



## Enhancing Learner Autonomy and Promoting Independent Learning in English Language Teaching

Haribabu Thammineni<sup>1</sup>, Budha Sravani Rama<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Professor, Department of English, Lendi Institute of Engineering and Technology, Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh, India.

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Lendi Institute of Engineering and Technology, Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh, India.

**\*Corresponding Author:** Haribabu Thammineni, Professor, Department of English, Lendi Institute of Engineering and Technology, Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh, India.

**Abstract:** The most valued skills of the 21st century are autonomous learning and independent learning, which are essential for enhancing English language proficiency. Language teaching cannot be limited to the classroom. It needs a wide exposer and practice. This is highly possible when the facilitator can drive the learner in autonomous learning and independent learning. This paper talks about the experiment and experience of the facilitators in ELCS Lab in encouraging students to autonomous learning and independent learning. Self-tracking, self-reflection, self-assessment, and progress-tracking reports of the students are the experiment's results because the strengths and weaknesses of one can be completely known by oneself. This autonomous learning drives the students to their language learning goals without any hesitations or deviation in a stress-free environment. The various assessment strategies, EdTech tools, and resources used by the facilitators and learners in and outside the ELCS lab are detailed in this paper. The theories and the research that motivated our facilitators can also be glanced here. Technology and online platforms provide choices and flexibility for students to improve their positive mindset toward Autonomous learning and Independent learning. This student-centric English Language Teaching method allowed students to be involved in real-world tasks. The self-reflection of their learning drove students towards developing their metacognitive skills. The synchronization of technology with successful theories of autonomy learning led ELCS lab to this experiment which can be presented in detail with reports in this paper.

**Keywords:** ELT, ELCS Lab, Autonomous Learning, Independent Learning, self-reflection, Stress-free environment and facilitators.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In language learning, having a teacher constantly present can be both impractical and limiting. Instead, empowering students to make the best use of available online resources and trending AI-powered applications presents a more sustainable and engaging approach. This method allows learners to take ownership of their progress, reducing overdependence on teacher feedback and traditional lecture-based instruction.

A notable example of this learner-centered model is observed in the ELCS (English Language Communication Skills) Lab, where teacher intervention is deliberately minimized. Here, students are encouraged to explore a range of EdTech tools and AI-based apps, such as speech analyzers, vocabulary builders, and fluency-enhancing platforms. The teacher acts as a facilitator, designing challenging tasks and activities to help students enhance their speaking, listening, and overall communication skills.

This paper explores various theories of autonomous learning, which advocate for shifting the teacher's role from knowledge provider to learning enabler. It also documents practical strategies, projects, and activities adopted in the ELCS Lab that support learner independence. The goal is to demonstrate how technology integration, when guided thoughtfully, can foster self-directed language learning, making learners more responsible, confident, and effective communicators.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Layla Zourez, in "Teacher's Awareness of the Role of EFL Learner Autonomy in Promoting Learning Outcomes," asserts that teachers must fully understand the process of learner autonomy—how to

evaluate progress, determine suitable levels of autonomy, and guide students in deciding what and how to learn.

In the article "The Motivational Effects of the Classroom Environment in Facilitating Self-Regulated Learning," Mark R. Young states that students become proactive learners when the learning environment aligns with their intrinsic motivation, enabling them to adopt deeper cognitive and metacognitive strategies. To support this, perceived autonomy, perceived competence, and a task mastery orientation are essential.

In *Self-Instruction in Language Learning*, Leslie Dickinson emphasizes the significant impact of the learning environment on language acquisition. He highlights that language learning should be viewed from the learner's perspective, focusing on their control over available resources and settings. Contrary to the typical image of solitary self-study, Dickinson argues that self-instruction is more effective when students are guided through literature and diverse learning strategies.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative experimental design, conducted across first-year, second-year, and third-year cohorts enrolled in ELCS lab-based English courses. The primary objective was to investigate the effectiveness of integrating autonomous learning practices supported by modern technological tools and AI-based applications in enhancing language proficiency.

A total of 62 students were purposively selected, focusing on individuals who had previously exhibited challenges in English communication. The study aimed to observe how learner autonomy, when facilitated through structured yet flexible interventions, influenced their motivation and engagement—both during and beyond institutional hours. Data collection involved face-to-face interactions and a comprehensive questionnaire. The instrument elicited responses on:

How did students feel the course influenced their progress in learning the language?

