

From totalitarianism to democracy: Building learner autonomy in Ukrainian higher education

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This research focuses on revealing the role of culture of education in shaping students' and teachers' attitudes to the learning process, which is largely determined by the political and social context in which it takes place. This exploration of the cultural nature of autonomy of the Ukrainian university students majoring in translation from English gives insights into the basic principles of Ukrainian pedagogy in a diachronic perspective, and examines students' capacity to manage their own learning, as well as teachers' skills for enhancing learner autonomy among their students. This article's comparative analysis of data provided by students in different years of study helps both to trace changes in learners' attitude to their educational processes and the degree of their awareness of learning objectives, and to set guidelines for building learner autonomy in the context of the Ukrainian higher education system since its independence in 1991.

Introduction

The construct of learner autonomy has gained a central position in modern day education across the globe. Being defined as the capacity to control one's own learning in terms of management, cognition and content (Nunan, 2013:209; Benson 2001), it is one of the basic principles that underlie effective learning, as students' ability to make plans, develop their own learning strategies and be selective in terms of learning content (Ceylan, 2015; Little, Dam & Legenhausen, 2017; Nunan, 2013) fosters personalised learning focusing on needs, strengths and interests of each student. Autonomous language learners are, therefore, learners who are in some sense 'in control' of important dimensions of their learning, which might otherwise be controlled by others or by nobody at all (Benson, 2010).

As the ability of individuals to take responsibility for their own learning is largely determined by the context in which the learning takes place (Bruner, 1996; Nunan, 2013), the construct of learner autonomy comprises four major dimensions: technical, psychological, political-philosophical and socio-cultural (Murase, 2015). This research is aimed at studying the influence of political and socio-cultural factors on the degree of autonomy students possess. In such a way, the investigation of the cultural nature of autonomy of the Ukrainian university students adds to the wide array of studies on the concept of autonomy in Western and non-Western contexts (Abadikhan, Aliyan & Talebi, 2018; Ceylan, 2015; Farmer, 1994; Karababa, Eker & Arik, 2010; Reinders, 2007; Rivers, 2001; Rowsell & Libben, 1994; Simmons & Wheeler, 1995), the importance of which cannot be underestimated, as the culture of education shapes learning processes and sets roles and functions performed by both teachers and students. According to Bruner (1996:x), a cultural view on education requires that one consider education and learning in their situated, cultural context, for you cannot understand mental activity unless you take

into account the cultural setting and its resources, the very things that give mind its shape and scope.

Viewing autonomy as a developmental process (Benson, 2010; Breen & Mann, 1997; Holec, 1985; Little, 1991), this study focuses on measuring learner autonomy within the Ukrainian culture of education as influenced by political and cultural factors in the diachronic perspective. Although the idea of measuring learner autonomy is still regarded as problematic, because students may pretend to be autonomous by showing autonomous-like behaviours, as they want to please their teacher by displaying what they think their teacher expects to see developing over time (i.e. quantitative measurement largely depends on the self-reporting of students) (Champagne et al., 2001; Murase, 2015), an attempt to measure behaviours in which control over aspects of the learning process is displayed (Benson, 2010) may help to understand the underlying factors that determine students' success in learning, and outline the main directions for developing learner autonomy in the future.

Constructing learner autonomy from Soviet times to the Independence of Ukraine: Change of paradigm

Tracing the development of the construct of learner autonomy in Ukrainian pedagogy from the times of its formation up to the present, in the context of the political processes that took place in Ukraine from the end of the 19th century will provide a key for understanding the place of the concept of learner autonomy in the modern system of education and the reasons for such a state of affairs.

If we look back and analyse the basic principles of education in the 19th and 20th centuries, a period of establishing the foundations of modern systems of education, we will see that a teacher was always considered a key person in the educational process, and a group rather than an individual was a cornerstone in mass education. Such fundamentals are deeply rooted into political situation in Ukraine during that time. For centuries Ukraine was under control of other countries, governments and regimes, and education served as a powerful tool of ideological influence and control.

The renowned philosopher, teacher and founder of scientific pedagogy in Russia and territories such as Ukraine in the 19th century, Konstantin Ushinsky claimed:

A teacher... when face to face with his students holds in himself all opportunities for successful education. The most important means of human education is conviction, and conviction can only be influenced by conviction. When a program or method of education, no matter how good it is, is not supported by the teacher's power of conviction, it is dead and has no potential in reality (Ushinsky, 1857).

This view aligns with the general policy of education in Tsarist Russia, as its main goal was to subdue individualism, which is demonstrated in another statement by Konstantin Ushinsky:

The number of students in an educational institution should not exceed the ability of personal influence and control over them by a teacher... Only when a spirit of an institution has been created, the educational power of an institution will grow and subdue new individuals (Ushinsky, 1858).

Such a vision of the fundamentals of the educational system in the late 19th century allowed no space for the independent development of a personality and the construct of learner autonomy as an educational principle. The main reasons for the establishment of such paradigm in the educational policy were the absolute autocratic rule of an emperor and the key role of orthodoxy as an ideological means of influence. As the Orthodox pedagogy proclaimed the key role of the Church in the educational process, declared Christianity a basis of moral development of a personality, and endowed the emperor with an absolute power in all spheres of people's lives (Shevyrev, 1852; Ushinsky, 1860), the educational process of that time was aimed at raising devoted servants of God and Emperor.

After the fall of the Russian Empire and establishment of the Soviet regime early in the 20th century, the basic principles of mass education were preserved and developed, as serving the state was proclaimed the main duty of an individual. This idea was entrenched in the Soviet principles of communism, which declared the following: social education for the needs of the country development; compliance of individual interests with the needs of community and society; and dominance of social interests over individual ones (Marx & Engels, 1848; Engels, 2013).

This doctrine was rigorously implemented in all spheres of social life, including education. Thus, on 25 August 1932 the Organisational Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union proclaimed the following:

- Soviet teachers as a mass unit of Soviet intellectuals are the propagandists of the high communist ideals;
- a Soviet teacher is a guide of the enlightenment policy of the Socialist state. Their social function is to raise, teach and educate young generation in a spirit of communism;
- a teacher must be an epitome of a person guided not by their personal interests, but by the understanding and awareness of their social duties and responsibilities assigned by the Soviet state;
- a teacher arms their students with a strictly limited areas of knowledge, defined by the governmental programs and books (Resolution of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. (B.) from 25.VIII.1932).

