Authors: Yulina, Christina Atika

REMODELING BENSON'S LEARNER AUTONOMY FRAMEWORK: A LIBRARY-BASED STUDY

Christina Atika Yulina[1]

christinaatika@ukwms.ac.id

Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya

ABSTRACT

Early theorists like Holec (1981) defined autonomy as the ability to take charge of one's own learning, while later scholars such as Little (1991) expanded this concept by adding essential psychological dimension, which covers two key dimensions of autonomy: control over learning management and control over cognitive process which is underlied by psychology of learning. Benson (2013) then added situational aspect of control over learning content and formulated this concept into a three-dimensional model in which learner control can be exercised: learning management (underlied by learning behavior), cognitive processes (underlied by psychology of learning) and learning content (underlied by learning situation). Despite these developments, the visual and conceptual representations of autonomy appear fragmented and may not sufficiently illustrate the interconnections among its dimensions, lacking a visual explanation of how they dynamically interact in autonomous learning and leaving room for a clearer, more integrated framework that helps educators and learners alike understand the interdependence of autonomy's dimensions. This study, conducted as a library-based analysis, critically reviews existing theoretical models and proposes a remodeled framework to address these conceptual gaps. The primary purpose of this paper is to remodel Benson's framework of control in learning autonomy, without attempting to integrate other theoretical perspectives such as Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) or Self-Directed Learning, nor does it propose new theoretical dimensions beyond Benson's three control areas.
Keywords: learner autonomy, benson's framework, control in learning, conceptual model, library-based analysis

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, the idea of learner autonomy in language teaching has undergone changes, but it has remained a central component of modern pedagogical techniques (Schunk & Ertmer, 2000; Zimmerman, 2002). The concept of learning autonomy remains relevant in language learning, as Mynard (2024) stated in her research that there is a link between autonomy and enhanced language proficiency

Authors: Yulina, Christina Atika

her research shows how learner autonomy plays a critical role in empowering language learners to take charge of their learning (Mynard, 2024). Moreover, the current setting in the educational system advocates learner autonomy and today's classrooms are now training venues for self-efficacy and independence (Basilan & Berber, 2024). Artificial Intelligence (AI) has stormed into the learning spaces and impacted the way students approach language learning significantly (Azhar & Abdullah, 2024). Azhar & Abdullah (2024) also mentioned that Language Learning Autonomy (LLA) has seen a major increase in recent years with the increasing use of mobile assistance applications bringing about drastic changes in the approaches taken by students and teachers and related research. Through a number of significant theoretical contributions, the idea of learner autonomy has developed. Autonomy was first defined by Holec (1981, 1988) as the learner's duty to oversee their own education. Later, Little (1991) added a psychological component to this perspective, highlighting cognitive and metacognitive control. Benson (2013) developed the framework further by conceptualizing autonomy as comprising three interconnected aspects of control: cognitive processes, which have their roots in the psychology of learning; learning content, which is influenced by learning circumstances; and learning management, which is bolstered by learning behavior.

Benson (2013) developed the idea of learner autonomy as comprising three interconnected degrees of control, building on the prior dimensions put forth by Holec (1981, 1988) and Little (1991). However, existing models of the three dimensions of autonomy related to 'the capacity to take control over learning' by Benson (2013, p. 61)— while theoretically comprehensive, may lack visual clarity. In particular, the model shows how each control component relates to the more general idea of autonomy, but it doesn't state clearly how the dimensions relate to one another. As a result, Benson's model can appear fragmented and may obscure the interdependence between learning management, cognitive processing, and learning content control.

This limitation has the potential to cause misinterpretations of the dynamic and interrelated nature of learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content control; in particular, subsequent research has revealed a hierarchy and unique relationship between one control area and another that needs to be explicitly depicted to prevent ambiguity and misunderstandings. Therefore, in order to improve pedagogical clarity and better express the internal relationships among the control dimensions, this paper attempts to reconfigure and reframe Benson's multidimensional model of learner autonomy into a more cohesive and visually coherent framework without adding new theoretical constructs.

In order to address these issues, the researcher developed two study questions: (1) How has the idea of learner autonomy changed over time, especially with regard to control dimensions? (2) What is the best way to rephrase Benson's multidimensional control model into a more understandable visual representation? Though it does not attempt to integrate other theories, such as Self-Regulated Learning (SRL), or propose new theoretical dimensions beyond Benson's three control areas, this study is limited to the analysis of learner autonomy theoretical

Authors: Yulina, Christina Atika

frameworks on control areas conceptualized by Benson (2013). Instead, it aims to demonstrate how the new model in this research aids in understanding the interconnectedness of dimensions without introducing new concepts, simply rearranging how they are visualized. The contribution of this research is a visual conceptual reframing to see the interconnectedness between one control area and another rather than an extension of the theory.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The idea that underpins this study is learning autonomy, which has evolved since Holec's (1981) pilot project and was further expanded by Little (1991) and Benson (2013).

