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UO‘K:

IS THERE A ROLE OF STUDENT AUTONOMY IN ESP CLASSES?

ESP DARSLARIDA TALABA MUSTAQILLIGINING O‘RNI BORMI?

ЕСТЬ ЛИ РОЛЬ АВТОНОМИИ СТУДЕНТОВ НА ЗАНЯТИЯХ ESP?

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Annotatsiya

Mazkur maqolada ESP (English for Specific Purposes) darslarida talabalar mustaqilligining o‘rni o‘rganiladi. Adabiyotlar tahlili shuni ko‘rsatadiki, mustaqillik o‘quvchilarning motivatsiyasi, natijadorligi va uzoq muddatli o‘qish ko‘nikmalariga bevosita ta’sir qiladi. Sun’iy intellekt vositalaridan foydalanish esa imkoniyat va muammolarni yuzaga keltirib, o‘qituvchilar uchun muvozanatli yondashuv zarurligini ta’kidlaydi.

Abstract

This article examines the role of student autonomy in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes. A literature review reveals that autonomy directly affects learners’ motivation, performance, and lifelong learning skills. The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools offers both opportunities and challenges, requiring teachers to design balanced strategies that foster independent learning while preventing overreliance on technology.

Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается роль автономии студентов на занятиях ESP (английский для специальных целей). Обзор литературы показывает, что автономия напрямую влияет на мотиватsiю, результаты и навыки долговременного обучения. Использование инструментов искусственного интеллекта предоставляет как возможности, так и риски, подчеркивая необходимость сбалансированного подхода со стороны преподавателей.

Kalit so‘zlar: *talaba mustaqilligi, ESP, motivatsiya, sun’iy intellekt*
Key words: *student autonomy, ESP, motivation, artificial intelligence*
Ключевые слова: *автономия студентов, ESP, мотиватsiя, искусственный интеллект*

INTRODUCTION

The question of student autonomy has long been central in language education, but in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), its significance becomes even more pronounced. Unlike general English classes, ESP emphasizes immediate, profession-oriented communication needs, which require learners to not only acquire linguistic knowledge but also develop independent strategies for applying that knowledge in their fields. Autonomy, therefore, is not merely an educational aspiration but a practical necessity. Studies such as Costeleanu (2024) and Cotterall (2000) have highlighted that learners’ ability to take control of their learning directly influences motivation, performance, and lifelong skills. In recent years, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools into ESP classrooms has added both opportunities and challenges, reshaping how autonomy manifests in academic and professional learning contexts.

This study explores the role of autonomy in ESP classes by synthesizing findings from multiple recent works (Costeleanu, 2024; Aleksandrovna, 2024; Anastasiya, 2025; Lee, 2024) and situating them within the Uzbek higher education context. As universities in Uzbekistan adopt AI-driven platforms and emphasize communicative competence for international opportunities, the question of how much agency students retain becomes crucial. The analysis underscores that autonomy remains a core factor in ESP effectiveness, but it requires deliberate pedagogical strategies to balance AI support with independent, self-regulated learning.

METHODOLOGY

The article employs a literature review methodology, drawing on a range of empirical studies and theoretical frameworks related to student autonomy in ESP and AI-assisted learning.

Key sources include Costeleanu's (2024) survey of engineering students, Aleksandrovna's (2024) case study of AI-enhanced learning in Uzbekistan, Anastasiya's (2025) exploration of AI-assisted writing practices, and supporting works by Cotterall (2000), Crabbe (2007), and Ryan and Deci (2017). By analyzing correlations across these studies, the article identifies patterns, tensions, and practical implications for fostering learner autonomy in ESP classrooms. This qualitative synthesis provides a comprehensive view of how autonomy is conceptualized, practiced, and challenged in different learning environments, with particular attention to the Uzbek higher education context.

RESULTS

There is a clear role of student autonomy in ESP (English for Specific Purposes) classes, and the study by Costeleanu (2024) provides strong evidence that autonomy directly influences motivation, performance, and long-term learning outcomes. Rooted in Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), student motivation operates on a continuum from controlled regulation to autonomous regulation, with the latter being most effective for sustained engagement. In the ESP context, autonomy means that learners not only acquire technical vocabulary relevant to their professions (e.g., engineers explaining engine issues to customers) but also adapt their learning strategies to personal and career needs. The study's survey of 60 engineering students revealed that while 18 students felt capable of working independently, 34 required teacher guidance half of the time, and 8 admitted they could never work on their own (Costeleanu, 2024, p. 408). These findings show that while autonomy exists, its development is uneven and dependent on factors such as prior learning experiences, proficiency levels, and psychological readiness. Students' own statements—such as being afraid of mistakes or overly dependent on teacher instructions—highlight the need for structured support to transition from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness.