This declaration clearly states the authority of a teacher in the educational process and the domination of a group in a social life of a person: 'a group should be the primary aim of education... Every action of a separate student, their every success or failure must be regarded as failures on the common background or success in common deed... A group is the main tool of education' (Makarenko, 1983).

Such collectivist culture of education formed under the influence of numerous socio-political factors up to the late 20th century contravened the development of the construct of learner autonomy, and to some extent defined further evolution of the modern system of education in Ukraine in terms of its group-oriented nature. According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 1983), as of today Ukraine scores 25 out of 100 on the Individualism vs. Collectivism scale (*Hofstede Insights*, 2019). This shows a clear tendency to collectivism in all spheres of modern society, including education.

However, after gaining the independence in 1991 the Ukrainian education authorities changed the vector towards individualism and declared the key role of a student in the learning process: a teacher is a transmitter of knowledge, whose main aim is to teach a student how to gain knowledge independently in the most effective way – to learn how to learn, create the atmosphere of cooperation, mutual respect and support (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2019). In this respect the modern Ukrainian pedagogy views each student as:

- I am energy;
- I am intellectual spiritual power;
- I am driving force of my own development and education;
- I am master of the situation (Vyshnevsky, 2006).

This view is in line with the Holec's (1981) proposal that education should be an instrument that can be used for arousing an increasing sense of awareness and liberation, and, in some cases, for changing the environment itself. Persons should no longer be the product of society, but producers of their society. Therefore, education plays a key role in preparing learners for these responsibilities, which involves teaching them the skills essential to take control over their learning processes and the content of learning (Teng, 2019:6). Although the main aims of the Ukrainian education have changed drastically in recent decades, and the new policy gives more space for the implementation of the principle of learner autonomy into the educational process, Ukrainian education needs time to adjust to a new paradigm. Therefore, in conducting this research I was interested in the following:

1. How far have we moved away from the Soviet legacy in educational policy?
2. To what extent did we manage to implement modern European principles of education in terms of raising students' awareness of autonomy?
 - a. Are students prepared to learn autonomously?
 - b. Do teachers teach students how to achieve higher level of learner autonomy?

Method

Participants

The participants in the study were 167 undergraduate students in their first to fourth years of study (44 first year students; 41 second year; 39 third year; 43 fourth year) majoring in translation from English at the Department of Theory and Practice of Translation from

English, Institute of Philology, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine, where all students take an obligatory EFL course as part of their curriculum. The survey participants ranged in age between 18 and 24 years. The data were collected in September 2019 (autumn semester).

Instruments and procedures

The methodological basis of the research is the understanding of autonomous learners as (1) communicators, continuously using and gradually developing their communicative skills in the target language; (2) experimenters with language, gradually developing an explicit analytical knowledge of the target language system and awareness of the cultural conventions and social constraints that shape its use; (3) intentional learners, gradually developing an explicit awareness of effective and metacognitive aspects of language learning (Little, Dam & Legenhausen, 2017:23). Therefore, the purpose of the questionnaire was to measure the level of students' confidence when performing these roles. For this reason, the questionnaire was split into three parts, each of which included statements about a specific role of a student as an autonomous learner.

The review of existing studies on the concept of learner autonomy, as well as the methods and approaches to its assessment (Benson, 2010; Bryman, 2008; Bryman & Cramer, 2005; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010; Lamb & Reinders, 2008; Newby, 2010), contributed to the formulation of key statements in each part of the questionnaire. In order to ensure a diversity of perspectives on the concept of learner autonomy in the questionnaire, I asked an academic colleague with a PhD in Education and experience in designing questionnaires, to review the questionnaire and comment on ways to improve it; some revisions of the questionnaire structure and statements were made.

Students assessed the statements using a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree). The survey was anonymous and all students were fully informed about the purpose of the research. It was administered and answered in English and required approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Ethical considerations

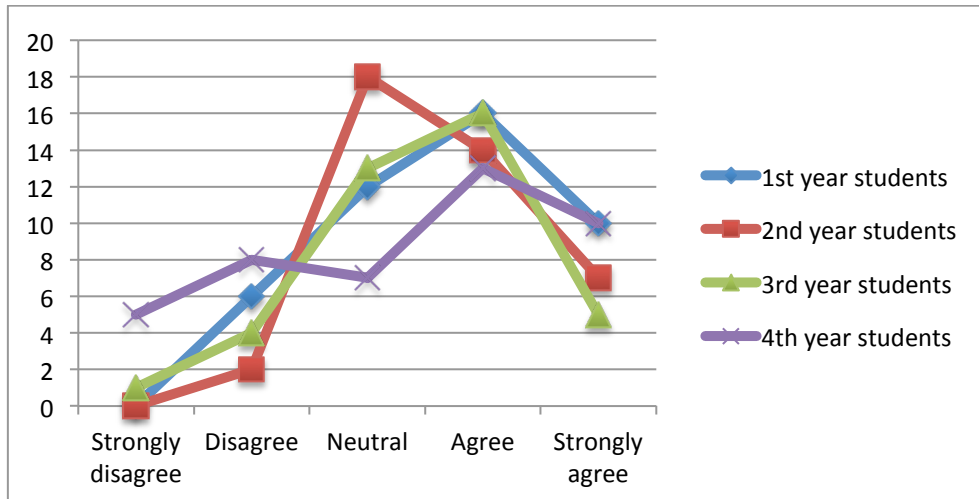
All students were informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary and anonymous nature of participation, and the way the data would be used. They signed an informed consent to participate in the survey. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Supervisors of the Institute of Philology of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.

Results and discussion

Part 1: Students' confidence as communicators

Statement 1

Outside of a classroom I take advantage of various opportunities to practise my English (e.g. using English to talk to classmates about daily life, participating in English speaking clubs / activities, etc.).

