# THE ROLE OF STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING IN DEVELOPING LEARNER AUTONOMY

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**Abstract:** This article looks at how student-centered learning can help university students who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) become more independent learners. Learner autonomy means that students take responsibility for their learning, make their own decisions, set learning goals, and check their progress. The article reviews existing studies to understand the connection between student-centered learning and learner autonomy. It focuses on classroom activities such as group work, projects, independent study, self-assessment, reflection, and using online resources. The studies show that these activities can help students become more active, independent, and responsible for their learning. However, students cannot develop these skills in a short time. They need clear instructions, regular practice, helpful feedback, and support from teachers. The article also discusses how student-centered learning can be used in English language teaching at universities in Uzbekistan. It concludes that students can become more independent when they take responsibility for their learning and receive proper guidance from teachers. More research is needed to understand how these methods work in Uzbek universities.

**Keywords:** student-centered learning, learner autonomy, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), independent learning, higher education, self-assessment, teacher support

## 1. Introduction

Education is changing quickly in the twenty-first century. Today, students need to do more than remember information. They also need to think carefully, solve problems, make decisions, and continue learning throughout their lives. Technology and the internet have also changed how people learn. Students can now use different learning materials, communicate with people from other countries, and study outside the classroom. Therefore, teachers need to use teaching methods that help students become more active and independent. Learner autonomy means that students take responsibility for their own learning (Holec, 1981). It also means that students take an active part in planning, organizing, and checking their learning progress (Little, 1991). Student-centered learning can help students develop these skills because it gives them more chances to participate in lessons and make decisions about their learning.In


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traditional teacher-centered classrooms, teachers usually explain lessons, choose learning materials, organize activities, and check students' progress. Students often listen, take notes, and complete tasks given by their teachers. This method can help students understand new information, but it may not give them enough chances to make their own decisions. Students who depend too much on teachers may find it difficult to study alone or solve problems without help. For this reason, modern education should give students more opportunities to take an active part in learning. Student-centered learning focuses on students' needs, interests, abilities, and goals. In this approach, students do more than listen to their teachers. They take part in discussions, work in pairs and groups, solve problems, complete projects, and share their ideas. They may also choose topics, search for information, and check their own work. Weimer (2013) explains that student-centered teaching pays more attention to what students learn, how they learn, and their responsibility for learning. In this approach, teachers still have an important role, but they mainly guide and support students. They explain tasks, provide useful materials, give feedback, and encourage students to think independently. As a result, students can take greater responsibility for their learning progress. One of the main aims of student-centered learning is to help students become more independent learners. Learner autonomy means that students take responsibility for their own learning. According to Holec (1981), independent learners can manage different parts of the learning process. They can set learning goals, choose suitable methods, organize activities, check their progress, and evaluate their results. In simple words, independent learners understand what they need to learn and take action to reach their goals. However, learner autonomy does not mean that students must learn without teachers. It means that they gradually learn to make decisions and manage their studies with less help from others. Little (1991) also highlights the importance of learner autonomy in education. He explains that independent learning is connected with making decisions and thinking about the learning process. Students need to understand their strong and weak points and find ways to improve. They should also learn to choose useful learning methods and check whether these methods help them. These skills can make students more confident and responsible. They are especially important in language learning because students need regular practice and independent study to improve their language skills. Learner autonomy is particularly important in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. English is widely used in international communication, higher education, business, research, and many professions. University students may need English to read academic texts, join international programmes, continue their studies, and find better job opportunities. However, learning English requires regular practice in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students also need to learn new words, improve their grammar, and communicate effectively. Since classroom time is limited, students cannot depend only on their teachers to improve their English. They


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also need to practise outside the classroom and take responsibility for their progress. University students have different levels of English, motivation, and learning experience. Some students regularly read English texts, watch videos, practise speaking, and use online learning materials. Others study mainly before exams or wait for their teachers to explain everything. These differences show that students do not automatically become independent learners simply by attending English lessons. They need help with setting goals, choosing learning materials, managing their time, and checking their progress. Student-centered learning can help them develop these skills through different classroom activities. Student-centered learning and learner autonomy are closely related because both give students an active role in the learning process. When students take part in classroom activities, they have opportunities to make decisions, share responsibilities, and solve problems. For example, a teacher may ask students to prepare a presentation on a topic they choose themselves. Students need to select a topic, find information, organize their ideas, and decide how to present them. Similarly, project work may require students to divide tasks, manage their time, and complete an assignment together. Through these activities, students can understand that learning depends not only on their teachers but also on their own efforts and decisions.