Learning Autonomy

Originally referring to the political standing of conquered cities that were governed by their own laws rather than those of the conquering authority, the English word autonomy is etymologically derived from the Ancient Greek word "autonomia," which means "liberty to live after one's own law (Benson, 2013, p. 50). In his pilot project for the Council of Europe's Modern Project, Holec (1981) defined autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning." This means that one must have and maintain responsibility for all decisions pertaining to all aspects of learning, such as deciding on targets, defining content and progressions, choosing methods and techniques to be used, keeping an eye on the process of learning (rhythm, time, place, etc.), and assessing what has been learned (p. 59). Benson (2013) noted that autonomy is best defined as the "capacity to control one's own learning" (p. 58), which is consistent with Holec's (1981) definition of autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3).

Little (1991), like Benson (2013), asserts that autonomy is fundamentally the capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It is a capacity that can be developed; and in order to understand how it can be developed, we need a broader picture of the potential for learner control over language learning (p. 92). The researcher agrees with these statements. The researcher believes that being autonomous is more than self-directed or self-instructed. Learning autonomy is more than learning by themselves, independently. However, being autonomous in learning needs such capacities and controls; but that does not merely mean that learning does not need teacher assistance. Further, Benson (2013) delineates learning autonomy in three dimensions related to control over language learning.

The Progression of Learner Autonomy Models: Expanding Dimensions of Control over Learning

Instead of using the word 'charge', Benson (2013) better to define autonomy as the capacity to take control of one's own learning, since he argued that the construct of 'control' is more accessible to empirical study than the constructs of 'charge' or' responsibility'. As control over learning can take many different forms depending

Authors: Yulina, Christina Atika

on the dimensions of the learning process, it is possible to define autonomy as a multidimensional capacity that can take different forms for different individuals and even for the same person in different circumstances or at different points in time (p. 58). In agreement with Holec (1988), Benson (2013) states that "the capacity to take responsibility for one's own learning is described more in terms of control over the cognitive processes underlying effective self-management of learning".

Little's (1991) concept complements Holec's (1981) but adds an essential psychological dimension, which covers two key dimensions of autonomy: control over learning management and control over cognitive process which is underlied by psychology of learning. This formulation, however, disregarded a third dimension dealing with control over learning content. Benson (2013) then adds situational aspect of control over learning content since autonomous learners should, in theory, have the autonomy to define and pursue their own learning goals and purposes if learning is to be genuinely self-directed. As it is, an adequate explanation of autonomy in language learning should at the very least acknowledge the significance of three dimensions in which learner control can be exercised: learning management (underlied by learning behavior), cognitive processes (underlied by psychology of learning) and learning content (underlied by learning situation), are clearly interdependent as shown in Figure 1.
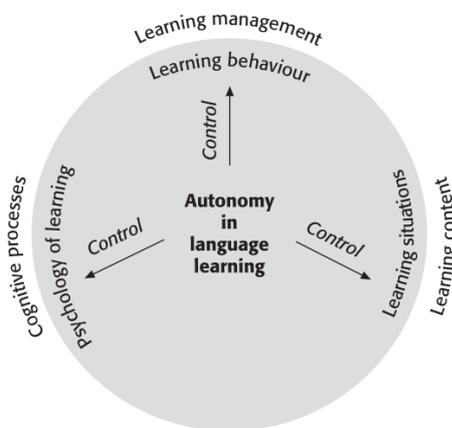

Figure 1 The Three Dimensions of Autonomy related to 'The Capacity to Take Control over Learning' by Benson (2013, p. 61)

While Benson's framework is comprehensive in outlining the dimensions of learner autonomy, its representation often appears segmented, potentially reducing clarity for both educators and learners. In Benson's model, the three areas of control—learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content—are depicted as distinct elements, each directly linked to learner autonomy in language learning as the central concept, but without illustrating the interrelationships among the control areas themselves. Therefore, there is a need for a model that better visualizes the interdependence and dynamic interaction among these three

Authors: Yulina, Christina Atika

dimensions, reflecting the fluid and reciprocal nature of learner autonomy in practice.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, literature-based methodology and draws on primary sources, such as significant works and contributions by Benson (2013), Little (1991), and Holec (1981).