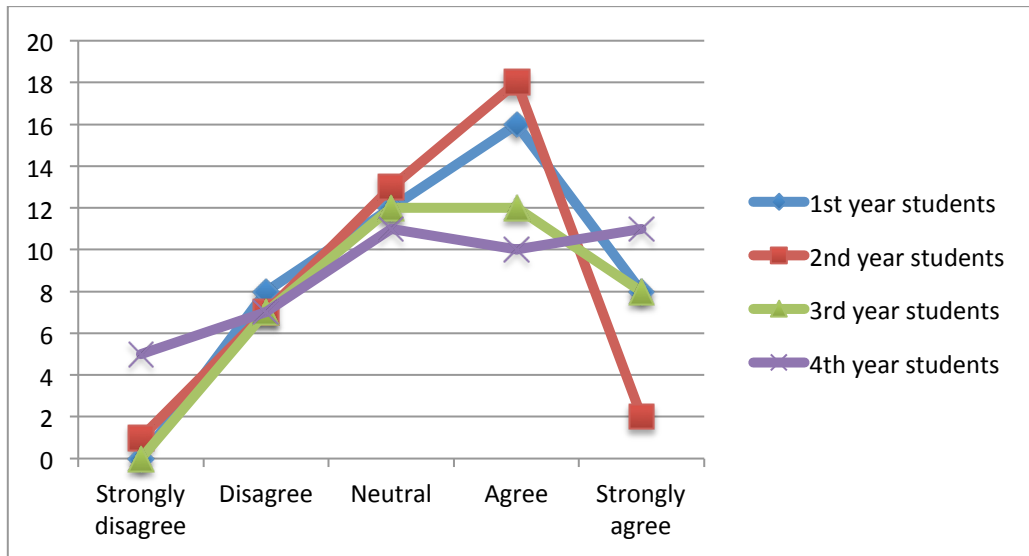


For all statements, first year n=44; second year n=41; third year n=39; fourth year n=43.

Although most students showed a high degree of awareness about the need for autonomous learning, the data indicate a negative trend: the number of students who did not use various opportunities to practise English outside the classroom was higher among senior students in compared with other years. This may be explained by a heavier course load that 4th year students undertake during the last year of their study, rather than being directly associated with a lower level of learner autonomy. Yet in the context of the state education policy of implementing the communicative approach to learning foreign languages and moving away from simple memorisation of vocabulary and grammatical structures, teachers should find ways to meet newly arising educational needs. Viewing language as an interactive process and being exposed to the activities aimed at using a target language outside the classroom may help students see a connection of their study to real life (Branden, 2007; Swarbrick, 2013). This is extremely important for students majoring in translation, as their awareness of various aspects of social life and ability to communicate different views will determine their professional success. However, the transition from the use of Soviet teaching methods to the communicative paradigm in teaching and learning requires time and effort from both education authorities and teachers.

Statement 2

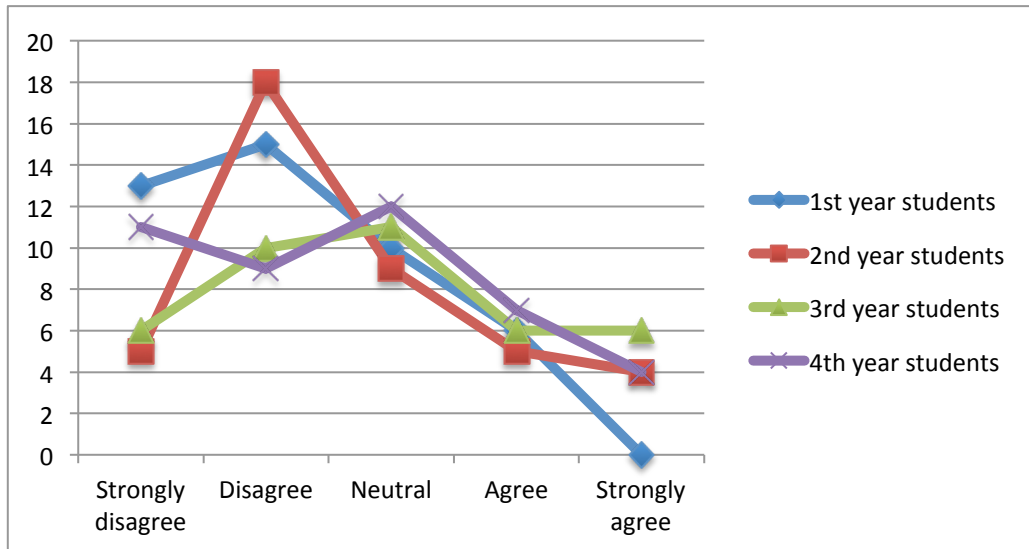
I feel confident in talking to English native speakers.



The number of students from the first up to the fourth years of study who feel confident when talking to native speakers is higher in comparison to the number of students who do not. However, the data show no progress in building up their confidence as communicators during their study at university: the number of those who disagreed with the statement remains almost the same among first, second and third year students, and it is even higher among fourth years (which is a disturbing tendency); the same trend is observed among those who agreed with the statement (chose Agree and Strongly agree options) – the percentage of such students is almost the same for all years. These results indicate the need for increased attention and efforts to raise teachers' awareness of the developing students' confidence in communication, because integration of natural contexts for using English may decrease learners' anxiety, help them integrate language skills, and serve as a motivation to learn a language (Jiménez Catalán & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2009; Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2007; Ghonsooly et al., 2017). As the state policy in the Soviet Union prohibited any contacts with foreigners within the mass education system, with the change of this paradigm in the times of the of Ukraine independence, students should be exposed to communication with native speakers within the educational process, which may occur in a form of seminars, conferences, workshops, students exchange, etc. This road map is extremely important, taking into account the fact that English is not the language of communication in Ukraine, which is why students may experience difficulties in finding situations that allow communication with English speakers. Therefore, learners need additional context for practising a target language.

Statement 3

My classmates have better knowledge of English, so I am afraid of making a mistake when speaking in a classroom.