However, student-centered learning and learner autonomy are not the same. Student-centered learning is a teaching approach, while learner autonomy is the ability to take responsibility for learning. Students may take part in group discussions and projects without becoming independent learners. For example, some students may follow their classmates' decisions or wait for the teacher to tell them what to do. In these situations, classroom activities may not help students become more independent. Therefore, teachers should give students opportunities to make their own decisions, think about their work, and find ways to improve. Taking part in activities is important, but students also need to learn how to manage their own learning. Different classroom activities can help students develop learner autonomy. Group work allows students to share ideas, discuss questions, and learn from each other. Project work helps them plan activities, find information, manage their time, and present their results. Problem-solving tasks encourage students to think carefully and compare different answers. Allowing students to choose topics or learning materials helps them make decisions about their studies. Self-assessment gives students a chance to check their own work, while peer assessment helps them learn from their classmates. Reflective journals can also help students understand their progress, identify difficulties, and set new goals. These activities can support learner autonomy when teachers provide clear instructions and explain the aims of each task.

Previous research has also examined the relationship between language-learning strategies and learner autonomy. Wang et al. (2024) conducted a meta-analysis of 49 studies involving college EFL learners in mainland China. Their findings showed that


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language-learning strategy instruction had positive overall effects on English achievement and learner autonomy. This suggests that students can benefit when teachers help them learn how to plan, monitor, and improve their language learning. Student-centered activities can provide opportunities for students to practise these strategies during lessons. Chong and Reinders (2025) reviewed 61 empirical studies on English language learner autonomy. Their review showed that learner autonomy has been studied in different ways and includes several important aspects of learning. This means that autonomy should not be understood only as the ability to complete homework without help. It also includes setting goals, choosing learning strategies, checking progress, and deciding what to do next. These skills are important for university students because higher education requires them to complete independent assignments, conduct research, and manage their studies.

Although student-centered learning has many possible benefits, teachers may face difficulties when using it. Some students are used to teacher-centered lessons and may not feel confident making their own decisions. They may expect teachers to provide all the answers, correct every mistake, and explain each step of a task. When teachers suddenly give them more freedom, students may feel confused or lose motivation. Therefore, learner autonomy should be developed gradually. Teachers need to provide clear instructions and support before asking students to work more independently. This topic is also relevant to higher education in Uzbekistan. English language skills can help university students access international research, participate in academic exchange programmes, and improve their future career opportunities. At the same time, students need independent learning skills to continue improving their English after graduation. Student-centered teaching methods may support these goals by encouraging students to participate actively, use English outside the classroom, and take greater responsibility for their progress. However, the results may depend on students' previous learning experiences, language levels, motivation, and access to learning resources.Although international research provides useful information about learner autonomy, more research is needed to understand how student-centered learning works in different educational settings. In particular, studying university EFL classrooms in Uzbekistan could help teachers understand which activities students find useful and what difficulties they experience when learning independently. Such research could also provide practical ideas for improving English language teaching in local universities. The present article examines the role of student-centered learning in developing learner autonomy, with a focus on university EFL education. It discusses the relationship between student-centered teaching and independent learning, describes classroom activities that may help students become more autonomous, and considers the difficulties teachers may face when using these methods.


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The main aim of this article is to examine how student-centered learning can help university EFL students develop learner autonomy. To achieve this aim, the article has four objectives: first, to explain the concepts of student-centered learning and learner autonomy; second, to examine the relationship between these concepts; third, to identify classroom activities that may support independent language learning; and fourth, to discuss the role of teachers and the challenges of developing learner autonomy in higher education.

The article addresses the following research questions:

1. How is student-centered learning related to learner autonomy in university EFL education?
2. Which student-centered classroom activities can help students become more autonomous learners?
3. What difficulties may students experience when learning independently, and how can teachers support them?

The importance of this article lies in its focus on helping students become more responsible for their own learning. By discussing previous research and practical teaching methods, the article aims to show how student-centered learning can support the development of learner autonomy. The discussion may be useful for university English teachers, teacher educators, curriculum designers, and researchers interested in independent learning and student-centered teaching. It may also provide a foundation for future research on learner autonomy among university students in Uzbekistan.