Their engagement with self-directed learning using digital tools

The extent of involvement outside classroom hours

The level of challenge presented by the tasks

The nature and adequacy of faculty guidance throughout the process

The survey was conducted ethically and transparently, with full informed consent from participants. Students were given complete autonomy in responding, and at no point were they compelled or inconvenienced.

This investigation encompassed all ELCS lab offerings for first-, second-, and third-year undergraduate students at LENDI Institute of Engineering and Technology, yielding rich, first-hand insights into the pedagogical value of autonomous learning environments in higher education.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Following the administration of the questionnaire, student responses were categorized into five thematic areas:

1. Personal Experience
2. Learner Autonomy
3. Support and Resources from Team English at ELCS Lab, LENDI
4. Motivation and Challenges

#### 1. Personal Experience

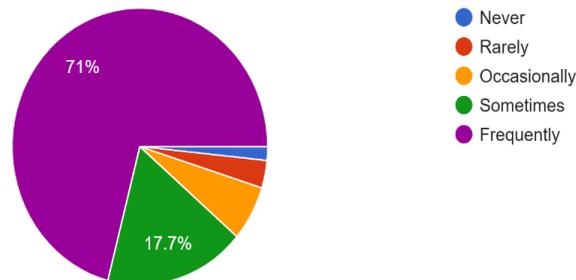
Two key questions were posed to understand the students' engagement with the ELCS Lab:

##### **Frequency of ELCS Lab Usage for Independent Learning**

When asked how often they used the ELCS Lab for autonomous English learning activities, 71% of students reported frequent usage, while 13.7% indicated occasional usage. This suggests that over 84%

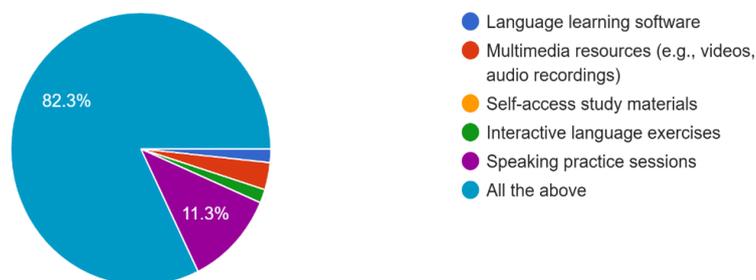
of respondents are actively engaging in self-directed language learning—an encouraging indicator of the lab’s positive impact.

How frequently do you use ELCSLAB@LENDI for independent English language learning activities.  
62 responses



### Most Beneficial Resources in the ELCS Lab

What specific resources or activities provided by ELCSLAB@LENDI have you found most beneficial for improving your English skills?  
62 responses



Students were asked to identify the most helpful tools for improving their English proficiency. Options included:

- Language learning software
- Multimedia resources
- Self-access study materials
- Interactive language exercises
- Speaking practice sessions
- All of the above

A significant 82.3% selected all of the above, indicating a broad appreciation for the diverse range of resources. Additionally, 11.3% highlighted speaking practice sessions as particularly impactful.

## 2. Learner Autonomy

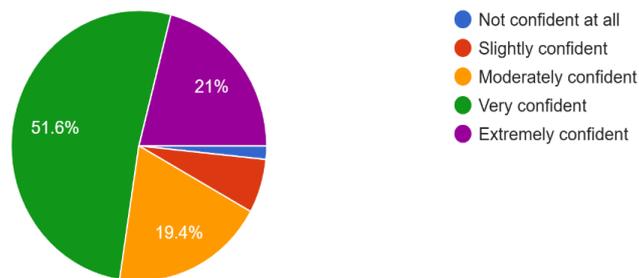
In order to gauge their growth as independent language learners, students shared responses to the following prompts:

Confidence in Utilizing ELCS Lab Resources to Set and Achieve Learning Goals:

Preliminary analysis indicates that a majority of students expressed increased confidence in independently navigating resources, setting personal goals, and progressing at their own pace—an essential aspect of autonomous learning.

How confident do you feel in utilizing the ELCSLAB@LENDI resources to set and achieve your own English language learning goals?