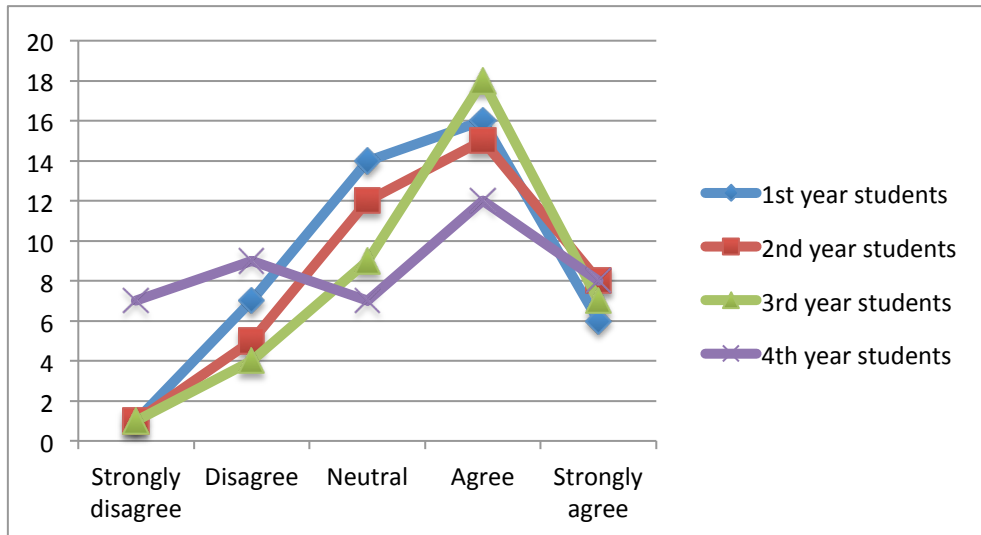


According to the Statement 3 survey results, first and second year students tend to show more confidence in using English in a classroom than the third and fourth year students (first and second years chose Strongly disagree and Disagree options more often than students of other years). This tendency is also reflected in the number of students who chose Strongly agree option: none of the first year students opted for it, which means when entering the university learners feel more freedom and confidence in using a foreign language than during the later years of study. This may happen, because the expectations set to the third and fourth year students are much higher, learners become more competitive, and therefore, feel more pressure from their groupmates. These factors are also intensified by the fact that students majoring in translation from English are expected to show the highest level of language mastering, which is a sign of their professionalism.

Nevertheless, such results indicate flaws in the higher education system, which restrains learners from building up their confidence in using a foreign language. Yet in the historical perspective this state of affairs has an explanation: the goal of teaching any foreign language in the Soviet Union was to develop minimum receptive skills, while productive skills were by no means a priority. Communicative teaching methods were neither recognised nor used in class, all student effort being focused on doing grammar exercises and translating selected texts (Ivanova & Tivyaeva, 2015:316). For this reason, the domination of grammar-translation methods in teaching for almost a century (when making a mistake was considered a bad habit, which must be eliminated) is still visible nowadays, as raising and educating a new generation of teachers guided by modern communicative approaches language education requires a lot of time.

Statement 4

I make an effort to overcome emotional issues that may hinder my English studies, such as shyness, anxiety, etc.



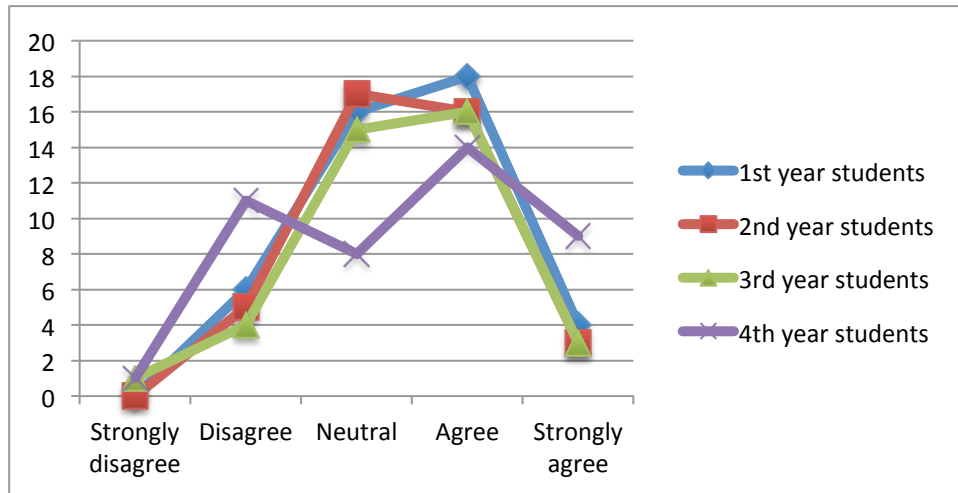
The graph for Statement 4 reveals a positive tendency towards the development of stress resistance skills among the fourth year students, as they disagreed with the statement more often compared with students in other years. Yet the number of those who chose Agree and Strongly agree options is the highest among all years, which indicates a high level of anxiety and pressure in the educational process. Such negative achievement emotions that relate to activities or outcomes that are judged according to competence-related standards of quality (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2014:4) may be significantly intensified by the collectivist nature of a society in which the educational process takes place, as Ukrainian learners feel dependent on judgments and evaluations by their teachers and peers.

Such a learning environment impedes students' academic performance and growth as autonomous learners, blocks critical thinking and problem solving skills (Soodman Afshar, Tofiqhi & Hamazavi, 2016; Benesh, 2013; Fredrickson, 2001; Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2014; Zeidner, 1998), as well as revealing an insufficient level of teachers' capacity to create a positive learning environment, which would give space for students' self-realisation in studying and using a foreign language. Thus, the data of the survey point to a need for further development of teachers' knowledge of ways to reduce emotional pressure in a classroom and help their students acquire skills necessary to overcome negative emotional states on their own.

Part 2: Students' confidence as experimenters with language

Statement 5

It is easy for me to put newly learned English into practice.

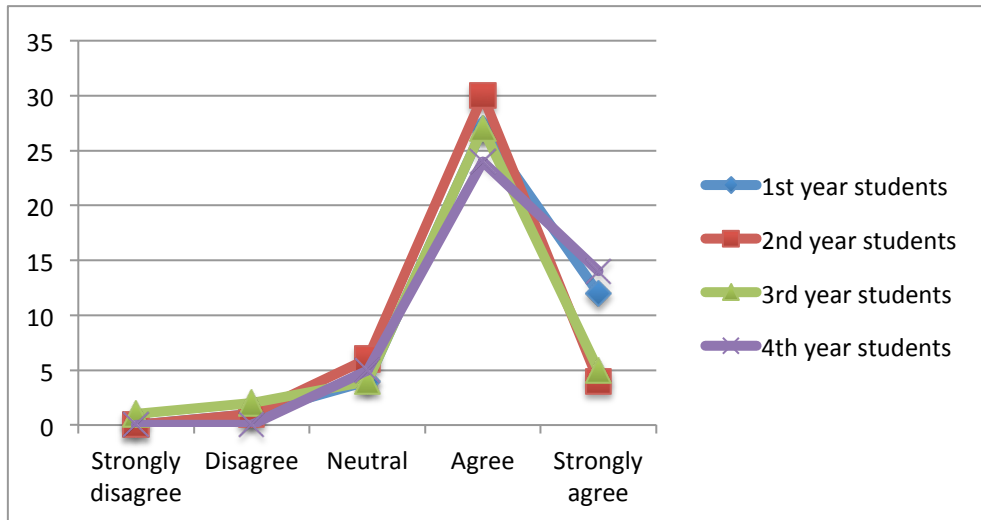


The Statement 5 diagram demonstrates a tendency towards better mastering of new knowledge by fourth year students: the number of senior students who chose Neutral option is smaller in comparison to other years, which means learners are more conscious about the use of a language. In addition, the number of the fourth year students who agreed with the statement (Agree and Strongly agree options) is bigger than among students of other years. Nevertheless, the data obtained in the survey show no dynamics among students in first, second and third year. Such results, however, may be explained by the questionnaire respondents having entered university with a solid background in English, as majoring in translation from English requires good mastery at the entry stage.