## 2. Methods

This article uses a narrative literature review to study how student-centered learning helps university students who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) become more independent learners. This method was chosen because it helps explain what other researchers have written about a topic, compare their ideas, and understand their main findings. It also helps show how student-centered learning can help students take more responsibility for their studies. The review uses academic books and research articles about student-centered learning, learner autonomy, and English language teaching. The main aim is to understand how students can become more responsible for their learning and how teachers can help them study independently. The reviewed sources also explain different teaching methods that encourage students to take part in lessons, make decisions, and organize their studies. The sources were chosen because they were related to the main topic of the article. Special attention was given to studies that explain learner autonomy, discuss student-centered teaching methods, and describe independent learning in English language education. Studies about university students and foreign language learning were especially important because this article focuses on higher education. Nunan (1997) explains that teachers can help students


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become more independent by choosing and changing learning materials that allow them to make their own decisions. The review also includes books and studies that explain how students can take more responsibility for their learning.

After choosing the sources, the information was divided into three main parts. The first part looks at the connection between student-centered learning and learner autonomy. It explains how taking an active part in lessons and accepting responsibility can help students learn independently. The second part focuses on classroom activities that can help students become more independent. These activities include group work, project work, discussions, choosing topics, self-assessment, peer assessment, and reflection. The third part discusses the main problems of student-centered learning. These problems include depending too much on teachers, finding it difficult to make decisions, and having problems organizing independent study. The information from the selected sources was compared to find similar ideas and differences between researchers. Special attention was given to the skills that students need to become independent learners. These skills include setting learning goals, choosing useful materials, planning study time, finding suitable ways to learn, checking progress, and understanding learning results. The review also looked at how teachers can help students develop these skills by giving clear instructions, useful feedback, and suitable classroom activities. The main ideas from the reviewed sources were brought together to explain how student-centered learning can help students become more independent. For example, group work allows students to share tasks and make decisions together. Project work helps students plan their work and use their time well. Self-assessment helps students understand what they do well and what they need to improve. Reflection helps them think about their progress and set new learning goals. These examples were discussed in relation to the main aim of the article.This study is based on a narrative literature review. It is not an experiment or a survey. The author did not conduct questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, or experiments. No new information was collected directly from students or teachers. Instead, the article uses information and ideas from previous studies. For this reason, the results in the next section are based on earlier research, not on a new study carried out in a classroom by the author. This method also has some limits. A narrative literature review gives general information about a topic, but it may not include every study related to it. The discussion depends on the sources chosen and the information they provide. Also, studies from other countries may not fully show the experiences of university students in Uzbekistan. More research with local university students and English language teachers is needed to understand how student-centered learning can help students become more independent in Uzbekistan.

3. Results


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The reviewed studies show that student-centered learning can help students become more independent in learning English. This approach gives students more chances to take part in lessons, make decisions, share ideas, and take responsibility for their studies. Previous research shows that independent learners need several important skills. They need to set learning goals, choose suitable learning methods, check their progress, and understand their results. Student-centered learning can help students develop these skills through different classroom activities.

One important finding is that student-centered learning helps students become more active in the classroom. Instead of only listening to the teacher and doing exercises, students can join discussions, ask questions, solve problems, and share their opinions. These activities can help students become more confident and responsible. For example, when students prepare a presentation, they need to choose a topic, find information, organize their ideas, and decide how to present them. In this way, they learn to make decisions and manage their work. However, active participation does not always mean that students can learn independently. Some students may still depend on their teachers to make every decision. Therefore, teachers should help students learn how to plan their work, solve problems, and check their own progress.

The reviewed studies also show that group work and project work can help students become more independent. These activities allow students to share ideas, discuss different opinions, and work together to finish tasks. In English lessons, students can prepare presentations, discuss social issues, or create projects about the environment, education, and technology. Each student can have a different task, such as finding information, writing key points, or presenting the results. This helps students understand that their own work is important. Project work can also teach students to manage their time, organize tasks, and finish their work on time. However, teachers need to make sure that everyone takes part. If only one or two students do all the work, the others may not develop the same skills. Clear instructions and individual tasks can make group activities more effective.

