

# A SURVEY ON SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING OF GEORGIAN ADULT LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the beliefs and behaviour of Georgian adult learners as autonomous English language learners and identify the adults' readiness for individual/ autonomous language learning. To achieve the purpose of the study we adopted a questionnaire form from Wagner's (2014) study. A sample of 115 adults (82% female, 17% male) filled in the electronic questionnaire in March-April, 2019. The results show that Georgian adults were enthusiastic about learning English, they were aware of their weaknesses and strengths as foreign language learners; however, the majority of them were unable to demonstrate specific autonomous behaviour. More than half of the respondents reported having a study plan before starting English classes, although only about a third of the respondents had a time-bound plan. About 90% were willing to continue English classes and about 60% expressed readiness for self-directed learning of English. The study disclosed the reasons why the adults were eager to start a self-directed English learning program such as preference for independent learning, saving some finances, an interesting experiment to observe oneself as a learner, etc. The preference for studying with a teacher was highlighted by those who reported that they were unable to study autonomously, wanted to bear responsibility in front of someone and preferred lessons planned by a teacher. The reported outcomes suggest that it is essential to conduct experimental self-directed English programs for Georgian adults and develop recommendations for autonomous adult language learning.

**Key Words:** Self-directed learning, English as a foreign language, autonomous learning, adult language learning

## **Background of the Study**

In the past decades, with advancement of technology, the education paradigm has changed markedly. The focus is being shifted from learning a foreign language in the classroom to learning a new language autonomously, all by one's self. However, this concept is not new and is called Self-directed learning (SDL), based upon the ideas of learner autonomy. Knowles (1975) defines self-directed learning as: '...a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and mental resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (p.18). Students who are proactive learners will exceed those who are reactive learners. According to numerous studies an autonomous learner is more likely to be invested in their learning and more likely to be successful in their language learning experience. Taking control of their learning is the natural progression for language learners (Benson, 2011). Learners who lack autonomy, they are capable of developing it. Once a student becomes an autonomous language learner, it is more effective for him/her than to be a dependent language learner. Thus, learner autonomy is important in relation to language learning because it allows the student to gain control of their language acquisition (King, 2011). The more a student exercises control over their learning, the more interested and motivated they will become in their growth as a language learner. As a result, through self-empowerment autonomous learning has the potential to greatly increase student learning. Autonomous learning is flexible in terms of resources and time as it happens outside of the traditional classroom. The biggest problem with autonomy and self-directed learning is that the students must be disciplined and plan their steps in learning. A significant amount of self-motivation and critical reflection are required to undertake autonomous learning. Within self-directed learning the role of a teacher can be of a consultant or advisor. Self-determination theory proposes that we all have a universal desire to connect with other people (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The relationship between the learner and the advisor can be a motivating factor for the learner in their search for autonomy in language learning. The advisor should provide the student with the incentive to continue on their desired path toward language acquisition. The desired outcome of the self-directed learning process is for the English language learner to take responsibility for their own learning (Arndt, 2017). Research shows that students who are more invested in

their learning experience are more likely to be successful language learners (Mynard, 2011; Reinders, 2010). Those learners are better able to focus on the skill areas that are most needed in order to meet their language goals.

### Methodology

Self-directed learning is an adult form of learning if critical reflection, the exploration of alternative perspectives, the alteration of personal and social circumstances are all present. Learning is successful if adults come to appreciate the culturally constructed nature of knowledge and values and when they recreate their personal and social worlds. This, in such a process a fully adult form of autonomous, self-directed learning is manifested. (Brookfield, 1985; Knowles, 1991).

The purpose of the study is to: a) provide a picture of the behavior of the Georgian adult learner while learning English; b) identify the adult's readiness for individual/ autonomous language learning; and c) providing recommendations for autonomous language learning.

To accomplish this, we set the following objectives:

- Determine the frequency for specific autonomous behaviors characterizing an adult Georgian learner while mastering

English;

- Find out what are adult learner's goals for learning English;

- Disclose the ways adult learners planned the language learning process when starting English classes;

- Investigate if adult learners are willing to learn English independently.

The following research questions guided our study:

2) How autonomous is the behavior of a Georgian adult learner?

3) What are adults' goals for learning English?

4) Is adult language learning a clearly planned process?

5) Does an adult learner want to learn the language independently?

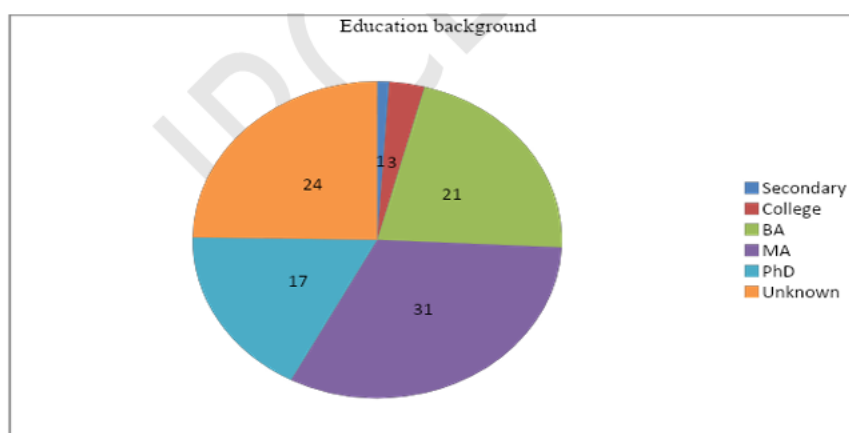
The survey method was chosen to gather the necessary information. The questionnaire was adopted from Arndt (2017) and adjusted to the objectives of the study.