The number of the fourth year students who Disagreed with Statement 5 is disturbing, as it means that senior students still experience difficulties in internalising knowledge and thus, lack confidence in using a language. This is an indicator of an insufficient level of learner autonomy, since these students still require teacher's support in language practising. For this reason, more teacher training is needed to help students develop operational knowledge, i.e. the ability to transfer and apply knowledge to new situations (Garcia, 2011), and practise self-direction skills to take informed learning decisions (Holec, 2009:37). Introducing new approaches to the development of the construct of learner autonomy and self-directed learning in existing teacher-directed educational environments may be a demanding process (Holec, 2009) due to the pedagogical thinking established during the last century. However, teachers play a crucial role in implementing such innovations, which is why teacher-training programs are of primary importance in solving this problem.

Statement 6

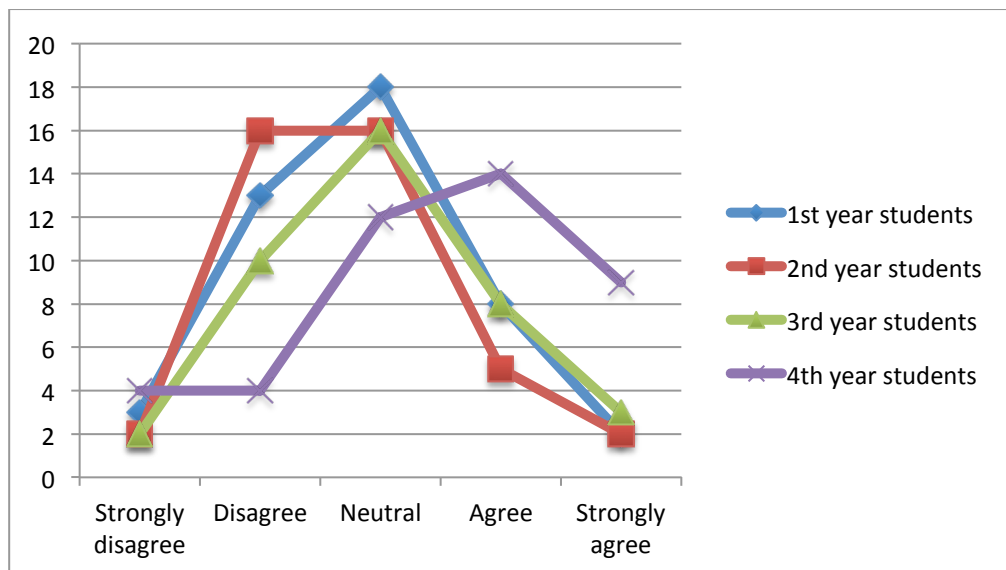
While practising English, I am able to realise my own mistakes and correct them.



The majority of students in all years of study agreed with Statement 6, and the number of those who experienced difficulties in understanding the underlying reasons for making mistakes was very small (1-2 students in each year). Within the context of the development of learner autonomy, the results are very promising, as it means that students possess a high level of linguistic awareness and can learn from their mistakes, which in its turn allows linguistic risk taking and experimenting with language (Pemberton & Cooker, 2012).

Statement 7

I feel confident in joking in English.

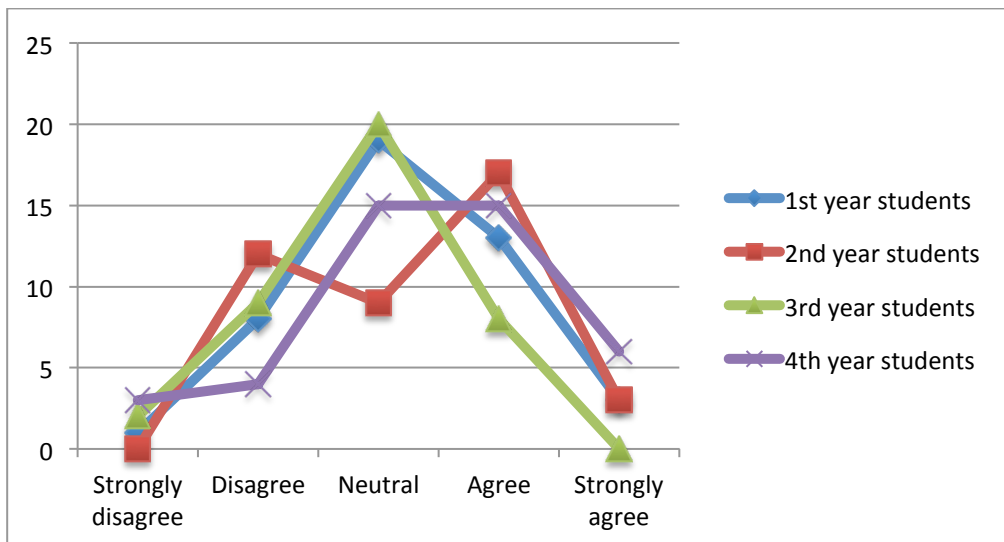


Understanding and making jokes requires a fairly high level of language proficiency and the ability to manipulate a language, due to the necessity to perceive different strata at the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic levels, since at the beginning of their learning students tend to equate one word with one meaning and often fail to perceive ambiguous meanings (Deneire, 1995:290-291). Therefore, the level of learners' confidence in joking in a foreign language shows to some extent their ability to experiment with language. The results show that during their learning students gain more confidence in using humour: the number of students who disagreed with Statement 7 tended to diminish with year progression. The positive dynamic is obvious when comparing first and fourth year students: the number of senior students who felt confident in joking in English is about double the number of freshmen who opted for Agree and Strongly agree.

However, we should bear in mind that more than 50% of the fourth year students chose Strongly disagree, Disagree and Neutral options, which means the number of those incapable of joking in a foreign language is larger than the number of those who claim they feel confident in using humour in English. In other words, by the end of their study students do not gain a sufficient level of linguistic and cultural competence in the target language and lack skills necessary for the top-down instead of bottom-up processing of information (Carrell, 1984). This again may be explained by certain socio-political factors, such as the domination of grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods rather than communicative approaches to teaching a foreign language, and previous era prohibitions of contacts with foreigners, which allowed no practising of humour in real-life situations, as well as broadening the knowledge of a target culture. Thus, within the new educational policy of Ukraine, more teacher training is needed to help educators introduce humour in a classroom, and show students its connection to real-life situations.