Another important finding is that giving students choices can help them become more independent learners. When students can choose a topic, select learning materials, or decide how to complete a task, they have more control over their studies. For example, a teacher may ask students to improve their speaking skills by preparing a presentation, recording a short podcast, or interviewing a classmate. Students can choose the activity they like, but they must still reach the same learning goal. This helps them make decisions and take responsibility for their work. Having choices can also make learning more interesting because students can choose activities related to their interests. However, some students may find it difficult to make decisions. Teachers should provide clear options and explain what students need to do.


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Self-assessment and reflection are also important for developing learner autonomy. Self-assessment means checking your own work, while reflection means thinking about what you have learned and what you need to improve. In English lessons, students can use simple checklists to check their speaking, writing, reading, or listening skills. For example, after a speaking activity, students can ask themselves whether they spoke clearly, used the right words, and explained their ideas well. Then, they can decide which skills they need to improve. Students can also keep learning journals and write about what they have learned, which activities helped them, and what they want to learn next. Peer assessment can also be useful because students can check each other's work and give feedback. These activities encourage students to think about their learning instead of depending only on the teacher's comments.

The reviewed studies also show that teachers have an important role in helping students become independent learners. Student-centered learning does not mean that teachers should leave students to study without any help. Instead, teachers should guide students and teach them the skills they need to learn independently. They can explain learning goals, provide useful materials, show students different learning methods, and give feedback. For example, an English teacher can show students how to use a dictionary, learn new words, find suitable reading materials, or practise listening by watching online videos. Students can then use these methods at home or outside the classroom. At first, they may need clear instructions and examples. As they become more confident, teachers can give them more responsibility. In this way, students can gradually learn to manage their studies with less help from their teachers.

Technology can also help students learn independently. Students can use online dictionaries, educational websites, videos, and language-learning apps to practise English outside the classroom. These resources allow them to study at their own speed and focus on the skills they need to improve. For example, students who have difficulty understanding spoken English can watch short videos and listen to difficult parts several times. Students who want to improve their vocabulary can complete online exercises and review new words regularly. However, simply using technology does not mean that students can learn independently. They need to know how to choose useful resources, set clear goals, and use their time well. Teachers can help by recommending suitable materials and showing students how to use them effectively.

Despite these benefits, developing learner autonomy can be difficult. Some students are used to lessons where teachers make most of the decisions. They may feel uncomfortable when they need to choose activities or find answers on their own. Some students may also have problems managing their time, choosing learning materials, or checking their own work. Different levels of English can create additional difficulties because some students can complete tasks easily, while others need more time and support. Large classes and limited lesson time can also make it difficult for teachers to


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help every student individually. These problems show that students need time to develop independent learning skills. Teachers can begin with simple activities, clear instructions, and a small number of choices. As students become more confident, teachers can gradually give them more responsibility.

Overall, the reviewed studies suggest that student-centered learning can help university students become more independent in learning English. Activities such as group work, project work, choosing tasks, self-assessment, reflection, and using online learning materials can help students take more responsibility for their progress. However, teachers need to plan these activities carefully and provide support when necessary. Learner autonomy does not develop through one activity alone. Students need regular practice, clear goals, useful feedback, and opportunities to make their own decisions. With the right support, student-centered learning can help university students become more active, confident, and independent learners.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this article was to examine the role of student-centered learning in developing learner autonomy among university students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The reviewed literature suggests that student-centered learning can help students become more independent and responsible for their learning. When students take part in classroom activities, make decisions, and evaluate their progress, they have more opportunities to develop independent learning skills. However, these skills do not develop automatically. Students need regular practice, clear instructions, and support from their teachers. The findings are in line with Holec's (1981) view that learner autonomy involves taking responsibility for one's own learning. Students need to understand their learning goals, choose suitable methods, and check their progress. Student-centered learning can help them practise these skills through classroom activities. For example, when students choose a presentation topic or plan a group project, they learn to make decisions and organize their work. These experiences can prepare them to manage other learning tasks more independently. The findings also relate to Little's (1991) work on learner autonomy. Little emphasized the importance of reflection and independent decision-making. Students need to think about what they have learned, identify their difficulties, and decide how to improve. For this reason, activities such as self-assessment and learning journals can be useful in English language classrooms. After completing a task, students can review their performance and set goals for future learning. This process can help them understand their strengths and weaknesses and become more aware of their learning needs. Wang et al. (2024) also found that language-learning strategy instruction had positive effects on English achievement and learner autonomy in college EFL settings. This finding highlights the importance of teaching students how to learn, not only what to learn. English teachers can help students develop useful strategies for learning vocabulary, improving listening


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skills, practising speaking, and understanding written texts. Students can then apply these strategies outside the classroom. In this way, classroom learning can support their continued development beyond formal lessons.