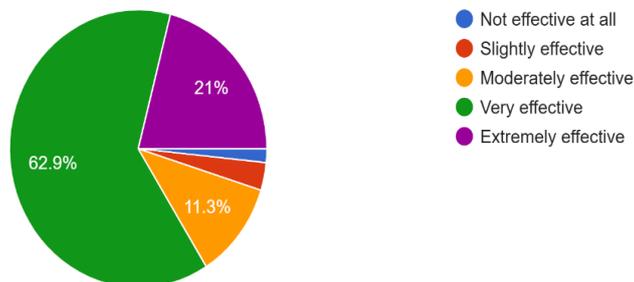
62 responses



### 3. Support from Team English and Institutional Resources

How effective are these ELCSLAB@LENDI resources in supporting your independent learning?

62 responses

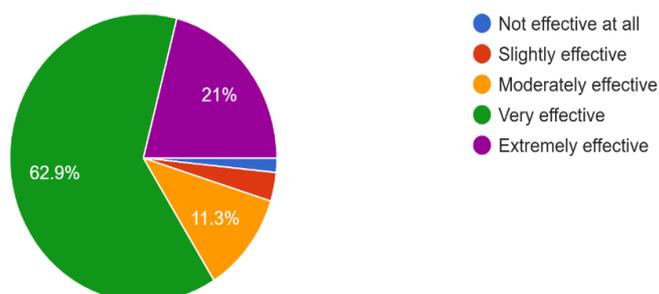


Students were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the support provided by the ELCS Lab and the Team English faculty in fostering independent learning.

#### Effectiveness of Support for Independent Learning:

How effective are these ELCSLAB@LENDI resources in supporting your independent learning?

62 responses



- 62.9% of the respondents found the support to be very effective,
- 29% rated it as extremely effective,
- while only 4.8% found it moderately effective.

These results highlight a strong positive perception of the instructional support provided, indicating that most students feel well-guided in their autonomous learning journey.

### Suggestions for Additional Support:

When asked what further support they required to enhance their autonomy, students suggested:

More frequent practice sessions

Opportunities for peer and facilitator feedback

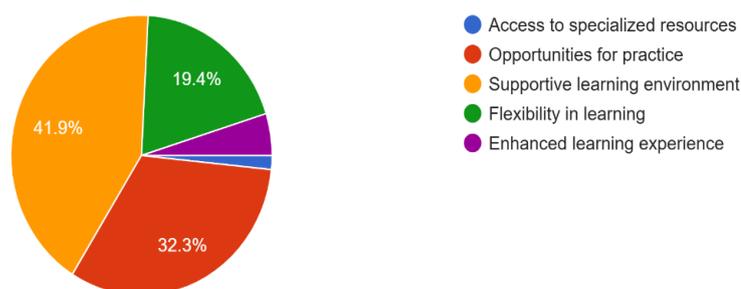
Workshops focused on effective use of lab resources

Training in navigating advanced language learning tools

These suggestions reflect a perceived gap between current support and students' evolving needs, pointing to the necessity for strategic improvements in lab facilitation and resource utilization.

### 4. Motivation and Challenges

What motivates you to use ELCSLAB@LENDI for independent English language learning?  
62 responses

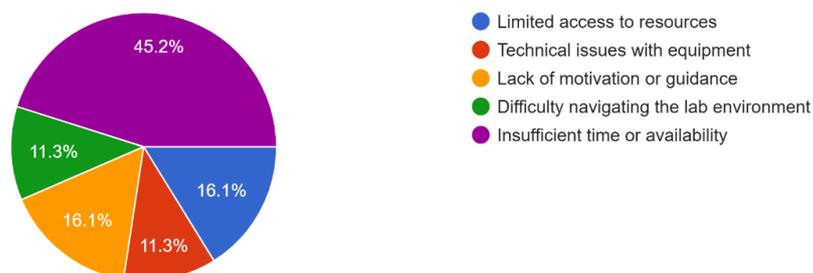


Students reflected on both the motivating factors and obstacles encountered during their autonomous learning experiences.

**Motivational Factors:** Many students reported that the ELCS Lab provided a supportive learning environment that enhanced their engagement. Notably, 32% specifically acknowledged the increased opportunities for practice as a motivating element. Several mentioned that being able to explore language learning independently boosted their confidence and interest, especially outside regular class hours.

