Innovation and Sustainable Autonomy in Foreign Language Teaching


1 INTRODUCTION
Context-driven alterations to university teaching

The COVID-19 pandemic represents not only a challenge but also an opportunity for teachers and learners to both adjust and actively re-evaluate their learning practices and routines. While these practices existed even prior to the pandemic-motivated alterations, learner autonomy (Little 1999) and technologically-mediated learning (Kern 2014) stand at the forefront in the context of this transformation.

The CORALL Erasmus+ KA2 project - Coaching-oriented Online Resources for the Autonomous Learning of Languages for Specific Purposes - deliberately chooses to embrace the pandemic as an opportunity to transform learning attitudes by fostering autonomous learning and empowering teachers to help their students become more autonomous during the pandemic and beyond, insisting on not returning “to the status quo when things return to normal” (Lockee, 2021: 5).

3 METHODS AND DATA
Needs analysis

The design of the CORALL project has been based in part on the selected results of an early needs analysis. The quantitative and qualitative data from the 23 participating teachers/researchers was collected in January 2020 via Google Forms.

Key problems and solutions identified

1) Perceived obstacles to learner autonomy

2) Teachers involving students in collaborative planning and decision-making

3) Teachers fostering learner autonomy

Interviews with business and education professionals

The CORALL interviews conducted with 42 respondents gave insight into perceptions of autonomous learning:

- challenges in international business that require autonomous learning
- individual and organizational support for and obstacles to autonomous learning
- autonomous learning solutions needed

Examples of conceptions of autonomous learning

- “As an autonomous learner puts his/her heart and soul into it.”
- “Autonomous learners are conscious of what they know and what they don’t know and how to bridge the gap.”
- “To me, autonomous learning is taking your education and the expansion of your knowledge into your own hands.”

Examples of autonomous learning solutions

- “Expect proactivity as a norm!”
- “Provide opportunities within a variety of teaching environments.”
- “Elicit a coaching attitude.”
- “Agile learning methods integrated into everyday work processes and a network of colleagues/supervisor.”
- “Design online learning communities as a powerful complement to offline interactions.”
- “Building the skills of autonomous learning from the beginning…”
- “Learning to set your own learning goals in relation to the employer’s goals is important.”
- “Offering solid, long-term, personalised learning packages.”

3-5 best practices for each of the following areas were identified

- Providing coaching opportunities within a variety of teaching environments
- Eliciting a coaching attitude
- Agile learning methods integrated into everyday work processes and a network of colleagues/supervisor
- Design online learning communities as a powerful complement to offline interactions
- Building the skills of autonomous learning from the beginning…
- Learning to set your own learning goals in relation to the employer’s goals is important
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2 PROJECT AIMS
CORALL - Coaching-oriented Online Resources for the Autonomous Learning of LSP

The CORALL project aims to:

- support autonomous learning by encouraging and training students to take responsibility for their learning processes and empowering LSP teachers with tools and strategies to help students become more autonomous.
- support LSP learners’ development through training their autonomous language learning skills in an online environment.
- create intellectual outputs and educational content to support autonomous language learning to be available as Open Educational Resources.

To meet these objectives, the CORALL collaborators are developing specific coaching-oriented language teaching resources which:

- take into consideration and are easily adoptable to diverse educational contexts
- provide enriching opportunities within a variety of teaching environments
- emphasize a coaching attitude
- aim to increase transparency, learner awareness, and learner control by harnessing characteristics of language coaching.

Coaching-oriented language learning assumes that through training, encouragement and support from their teachers and peers, learners are able to work autonomously.

4 RESULTS
For the CORALL project as a whole, the Outputs are as follows:

- O1 Conceptual framework for coaching-oriented approach in teaching and autonomous learning in LSP
- O2 Resources to support students’ autonomous learning of LSP
- O3 Sample materials and modules for self-study and to integrate into LSP-related classes or projects
- O4 Case studies
- O5 Training materials for teachers of LSP

Output 1: Visualizing an autonomous learning journey

Based on the qualitative interview results, a visual roadmap for CORALL was created by the project team of Haga-Helia University to illustrate the interdependent nature of individual, peer, and organizational levels of autonomous learning.

Output 4: Translational synthesis of best practices

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- Eliciting a coaching attitude
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5 CONCLUSIONS
Autonomous learning is an integral and valuable experience that generates self-efficacy and satisfaction. An autonomous learner should have a transformative mindset that appreciates effort, regards mistakes and endeavor as valuable tools, and seeks experientially-focused feedback, incorporates flexible learning methods, and adjusts to continuous challenges.

Training in autonomy for both learning and teaching aims to increase employability through curricula that derive from and satisfy the needs of the learners and the job market. Consequently, the aspiration of teachers and policy-makers to embrace learner autonomy becomes not an educational aim for its own sake, but rather a vital means for encouraging learners to embark on a journey of personal development and fulfillment.

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- Little, D. (1999) “Learner autonomy is more than a Western cultural construct.” In S. Cutler & D. Cribbe (Eds.), Learner autonomy in Language Learning: Defining the Field and Effecting Change (pp. 11–18). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang

Any questions? Please contact us here.