Statement 8

I feel confident in using idioms and sayings while speaking English.

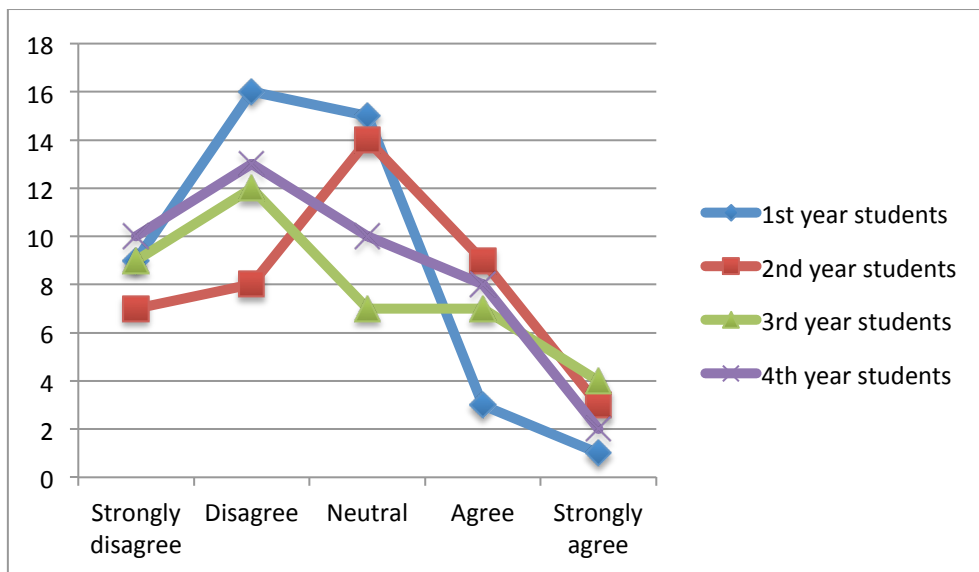


The number of students who chose Neutral option for Statement 8 is very high in all years of study, ranging from 15 to 20, except for second year students. Although such results may not seem disturbing in the first and second years of study, junior and senior students are expected to show a higher level of confidence in using idiomatic language. In addition, the number of students who disagreed with Statement 8 (opted for Strongly disagree and Disagree), as well as those who agreed with it (chose Agree and Strongly agree) remains almost the same in all years. This is also a sign of the lack of development of learners' confidence in using a foreign language, which is extremely important for students majoring in translation (both written and oral). Indeed, lack of metaphorical competence, which presupposes the ability to infer a meaning of an idiomatic expression, to understand idiomatic expressions which have undergone syntactic and lexical variations, and to generate new idioms based on applying such variations to the existing ones, has been identified as a major reason why second language learners fail to attain native-like fluency (Cieslicka, 2013:116). Such a state of affairs may significantly impede students' professional growth. Therefore, education authorities and teachers should increase efforts to implement the communicative approach into teaching and learning, and give learners more possibilities to practise English in a natural context. Such methods, as I have already mentioned, were not favoured during the Soviet times, which is why changes in educational policy may take some time.

Part 3: Students' confidence as intentional learners

Statement 9

Whether you can learn English well or not depends on your teacher.

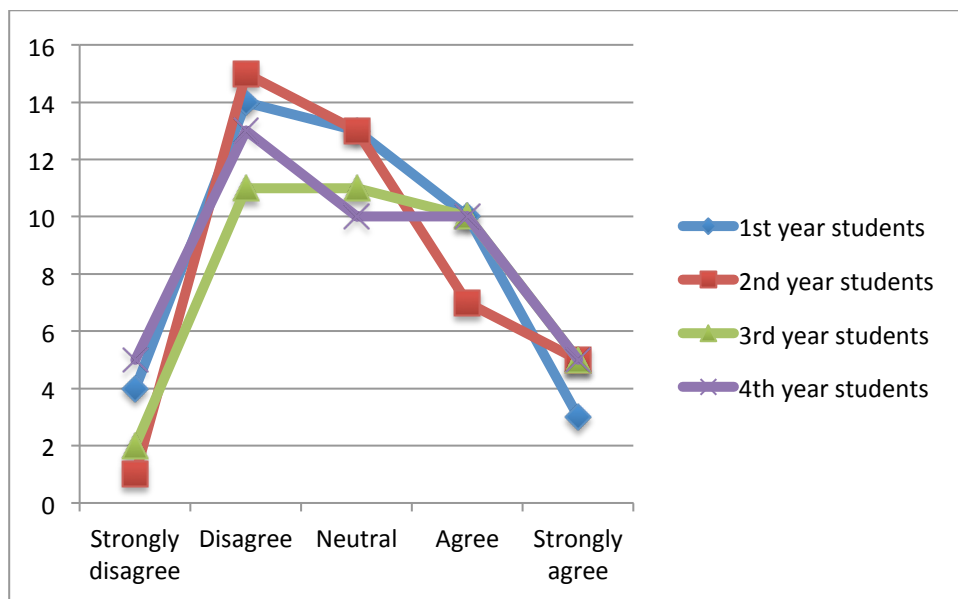


The number of those who agreed Statement 9 (opted for Agree and Strongly agree) remains the same among second, third and fourth year students – 28%. However, only

9% of first year students chose these options. This is a negative tendency, which points at teachers' insufficient attention to raising students' awareness of autonomy in learning a foreign language, as students still rely heavily on teacher's authority in a classroom. By viewing learner autonomy as the ability of students to take full responsibility for their own learning (Cotterall, 1995; Dickinson, 1995; Little, 1995), students should be aware of the fact that successful learners accept responsibility for creating their own learning environment in their own situations. Such ability is of particular importance for language students who acquire English away from an English-speaking environment (Usuki, 2007:131). One of the prerequisites for the development of self-directed learning is a shift from collectivism to individualism, which in the historical and cultural context of the Ukrainian society is a long-term process that requires both governmental reforms and commitment by teachers themselves.

Statement 10

I reasonably organise my spare time and spend at least two hours studying English every day.