### Challenges Faced

What challenges do you face when using ELCSLAB@LENDI for independent learning?  
62 responses



Although the feedback was largely positive, students also pointed out a few difficulties they encountered:

- Limited availability or diversity of resources at times
- Technical issues with lab equipment and software, affecting uninterrupted learning
- A few students expressed difficulty in navigating certain tools independently, suggesting a need for more orientation or guidance

These insights emphasize the importance of continuous technical and pedagogical enhancement in the lab infrastructure and instructional design, ensuring smoother, more effective self-directed learning experiences.

### 5. DISCUSSION

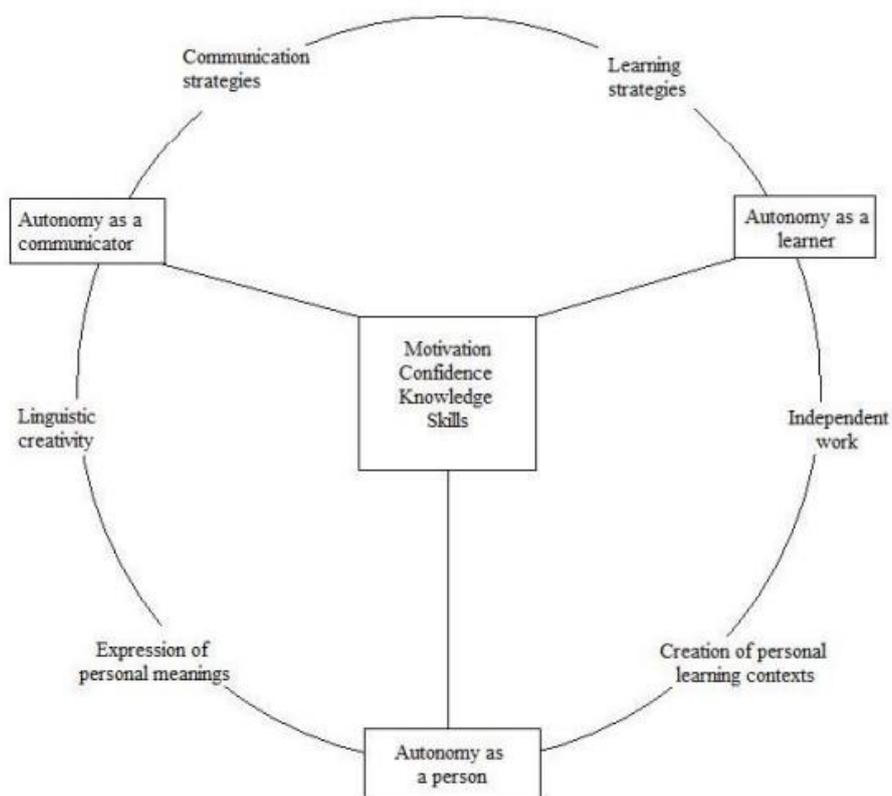
From this research and experiment, it became evident that while providing students with digital resources and corporate-relevant tools is vital, the internal motivation of the learner plays a more decisive role in successful language acquisition. For learners to engage meaningfully in autonomous learning, they must first understand the purpose of language learning—a realization that often begins with the teacher's guidance. As Earl Stevick rightly said, "The teacher's role is not to teach the language but to create the conditions in which learners can learn it."

In our findings, while students benefited from independent access to AI-based tools and ELCS lab resources, around 15–20% teacher involvement proved necessary—not to micromanage, but to offer timely motivation, regular tracking, and ensure the resources used are authentic and appropriate. This echoes David Little's perspective: "Learner autonomy does not mean the absence of the teacher, but rather a redefinition of the teacher's role."

Additionally, some students faced challenges in navigating digital tools and managing their time effectively. These gaps suggest the need for hands-on workshops to demonstrate the purposeful use of learning tools. As Neil Selwyn noted, "Digital technologies can enhance learning, but only if they are used purposefully and meaningfully." It's not enough to provide access—students need guided orientation to benefit fully.

