out-of-class language practicing, and arrange for a portion of homework to be related to out-of-class language learning activities. For example, teachers could cooperate with the school and community to create more opportunities for students to practise language to give them the chance to learn independently or interdependently and have more opportunities to practise. As well, proper guidance and instructions should be given to

students so that they can learn how to better take charge of their out-of-class language learning, adopt appropriate metacognitive strategies, and arrange different kinds of activities reasonably and efficiently. For instance, students could make an activity plan that balances the three kinds of out-of-class language learning activities, therefore, academic language knowledge is gained through self-instruction learning, students' scope of knowledge about English is increased through self-directed naturalistic learning, and oral language competence is improved through naturalistic language learning. In addition, some psychological support should be provided to help students overcome their language anxiety while participating in activities. Once students achieve different degrees of success with these activities, they are motivated in a variety of ways and therefore begin to take responsibility for their learning. Students may learn independently when they are capable of taking complete responsibility for their learning once they have mastered autonomous learning skills.

Last but not the least, in order to build an accessible out-of-class English learning environment and create more practicing opportunities for students, the school should build an autonomous learning centre so that out-of-class autonomous learning will be more formal and effective. Additionally, the school should actively cooperate with teachers with regard to increasing of out-of-class learning activities and the reform of curriculum and extracurricular activities. When the professional facilities and equipment are built and out-of-class learning activities are increased, out-of-class learning will be more accessible for students.

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