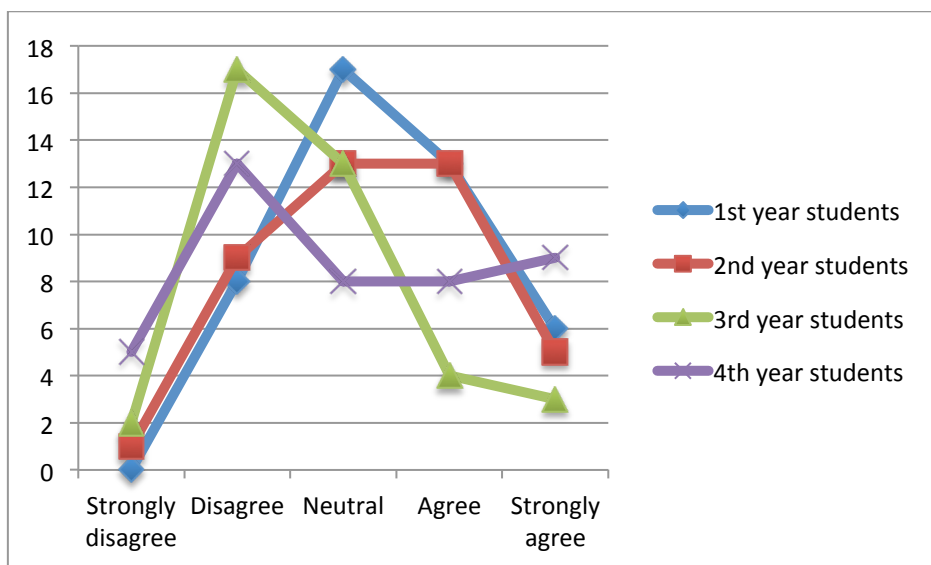


The data for Statement 10 show no positive dynamics in the development of students' skills to organise their free time in order to achieve better results in learning English: 41% of first years, as well as fourth years disagreed with Statement 10. The percentage of those who chose Neutral option is also very high – 30% of first years, 32% of second year students, 28% of third years, and 23% of fourth years. Such results clearly demonstrate the lack of time-management skills among students. As time management is an essential dimension in performing learning autonomously, and relates to setting goals, planning, selecting resources and activities (Garcia, Gros & Noguera, 2014:129), absence of such skills has a negative effect on students' progress in learning.

For this reason, teachers' guidance in the development of students' time-management skills is highly important in the process of raising self-regulated learners (Ghanizadeh, Makiabadi & Navokhi, 2019; Weinert, 1983; Zimmerman, 1998) engaged in scheduling, setting goals, planning, and allocating time and effort for study activities (Garcia, Gros & Noguera, 2014:130). Especially it concerns university students, whose academic and later professional performance depends on their ability to self-regulate learning, in terms of self-evaluation and monitoring, goal-setting and strategic planning, strategy implementation and monitoring, and strategic outcome monitoring (Zimmerman, 1998). As time management is an underlying factor in students' success in achieving these objectives, educational policy should be aimed at introducing new university courses that will raise students' awareness of learner autonomy.

Statement 11

Outside of assignments given by a teacher I make my own study plan and stick to it in order to achieve my aims in learning English.

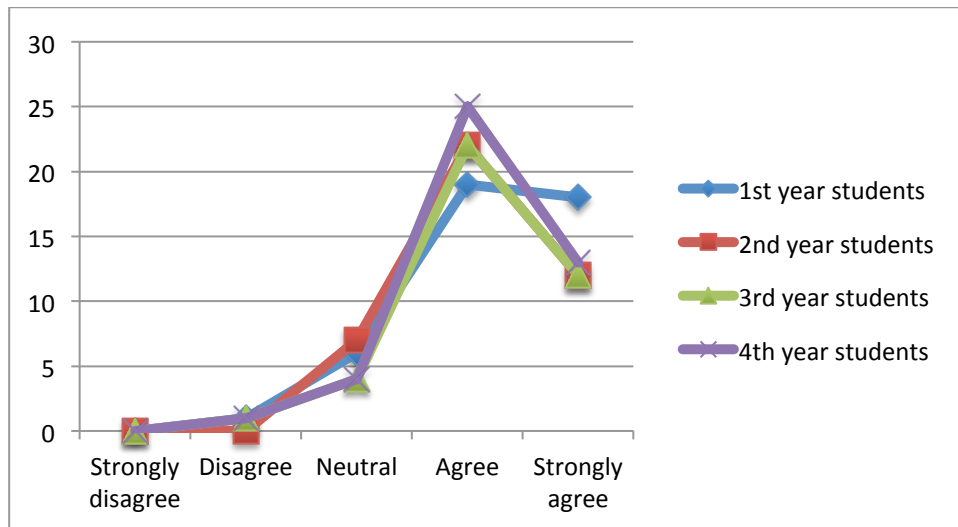


As learning management is one of the dimensions of control over learning (Benson, 2011), and includes control over where, when and how to learn a language, an adequate study plan is a relatively straightforward example of learner autonomy (Teng, 2019:4). The fact that the majority of first years chose Neutral option when assessing Statement 11 may be explained by their lack of experience in organising their learning during a transition from school to university, and also the realisation of personal responsibility for their studies takes time. However, Statement 11 results also show that many third and fourth year students chose Disagree and Neutral options, which is quite disturbing. This means students do not gain more autonomy during their university studies, and are not conscious enough about the necessity of self-study. In addition, control of learning management is regarded as a way of aligning the process of learning a foreign language with personal

needs and purposes (Teng, 2019:4), which leads us to another problem in the educational process – students do not see the link between their studies and a professional career after university, as they cannot anticipate the skills and knowledge they will need in real life, which for this reason should be developed during the learning process. Such a state of affairs may serve as an example of how the culture of education defines the level of learner autonomy, as students still rely heavily on teachers' power and control in the educational process.