The three primary control dimensions—learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content—will remain in the new model. This model, however, will highlight the dynamic and interconnected interaction among the three and offer a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which environmental, behavioral, and psychological aspects interact during the process of autonomous learning.

The reorganization aims to clarify how autonomous learning functions holistically, without changing the basic concepts that have been put forward in Benson's framework. The new model will retain the three main control dimensions of learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content. However, it will emphasize the dynamic and interdependent relationships between these three dimensions and provide a clearer picture of how learning situational, behavioral, and psychological factors interact in the autonomous learning process.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

As shown Figure 1, Benson's model of the three dimensions of control at least acknowledges the importance of three dimensions of control in which learner control can be exercised: learning management (based on learning behavior), cognitive processes (based on learning psychology), and learning content (based on learning situations). However, Benson's model does not explain the relationship between these controls.

Proposed Conceptual Model

This new model shows the relationships between the control dimensions and not only examines who is responsible for what, but also how one control dimension is related to another.
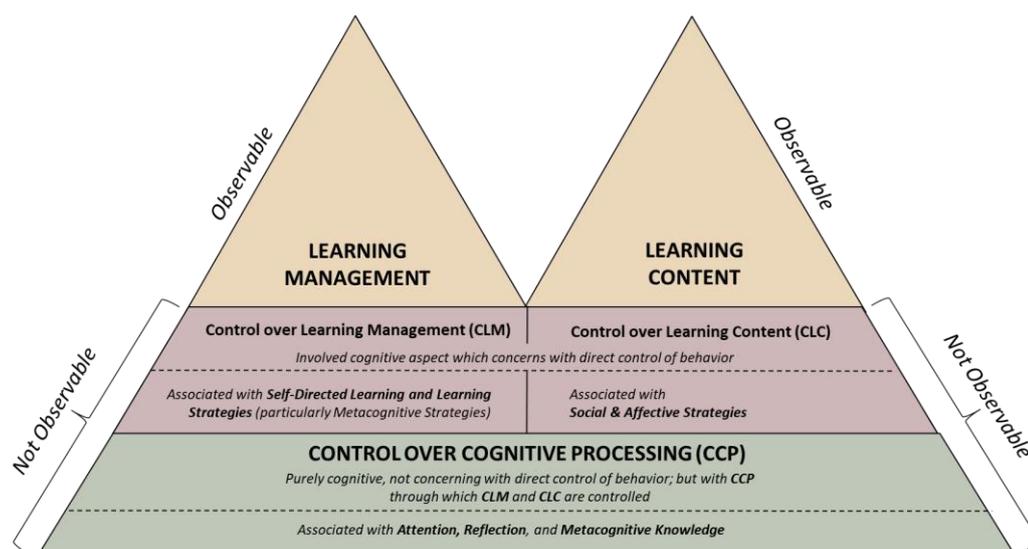
Authors: Yulina, Christina Atika

Figure 2 The Relation between Control over Learning Management, Control over Learning Content, and Control over Cognitive Process

In the new model, the control area is emphasized as an aspect that cannot be directly observed (not observable), because in the context of learner autonomy, what is observable is students' learning management behavior and choice of learning content. These two visible aspects are each based on their respective control areas: observable learning management behavior stems from control over learning management, while the activity of selecting and managing learning content is based on control over learning content.

Meanwhile, control over cognitive processes plays a fundamental role in both. This aspect is purely cognitive, not directly related to behavioral control, but rather involves control over thought processes that enable control over learning management and learning content. In other words, control over cognitive processes serves as the primary foundation that guides the other two control areas.

Analysis of the Proposed Model
Control over learning management can be stated in terms of behaviors involved in learning planning, organization, and evaluation. The control itself is related to the cognitive and attitudinal factors that appear to underlie learning management that make the autonomous learners are able to plan their language learning, select resources and allocate time to their learning over relatively long periods of time is to describe elements of tasks (Benson, 2013, p. 91-93). In other words, learning management refers to observable behaviors; control over learning management refers to the cognitive competences underlying these behaviors. This underlying capacity actually have been discussed and classified in the literature on adult self-directed learning and learning strategies which appear to be concerned with metacognitive strategy (p. 93-100).