Moreover, the correlation between autonomy and lifelong learning skills emphasizes its role beyond the classroom. Nearly all students (57 out of 60) recognized the importance of independence in academic and professional contexts, yet only 9 expressed willingness to study outside the classroom, with all of them being female (Costeleanu, 2024, p. 409). This gap between awareness and practice illustrates that autonomy must be actively nurtured through pedagogical strategies. Research aligns here: Cotterall (2000) argued that autonomy should be an essential goal of all language learning, not only for highly motivated learners, while Crabbe (2007) emphasized that curricula must provide opportunities for learners to take ownership of tasks. In ESP, autonomy is particularly significant because students already have specialized disciplinary knowledge and know exactly where English will be applied. By involving them in material selection and strategy development, teachers can foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and motivation, moving learners from dependency to self-regulation. Thus, autonomy is not an optional extra in ESP—it is a necessary condition for meaningful, transferable learning.

The role of student autonomy in ESP (English for Specific Purposes) classes is becoming increasingly complex in the context of artificial intelligence (AI) adoption. Aleksandrovna (2024) emphasizes that AI technologies enhance personalized learning, engagement, and achievement by providing tailored feedback and adaptive content (pp. 276–278). However, while these tools can promote learner independence by allowing students to learn at their own pace, they may also risk undermining the very autonomy they are supposed to strengthen. For example, survey data from Fergana State University and TUIT show that 85.7% of learners appreciated AI feedback because it boosted their self-esteem and enabled them to control their pace of study (Kabilovna & Aleksandrovna, 2024, pp. 37–38). This aligns with Sasikala and Ravichandran's (2024) findings that AI can personalize instruction and increase satisfaction. Still, over-reliance on these tools often leads to dependency, as several learners admitted that AI "makes me lazy" or reduces their will to think independently (Aleksandrovna, 2024, p. 282). Thus, while AI creates conditions for autonomy, it simultaneously threatens critical self-regulation skills if not balanced carefully.

The issue becomes clearer when analyzing students' problem-solving strategies. Aleksandrovna's (2024) data show that 39.13% of learners try to solve challenges independently, but 34.78% immediately consult AI tools, and 26.09% turn to textbooks or online resources (p. 281). This blend illustrates both autonomy and dependence: a substantial number still prefer self-reliant approaches, but a comparable proportion default to AI assistance. In ESP classes, which

emphasize applying English in professional contexts, this balance is critical. Students who simply copy AI-generated answers risk weakening their analytical and communicative abilities, whereas those who use AI as a starting point to develop their own solutions—reported by 21.74% of respondents—demonstrate autonomous, critical engagement (Aleksandrovna, 2024, p. 281). Such findings echo broader debates about autonomy in digital learning, where AI must be framed as a scaffold for independent thought rather than a substitute for it (Farhood et al., 2024, pp. 13–15).

Another layer of complexity lies in engagement and motivation. The Uzbek case study revealed that while 61.5% of learners found online AI-based platforms engaging, 23.1% admitted falling asleep during classes, reflecting passive participation (Aleksandrovna, 2024, p. 277). Similarly, although 64.6% valued flexible self-scheduled programs, 61.8% regretted poor interaction with peers and teachers. These statistics highlight that autonomy is not simply about independent access to tools, but also about developing the responsibility to remain engaged and reflective. Without structured guidance, students risk equating autonomy with isolation, which undermines ESP's communicative goals. Here, parallels with earlier studies are striking: Cotterall (2000) and Blidi (2017) argue that autonomy requires institutional support and teacher facilitation, not just individual effort. AI in ESP can thus foster self-directed learning, but educators must integrate peer collaboration and human feedback to ensure that autonomy translates into communicative competence rather than disengagement.

The findings of Anastasiya (2025) reveal that there is indeed a role for student autonomy in ESP classes, but it is challenged by the rapid adoption of AI-assisted feedback tools. Nearly 70% of Uzbek ESP students reported regular use of Grammarly or ChatGPT, primarily for grammar correction, idea generation, and translation. While such reliance improves writing efficiency and grammatical accuracy, 64.28% of students admitted to passively accepting AI-generated corrections, which raises concerns about diminishing independent learning and critical engagement (Anastasiya, 2025, p. 17). This trend mirrors Lee's (2024) caution that AI may hinder self-directed learning, and it aligns with Aleksandrovna's (2024) argument that AI functions as both a facilitator and a crutch. The observed challenges in writing without AI—50% struggling to organize ideas and 26.19% lacking confidence—suggest that autonomy in ESP writing is compromised when learners outsource key cognitive tasks to technology rather than cultivating foundational skills.