Statement 12

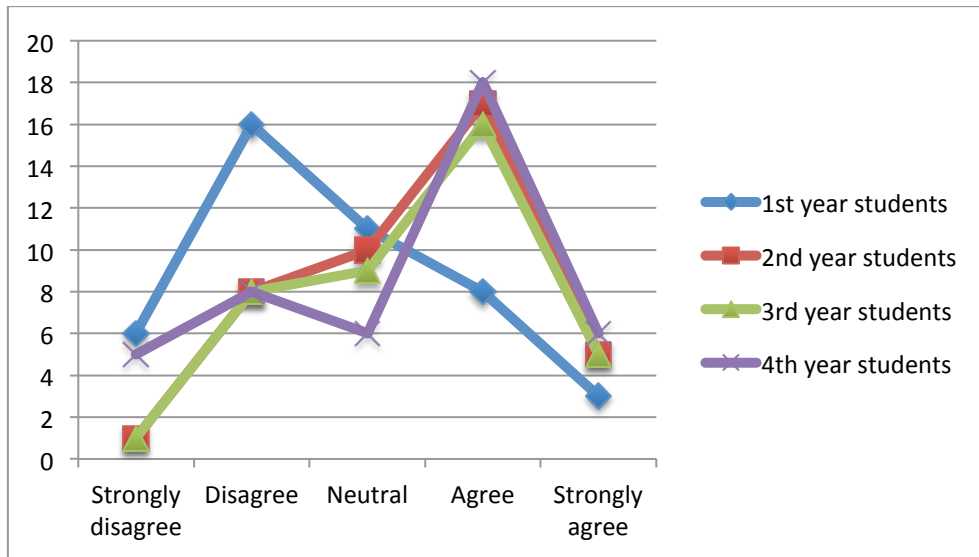
I feel confident in using all possible learning resources available (e.g. reference books, Internet, etc.).



Statement 12 result show that 84% of first years, 83% of second years, 87% of third years, and 88% of fourth year students feel confident in using learning resources on their own. These are very good results, as they indicate students' ability to learn autonomously. However, in the context of the discussion of Statements 2, 3 and 4 we should differentiate between proactive and reactive autonomy (Littlewood, 1999). According to Littlewood (1999:75), proactive autonomy is the form of autonomy in which learners determine learning objectives, select learning methods and techniques, and evaluate what they have learned, while reactive autonomy is the kind of autonomy which does not create its own directions but, once a direction has been initiated, enables learners to organise their resources autonomously in order to reach their goal. Students' responses to Statements 2 and 3 show a low level of proactive autonomy skills, but their assessment of Statement 4 proves their ability in reactive autonomy. In other words, by organising their learning environment (including the autonomous use of learning resources) within the direction introduced by a teacher, different students may perceive different possibilities for learning and find various opportunities to personalise their learning (Teng, 2019:5). This is a big step towards further development of learner autonomy, including proactive autonomy.

Statement 13

I do not always understand the purpose of certain exercises, and see no point in doing some assignments.



The majority of students in second, third and fourth years (in contrast to first year students) agreed with Statement 13, which is another negative trend in the educational process. However, such results may be explained by the Soviet culture of education, which still has influence on the development of a new paradigm within Ukrainian educational policy. Teachers have always been considered key personalities in the system of education, retaining in their hands control over students' learning. Such an approach presupposed no explanations of purposes of certain assignments, as students' main task was to perform certain operations without doubting teacher's authority.

With the change of the paradigm towards learners' individualism within the educational process, the importance of teacher-student communication has become more evident. According to La Ganza (2008:66), learner autonomy depends on the capacity of both the teacher and the learner to develop and maintain an inter-relational climate characterised by the teacher's holding back from influencing the learner, and the learners holding back from seeking the teacher's influence. Apart from developing a capacity for restraint, the learner must develop a capacity for persistence in using resources and using the teacher as a resource, and the teacher must develop a capacity for communicating to the learner that he or she is concerned for the learner's educative well-being during the learning process. In a classroom such mutual relations of respect and trust consist in teacher's explanations of learning objectives and purposes of certain tasks and exercises. In this way, teachers may spark students' interest to learning, establish links between the learning process and real life, and set guidelines for the development of learner autonomy. Therefore, the introduction of workshops and seminars for teachers on this issue may improve students' attitude to learning in the future.

Conclusion

The findings from students' responses show that modern educational policies in Ukraine have laid the groundwork for improved development of learner autonomy, and made significant steps towards raising students' awareness of the issue, taking into account the past history of Soviet education, which allowed no space for autonomy in learning. Analysis of the questionnaire Statements showed that students feel confident in talking to native speakers and using learning resources on their own, and with time they come to understanding of their own mistakes and underlying reasons for making them. A high level of such self-directed skills indicates students' preparedness to achieve more autonomy in their studies.

However, some issues need more attention from education authorities and teachers, including (1) students are not aware of the whole range of opportunities they can use to study autonomously; (2) students are afraid of making mistakes in a classroom because of perceived pressure from their peers and teachers; (3) learners make efforts to overcome emotional issues but rarely get scaffolding support from teachers; (4) students do not feel confident in using idiomatic language, which means they are not exposed to real-life language to the extent needed; (5) students possess poor learning management skills (e.g. time-management), which hinders their autonomous learning; (6) learners still rely heavily on teacher's authority and control, rather than viewing educators as their helpers or guides. Of course, all the issues discussed may be explained at least in part from the perspective of certain cultural and political factors, namely the collectivist nature of Ukrainian society, which induces learners to feel dependence on their peers and teachers, or the Soviet totalitarian system of education, which still influences the attitudes of teachers and their students.

In order to build and enhance the level of students' autonomy in learning, Ukraine's system of education would be well-served by developing further in these directions: (1) introduce higher education courses aimed at learner familiarisation with the construct of learner autonomy and the ways to achieve it; (2) organise seminars, workshops and conferences for teachers that would serve as platforms for exchanging experiences in such issues as implementing the communicative approach into learning, moving from collectivism to individualism in learning, broadening knowledge of a target culture, prompting teacher-student communication, and building a positive classroom environment. Such actions will raise teachers' awareness of the concept of students' autonomy, the foundation for more effective learning, by providing them with tools necessary to enhance students' motivation to learn, help them take active approaches, and get better understanding of their personal needs in learning, as well as improving their ability to assess and direct their own education.

Although the findings have important implications for further development of the construct of learner autonomy in Ukrainian pedagogy, this research is subject to certain limitations. First, data were not obtained on teachers' views on learner autonomy, which may result in a one-sided interpretation of the responses obtained. Second, gender and age factors were not taken into account during the results analysis, as the study was based

primarily on the assumption that learners' attitude to the educational process, as well as their academic performance, depended on cultural and political factors. Third, the study focused on measuring the level of learner autonomy among university students majoring in translation from English, who have a strong background in learning a foreign language. Thus, more research is needed to estimate the degree of learner autonomy among other groups of English learners depending on their needs and motivation for learning a language. However, these limitations open possibilities for future investigations on the issue, including a broadening the scope of the study by introducing questionnaires for teachers, and analysing the impact of age, gender and motivation factors on the level of learner autonomy.

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