Authors: Yulina, Christina Atika

Further, in relation to learning management, autonomy can also be defined primarily in terms of its capacity to employ strategies that are specifically tied with the concept of learning control (Benson, 2013, p. 97). Benson (2013), in his book, elaborates three schemes of learning strategies classification, namely by Wenden (1983), O'Malley & Chamot (1990) and Oxford (2003). Regardless of the different in terminology, all three share almost-similar notion.

Wenden (1983) classified the learning strategies into three categories: (1) understanding what language and language development entails; (2) planning the content and methods of learning; and (3) self-evaluation of progress and the learning experience. Further, O'Malley & Chamot (1990) advocated a more thorough schema comprising three key categories: cognitive strategies (related to the strategies of direct operations on the information or learning content to be learnt), metacognitive strategies (strategies that use cognitive process knowledge to modulate and control the learning process) and social & affective strategies (strategies that involves how learners engage with others and manage themselves in enhancing their learning) (Benson, 2013, p. 96). While (Oxford, 2003, p. 151) distinguishes learning strategies into direct strategies (refers to the cognitive strategies) and indirect strategies (refers to metacognitive and social-affective strategies which support learning through 'focusing, planning, evaluating, seeking opportunities, controlling anxiety, increasing cooperation and empathy and other means').

While learning management and learning content refer to observable behaviors, control over learning management and control over learning content refer to the cognitive competences underlying these behaviors (Benson, 2013, p. 100). However, control over cognitive processing, on the other hand, is entirely cognitive in the sense that it is not concerned with direct control of behavior, but with control over the cognitive processes through which learning management and content are controlled. To make the notion easier to understand, the researcher created a model of the interaction between control over learning management, control over learning content, and control over cognitive processes based on Benson's (2013) elaboration.

CONCLUSION

The theoretical development of learner autonomy was reviewed in this work, which traced its conceptualization from responsibility (Holec, 1981) to multidimensional control (Benson, 2013). This study clarified the interdependence of learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content control by putting forth an innovative visual model. In order to help educators and students comprehend that the aspects of control in learning autonomy are an integrated construct rather than separate components, the study offers a more coherent visual framework. Instead of adding new theoretical components, it restructures preexisting conceptions for improved pedagogical use.

Authors: Yulina, Christina Atika

Lastly, it is strongly advised that future research empirically test the usefulness of the proposed model in a language learning context, examine learners' perceptions of their autonomy across the three dimensions, and look into how various learning situations affect the dynamic interaction of control dimensions, as this study is limited to a librarian-based theoretical analysis without empirical validation.

REFERENCES

Azhar, A., & Abdullah, A. (2024). Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Language Learning Autonomy (LLA): A Systematic Literature Review Uncovering Learning Autonomy. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research, 6*(6).

Basilan, M. L., & Berber, L. V. (2024). Learner Autonomy as an Instructional Strategy in Enhancing Language Learning. *International Education Forum, 2*(4). doi:10.26689/ief.v2i4.7050

Benson, P. (2008). *Teachers' and learners' perspectives on autonomy* (pp. 15–32). https://doi.org/10.1075/aals.1.05ben

Benson, P. (2013). *Teaching and Researching Autonomy* (C. N. Candlin & D. R. Hall (eds.); 2nd ed.). Routledge.

Benson, P., & Voller, P. (2013). Autonomy and independence in language learning. In *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315842172

Little, D. (1991). Learner Autonomy 1: Definition, Issues and Problems. In *The Routledge Handbook of English Language Teaching*. Authentik Language Learning Resources Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315676203-29

Little, D. (1995). *Learning as Dialogue: The Dependence of Learner Autonomy on Teacher Autonomy*. *23*(2), 175–181.

Little, D. (1996). Learner Autonomy: Some Steps in the Evolution of Theory and Practice. *Die Neueren Sprachen*, *93*(5), 430–42.

Mynard, J. (2024). Language Learner Autonomy. *Reference Module in Social Sciences*. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-323-95504-1.00160-5

O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (1990). Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition. In *Cambridge Applied Linguistics*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1017/CBO9781139524490

Oxford, R. L. (2003). Toward a more systematic model of second language learner autonomy. *Learner Autonomy Across Cultures: Language Education Perspectives*, 75–91. https://doi.org/10.1057/97802305046845

Schunk, D. H., & Ertmer, P. A. (2000). Self-regulation and academic learning: Self-efficacy enhancing interventions. In Handbook of self-regulation (pp. 631–649). Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-012109890-2/50048-2

Wenden, A. (1983). Literature Review: the Process of Intervention. *Language Learning*, *33*(1), 103–121. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1983.tb00988.x

Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. Theory into Practice, 41(2), 64–70. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4102_2