At the same time, the study shows that some students are attempting to reclaim agency in their learning. For instance, 21.43% used AI for full-text rewriting and 9.52% for translation, but several also proposed selective AI use and post-draft corrections as strategies to balance technology with independent skill development (Anastasiya, 2025, pp. 17–18). These insights resonate with Guo et al. (2024), who argue that AI can enhance peer feedback and outcomes if integrated critically, and with Etaat (2024), who warns that unchecked AI reliance can erode originality. Similarly, Darvishi et al. (2024) highlight the risks of misleading AI corrections, which reinforces the need for autonomous judgment. Thus, while AI provides scaffolding, true autonomy in ESP requires that learners engage critically with feedback rather than accept it unreflectively, developing the ability to evaluate, question, and selectively apply corrections.

The role of student autonomy in ESP classes, therefore, lies in striking a balance between AI support and self-regulated learning. Anastasiya (2025) emphasizes the value of AI-free writing tasks, guided error analysis, and peer review as means of fostering autonomy (pp. 18–19). These recommendations align with global scholarship: Lee (2024) and Aleksandrovna (2024) both stress the importance of maintaining student agency in AI-rich environments, while Kabilovna and Aleksandrovna (2024) found that AI can boost self-esteem when paired with critical reflection. In this sense, autonomy is not about rejecting AI, but about ensuring that students retain ownership of the writing process. ESP contexts demand higher-order skills—idea organization, audience awareness, intercultural competence—that cannot be outsourced. Thus, AI should function as a scaffold, while instructors deliberately design opportunities for students to practice independence, ensuring that technological convenience does not displace the critical and creative dimensions of professional communication.

DISCUSSION

A key correlation across studies is the link between autonomy and motivation. Costeleanu (2024) demonstrated that students with higher levels of independent learning reported stronger engagement and confidence in ESP contexts, while those dependent on teacher guidance exhibited hesitation and fear of mistakes. Similarly, Ryan and Deci's (2017) Self-Determination Theory situates autonomy as a driver of intrinsic motivation, suggesting that fostering learner choice and responsibility leads to more sustainable outcomes. In Uzbekistan, where ESP learners often prepare for international careers, this connection is particularly relevant: students who take initiative in selecting materials and practicing independently are better equipped for global communication challenges.

Another point of convergence lies in the role of AI tools in shaping autonomy. Studies by Aleksandrovna (2024) and Anastasiya (2025) show that AI platforms such as Grammarly or ChatGPT offer personalized feedback and flexibility, boosting student confidence and reducing anxiety. However, these benefits are double-edged. While 85.7% of Uzbek students valued AI feedback (Kabilovna & Aleksandrovna, 2024), over 60% admitted to passively accepting corrections without critical reflection (Anastasiya, 2025). This reveals that AI can encourage surface-level engagement, undermining the very autonomy it aims to promote if learners are not guided toward reflective, selective use.

The discussion also highlights variability in learners' readiness for autonomy. Costeleanu (2024) found that only 18 out of 60 engineering students could work independently, while the rest relied on teacher direction to varying degrees. Similar patterns appear in Uzbek classrooms, where students oscillate between independent problem-solving and dependence on AI tools (Aleksandrovna, 2024). These findings underscore that autonomy cannot be assumed; it must be scaffolded through structured opportunities, such as AI-free writing tasks, peer collaboration, and guided reflection (Anastasiya, 2025). Without such support, students risk equating autonomy with isolation or outsourcing cognitive tasks to technology.

Finally, correlations across the studies emphasize the institutional and cultural dimensions of autonomy. Cotterall (2000) and Blidi (2017) argue that autonomy must be embedded in curricula and supported by teachers, not left to individual initiative alone. This resonates in the Uzbek context, where collectivist learning traditions often prioritize teacher authority. To bridge this gap, ESP teachers must reframe autonomy not as a solitary pursuit but as shared responsibility—encouraging learners to set goals, self-assess, and engage in peer review while still benefiting from teacher guidance. When carefully structured, autonomy becomes a pathway to critical thinking, communicative competence, and professional adaptability.

CONCLUSION

The review of current studies confirms that student autonomy plays a pivotal role in ESP classes, directly influencing motivation, learning strategies, and professional readiness. However, autonomy is neither uniformly developed nor automatically sustained, particularly in environments increasingly shaped by AI. While digital tools offer new opportunities for personalized learning, they also introduce risks of dependency, highlighting the need for balanced pedagogical approaches.

For the Uzbek higher education context, fostering autonomy in ESP means designing curricula that integrate AI as scaffolding rather than a substitute, while simultaneously cultivating independent judgment, peer collaboration, and reflective practices. Autonomy in ESP is not optional; it is a prerequisite for meaningful, transferable learning that equips students to thrive in international academic and professional arenas.

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