Moreover, Henri Holec's foundational idea that "autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's own learning" deeply resonates with our aim: promoting independence while reinforcing that autonomy is best developed under structured support. Ultimately, learner autonomy becomes transformational when students are encouraged to build self-driven learning habits, sparked by teacher motivation. As Jim Ryun said, "Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going."

### Practical Recommendations for Educators and Learners



**Figure:** Developing Autonomy through Teaching (Littlewood, 1997, p.83; cited in *Çakici, 2015, P.33*)

To elaborate on practical recommendations for educators and learners, I refer to Littlewood's 1997 work *Developing Autonomy Through Teaching*. The central idea is to help students build confidence, knowledge, and motivation in language learning by allowing them autonomy—as learners, individuals, and communicators.

### **Autonomy as a Learner**

Since every learner is unique, they should be given the freedom to learn at their own pace, based on their interests and abilities. This includes choosing learning strategies and resources that suit their personal learning style. Learners must be encouraged to take responsibility for their own progress and decisions in the learning process.

Researchers also recommend a variety of autonomous learning strategies such as watching English movies or dramas, engaging with educational YouTube channels, using AI tools, conversing with peers or native speakers, and exploring literature and music. The key is to enable learners to identify and apply the strategies that work best for them.

### **Autonomy as a Communicator**

Students should be supported in expressing their ideas in their own style using their preferred communication strategies. Their individuality in communication should be encouraged, helping them build confidence and fluency in a way that feels natural and effective.

### **Autonomy as a Person**

As individuals, learners should be given opportunities to express their linguistic creativity. This can be fostered by encouraging them to explore literature of their own choice and create personal content such as journals, stories, or other forms of expression. While not all students may be naturally expressive, their language use should reflect personal meaning.

Students should also be encouraged to take responsibility for their language practice, using AI tools or other supportive platforms that offer suggestions rather than criticism. Importantly, they should be allowed to set personal learning goals and be free to choose whether to work independently or collaboratively—based on their comfort and learning preferences.

Emphasizing autonomy as a person not only helps students make meaningful choices and overcome cultural and physical barriers but also contributes to their mental wellness, as they learn a new language without the pressure or fear of failure. This supportive environment fosters confidence, self-expression, and a more positive attitude towards language learning.

### **Challenges in Autonomous Learning**

While autonomy in language learning empowers students, it also presents certain challenges—particularly due to the reduced involvement of teachers and facilitators. When learners lack self-motivation or fail to set clear goals, their performance may be hindered. Evidence from our own ELCS lab indicates that students frequently struggle to effectively access and utilise the resources provided, particularly without consistent guidance.

At the initial stages, special attention and support are essential to help students transition into autonomous learning. It is important to recognize that not all learners are immediately ready to take full responsibility for their own learning. Therefore, facilitators should monitor student progress closely, provide scaffolding when needed, and gradually shift responsibility to the learner, based on their readiness and motivation levels.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

As the saying goes, “Every change brings both challenges and opportunities.” The same holds true for autonomous learning. In our experiment conducted at the ELCS lab, we integrated autonomy into the curriculum by giving students the freedom to choose activities based on their interests and to complete them at their own pace—even beyond college hours.

This approach revealed both challenges and successful outcomes. While autonomy fosters independence and motivation, it also requires structured support. Our findings highlight that teacher guidance and awareness are essential in making learner autonomy effective. Educators must ensure students are provided with authentic, accessible resources and are guided in setting meaningful goals.

In conclusion, autonomous learning is highly beneficial when implemented thoughtfully, with the teacher acting not just as an observer but as a facilitator of learning.

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### AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY



**Dr. Haribabu Thammineni** is currently working as a Professor of English and Vice-Principal at Lendi Institute of Engineering & Technology, Visakhapatnam, AP India. He has taught English language and literature to undergraduate and postgraduate students for 27 years and has conducted many human resource development workshops. He has presented more than 20 research papers at national and international conferences. His research interests are Indian English Drama, English for Specific Purposes, Online Language Learning and Discourse Analysis.



**Budha Sravani Rama** is an Assistant Professor of English at Lendi Institute of Engineering & Technology, Visakhapatnam, AP. From shaping young minds as a primary teacher to mentoring graduates in language learning, her journey reflects a passion for evolving pedagogy. She is known for blending creativity with classroom practice to make English learning dynamic and inclusive.

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