### Results

One hundred fifteen (115) respondents filled out an electronic questionnaire in April, 2019. The questionnaire was divided into three sections, the first section consisted of demographic data, and the second section contained twelve statements on learning behaviour. The third section was devoted entirely to autonomous learning and self-evaluation. The survey data are generalizable to the general survey aggregation and its 95% confidence interval is 9.13%; despite the high percentage of error, the data is generalizable.

As for gender distribution - 82% female and 17% male were in the study. The age groups of respondents were 21-30; 31-40; 41 - 50 and 51+, the percentage of which was distributed as follows - 33% for 21-30 years; 26% of 31-40 years; 35% of 41-50year olds and 6% of 51+ ages. As for their academic degree, secondary education - 1%, college - 3%, bachelor - 21%, master - 31%, PhD - 17%. 24% of respondents avoided responding to the level of education. (See figure 1).

Figure 1. Participants' Education background



By the time of responding to the survey 12% of the respondents had studied English for the last six months, 17% were studying English, and 70% had taken English classes more than six months ago. Below in the table 1, the responses to twelve statements regarding autonomous learning practices and behavior are given. Employing a Likert Scale, participants were provided with five answer choices, never, rarely, sometimes, often and always.

**Table 1**

Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	often	Always
1. I think I have the ability to learn English.	17%	2%	4%	9%	57%
2. I use my free time to learn English.	10%	19%	23%	15%	14%
3. I repeat the study material before the lesson	10%	10%	19%	26%	10%
4. I usually repeat the lesson material after the lesson.	13%	14%	18%	20%	7%
5. I make notes about my learning, e.g. I run a diary or write a review.	23%	17%	13%	10%	10%
6. I test myself with the tests I have chosen.	21%	15%	17%	17%	8%
7. When I see progress in my studies, I reward myself by going shopping or doing something fun.	34%	17%	13%	6%	3%
8. I attend English language classes for language practice and learning.	19%	18%	20%	8%	8%
9. In the lesson I try to get involved in different activities - working in pairs, group work, role-playing games.	9%	13%	10%	23%	18%
10. I know my strengths and weaknesses in English.	12%	4%	6%	22%	39%
11. I choose the right books and exercises for me, neither too hard nor too easy.	12%	7%	13%	25%	20%
12. I enjoy extracurricular English-language activities - reading books, watching movies, using the Internet.	17%	12%	12%	21%	18%

The main reason or compelling reason for learning English were the following: 3% studied because of parents' request, 50% - for interest, 43% - employment and 3% - to know more about English culture. As for autonomy in choosing the materials, the respondents used the teaching material selected by a learner and a teacher in 69% of the cases, 23% - only the material selected by the teacher and 8% only the material selected by him / her. In the next part of the study, the respondents were asked about their goals and plans for learning English and autonomously increasing their own capabilities in a planned manner. Three different questions were asked to learn how thoroughly Georgian adult learners plan the learning process: a goal, clear plan and a scheduled plan. They were asked whether they had a clear goal before they started English language learning: 65% agreed, 14% disagreed, and 17% of the respondents did not answer. As for having a clear plan, 45% had a clear plan, 17% did not, and 25% did not have an answer. 27% confirmed that they had a scheduled plan, 30% disagreed and 30% of respondents did not have an answer. In the last section of the questionnaire, participants had to answer open questions on why they wanted to learn English independently. The main reason for the self-directed learning was an opportunity for employment -25%; improving language skills had almost the same percentage - 24%; 13% for knowledge / education in general; 8% - for career advancement; 7% - to communicate with foreigners; 6-6% are interested in the language and learning spoken English, the lowest - 4% - for traveling purposes. 90% of respondents wanted to continue learning English, while 3% did not want to continue. 7% did not know if they wanted to continue learning English. As for the desire for self-directed learning, 62% were willing to do so, while 21% preferred to study the language under someone else's supervision. To the final question - why you would like to study English independently, the responses varied. They were analyzed and grouped under main topics: save one's time – 22 %;generally prefer to study independently - 12%; to save money - 6%; consider it as an interesting experiment - 4-4%; and 1-1% is for professional development as well as for self-observation and knowledge enrichment.

As for the negative attitude for self-directed learning, following impeding reasons were given: 14% believed that they would not be able to do it independently; 9% - preferred to study with a teacher; 5-5% -

preferred to have responsibility for the lesson and generally needed more motivation to learn independently than with anyone; 2-2% - considered the problem of practice and correct expression to be the main challenge.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of the paper is to study more about self-directed learning of Georgian adult learners of English. Particular attention is paid to their behaviour as English learners. To our knowledge, the results of our paper describe for the first time Georgian adult learners readiness for autonomous learning. More than half of the respondents are confident in their language learning abilities. However, they do not consistently spend their spare time learning English. Georgian adult learners prefer to review lessons before the class. Very few of them run a diary or write a review journal to monitor their learning progress. Georgian adult learners do not acknowledge the accomplishments they make in learning English. This finding was quite unexpected and suggests that adult learners miss the celebratory part of learning.

Another significant finding is that more than half of Georgian adult learners are willing to try self-directed learning for practical reasons: to save their time and money and to have control over their learning, and they set a goal for this. Nevertheless, only third of them have a detailed, scheduled plan to learn English.

### **Conclusion**

From the research that has been carried out, it is possible to conclude that Georgian adult learners are eager to engage in self-directed learning, however they need support and encouragement to maintain and protect the motivation in learning and perform on a consistent basis. As language teachers we may see ourselves as teaching not only language but also teaching the learning of language a goal of producing competent language users and competent language learners. Teachers should lead students to develop metacognitive skills, generate motivation and focus on self-motivation strategies by encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation and increasing learner satisfaction.

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