

## Review of “Developing Learner Autonomy through Tasks: Theory, Research, Practice”

<b>Title</b>	Developing Learner Autonomy through Tasks: Theory, Research, Practice
<b>Editor</b>	Andrzej Cirocki
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In the language education literature, the notion of learner autonomy has been widely discussed and well-documented. It is no wonder that building learner autonomy is one of the most important curricular goals that language teachers are supposed to achieve. While much research on learner autonomy has been undertaken, little work touches upon the role of task design in learner autonomy in an EFL context where the use of English occurs in classrooms and English-speaking communities. To fill this void, Andrzej Cirocki’s “Developing Learner Autonomy through Tasks” gives theoretical, empirical, and practical insights into how tasks can develop learner autonomy. The book is a welcome addition to the field of learner autonomy in language education.

To begin with, the book comprises eight chapters: First Things First (Chapter 1), Fostering Learner Autonomy in the EFL Classroom (Chapter 2); Materials and Pedagogical Tasks for Developing Learner Autonomy (Chapter 3); Learner Autonomy in the Polish EFL Context (Chapter 4); Presentation of the Research Data (Chapter 5); Discussion of the Research Findings (Chapter 6); Designing Pedagogical Tasks for Learner Autonomy (Chapter 7); and Conclusion, Implications, and Future Research. In the Preface, the author tells us the rationale behind the writing of the book. As the author writes, “[t]his book reflects my personal interest in the following two aspects of foreign language pedagogy: *learner autonomy and materials development*” (p. 13). This indicates that the present text is based on the author’s teaching journey. This provides the historical and contextual validity of the book.

The introductory chapter features a brief overview of learner autonomy in the fields of education and applied linguistics, the structure and content of the book, and the intentions of the entire book. In this chapter, the author indicates that “it is necessary that the reader is aware of the difference between autonomous learning and self-directed learning ...” (p. 24). He emphasizes that “it is important to distinguish between instructional materials and tasks” (p. 25). In this book, instructional materials are defined as anything that facilitates a teaching and learning process, but tasks are operationalized as in-class and out-of-class activities that help learners use English to achieve specific goals. Chapter 2 continues to elaborate on what learner autonomy in language education means from psychological, sociocultural, and political perspectives. The author presents useful

approaches to developing learner autonomy, such as the learner-related approach (e.g. strategy training), the classroom-related approach (e.g. planning and assessing classroom learning), the resource-related approach (e.g. self-access learning centers and materials), and the technology-related approach (e.g. computer-assisted language learning). The author stresses the need for considering a blend of approaches to learner autonomy and tasks that mediate the learner autonomy. Such approaches and tasks should be adapted to a classroom context. He also emphasizes that language teachers have to adapt the existing materials and design their own tasks.

Chapter 3 addresses two issues, instructional materials and pedagogical tasks for the development of learner autonomy. The author argues that text-driven tasks can be a catalyst for facilitating learner autonomy. He moves on to present such criteria for selecting texts as connectivity (linking learner knowledge with worlds of texts), suitability of language and content (appropriate text and language), suitability for personalisation (recognizing individual differences), exploitability (using texts with different tasks), and variety – engaging learners with different topics, texts, and text types (pp. 84–103). Cirocki also discusses task authenticity, complexity, and purposefulness that should be taken into account when designing pedagogical tasks for developing learner autonomy. In the remaining section, he gives a critical evaluation of the existing EFL course books that do not promote learner autonomy. For this reason, course book re-appropriation or modification is badly needed.

Chapter 4 is devoted to discussing methodological issues, because the present book reports findings drawn from classroom-based research by the author. The author describes the rationale behind his study, research objectives, the pilot study, data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study. Chapter 5 presents sufficient research data garnered from questionnaires and journals. The author reports his findings based on the following themes: the importance of developing learner autonomy, undertaking learner autonomy development, teacher involvement in task development, obstacles to learner autonomy development, and learning resources and learner autonomy development. In other words, this chapter chronicles empirical evidence on learner autonomy. Chapter 6 discusses the research findings that address four main issues: (1) the importance and sustainability of developing learner autonomy; (2) ways of fostering learner autonomy; (3) teacher involvement in task development; and (4) obstacles to learner autonomy development. This discussion chapter shows how the research findings provide a better understanding of learner autonomy in terms of practice, theory, and research. It also elaborates on the notion of learner autonomy in the Polish EFL classroom context.

Informed by the discussion of the findings, Chapter 7 addresses a practical proposal for designing pedagogical tasks for learner autonomy. In this case, language teachers play a pivotal role in re-appropriating the existing materials and in creating pedagogical tasks. The author proposes a task approach to this materials design in order to optimize learners' involvement in their language learning. In designing pedagogical tasks, the author lists six design principles, such as goals, input, procedures, teacher roles, classroom settings, and feedback. Included in this chapter are useful examples of materials that language teachers can adopt or adapt. Chapter 8 reiterates what Chapters 1–7 present. The author re-emphasizes the interweaving of learner autonomy and task design. In other words, Cirocki accentuates the role of task design in learner autonomy development. He closes this chapter by addressing implications of his findings for teacher education and materials writing. In this respect, a task-based approach to language pedagogy can be implemented to foster learner autonomy. The author suggests future studies (i.e. an exploratory case study and action research) on learner autonomy.

The strength of the book is that Andzerj Cirocki provides a theoretically and empirically-rich description of learner autonomy in the Polish EFL context. He makes use of extensive and relevant updated references. The author showcases empirical evidence that gives a better understanding of learner autonomy in practice. The book is of course not without any limitations. I observe two main weaknesses of the book. The author should have provided more detailed methodological information, such as research design and data analysis. Another shortcoming of the book is that the

author’s data analysis was perhaps not sufficiently thorough; some of the data were left unanalyzed in detail. Despite these drawbacks, this timely volume is well-written and documents what has been discussed and debated in the area of language learner autonomy. It is also exemplary work within the remit of learner autonomy and language materials development in tandem. That said, the book can be a useful resource for curriculum developers, researchers, textbook writers, and teacher educators interested in language pedagogies that promote learner autonomy. Certainly, language teachers keen on task-based materials writing and design will find this book useful (see Chapter 7).