Another important point is the role of the teacher. Student-centered learning does not mean that teachers should give students complete freedom without guidance. Some students may not have enough experience to plan their learning or choose suitable resources. If they receive too little support, they may feel confused or lose motivation. Teachers should therefore introduce independent learning activities step by step. At first, they can provide clear instructions, examples, and checklists. Later, they can encourage students to make more decisions and take greater responsibility for their work. The findings also have practical value for university English teaching in Uzbekistan. Teachers can include small activities that encourage independence without making major changes to the whole course. For example, students can set a personal English-learning goal at the beginning of a month and review their progress at the end. They can choose one of several topics for a presentation, use online resources to practise listening, or complete a short reflection after each unit. These activities can help students develop responsibility while continuing to improve their English skills. However, teachers should consider differences between students. Some learners may feel confident working independently, while others may need more support. Students may also have different levels of English proficiency, access to technology, and experience with independent study. Teachers can respond to these differences by providing tasks at different levels, offering suitable learning materials, and giving regular feedback. Pair work and small-group activities can also allow students to support one another while developing their own skills.

This article has some limitations. It is based on a narrative review of previous literature and does not include new data from university students or teachers in Uzbekistan. Therefore, the discussion cannot show exactly how effective particular student-centered activities are in local classrooms. Future research could use questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, or teaching experiments to investigate students' experiences with independent learning. Such research could help identify which activities are most useful and what support students need to become more autonomous learners. In general, the discussion suggests that student-centered learning can support learner autonomy when it gives students meaningful opportunities to make decisions, reflect on their progress, and practise independent learning strategies. Teachers remain important because they guide students and help them develop the skills needed to manage their learning. A balanced approach that combines student responsibility with teacher support may be especially useful in university EFL education.

## 5. Conclusion


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This article studied how student-centered learning can help university students who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) become more independent learners. The review of previous studies shows that student-centered learning can help students become more active, independent, and responsible for their studies. It gives students chances to make decisions, share ideas, solve problems, and check their progress. These experiences can help students develop the skills they need to continue learning inside and outside the classroom. The review also showed that different classroom activities can help students become more independent. Group work and project work teach students to share tasks, organize their work, and manage their time. Giving students choices helps them make decisions about their learning. Self-assessment and reflection help students understand what they do well and what they need to improve. Online resources also give students more chances to practise English on their own. However, teachers need to plan these activities carefully to make sure that all students take part in the learning process. Another important conclusion is that teachers still have an important role in helping students become independent learners. Students may not know how to set goals, choose useful learning materials, or check their progress at first. Therefore, teachers should give clear instructions, helpful feedback, and suitable learning materials. They should slowly give students more responsibility as their skills and confidence grow. A good balance between student independence and teacher support can create a better learning environment. These findings are important for English language teaching at universities in Uzbekistan. English teachers can help students become more independent by giving them regular chances to choose activities, practise English on their own, and think about their progress. For example, students can set personal learning goals, choose topics for presentations, use online materials to practise English, and check their progress at the end of each unit. These activities may help students take more responsibility for learning English and prepare for their future studies and careers. However, this article is based on a review of previous research and does not include new data from university students in Uzbekistan. More research is needed to understand how student-centered learning helps students become independent learners in local universities. Future studies could collect information from students and teachers through questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, or teaching experiments. This would help researchers better understand students' experiences and identify the most useful classroom activities for developing learner autonomy.

In conclusion, student-centered learning can play an important role in developing learner autonomy in higher education. When students are encouraged to participate actively, make decisions, reflect on their progress, and take responsibility for their learning, they can gradually become more independent learners. However, successful development of autonomy requires regular practice, clear goals, and suitable teacher


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support. By using student-centered methods in a planned and balanced way, university English teachers can help students improve their language skills and develop the ability to continue learning throughout their lives.

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