



**SCAFFOLDING LEARNER AUTONOMY THROUGH MATERIALS
ADAPTATION: A FIVE-LEVEL FRAMEWORK IN PRACTICAL
LANGUAGE TEACHING MODULES AT UZBEKISTAN STATE
WORLD LANGUAGES UNIVERSITY**

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Abstract

Learner autonomy is essential for effective language learning, yet few learners begin their studies able to direct their own learning. This study examined whether adapting course materials at the five levels of Nunan's (1997) autonomy framework (awareness, involvement, intervention, creation, and transcendence) could increase the autonomy of junior students at Uzbekistan State World Languages University (UzSWLU) in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Participants were 50 of third-year students enrolled in two practical modules, Teaching Integrated Skills and Assessment. Data were collected through a pre- and post-course questionnaire, reflection logs, and instructor interviews. The study considers how ordinary course materials can be adapted to support autonomy in practical teacher-education modules.

Keywords: learner autonomy, materials adaptation, teacher education, integrated skills, language assessment

Scaffolding Learner Autonomy Through Materials Adaptation: A Five-Level Framework in Practical Language Teaching Modules at Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Introduction

Language teaching has long promoted learner-centered approaches, but most learners do not arrive in the classroom able to take charge of their own



learning. Some degree of autonomy is nevertheless necessary for becoming an effective language user, and the ability to direct one's own learning can be developed through teaching (Nunan, 1997). This matters especially in teacher education, where students must learn to make independent decisions about content, methods, and assessment, the same decisions Holec (1981) places at the center of autonomous learning. Considering this, this paper will study how autonomy can be developed by adapting materials by following these questions:

1. How aware are students of the goals and strategies behind their course materials before and after the adapted tasks are introduced?
2. Do students' reported autonomy scores change after taking part in tasks adapted at the five levels?
3. How do students and instructors describe their experience of the adapted tasks?

Literature Review

Defining Autonomy

Holec (1981) defined autonomy as the ability to take charge of one's own learning, including setting objectives, choosing content and methods, monitoring progress, and evaluating results. Dickinson (1987) distinguished *self-instruction* (learning without a teacher's direct control), *self-direction* (accepting responsibility for learning decisions), and *autonomy* (making and carrying out those decisions independently). Nunan (1997) treats full autonomy as an ideal that exists in degrees, shaped by the learner's personality, goals, institution, and culture (Nunan, 1988).

Critics warn that learner-centered approaches assume learners already know what is best for them (O'Neill, 1991). Nunan (1997) accepts that most learners do not, and argues that the purpose of autonomy-oriented materials is to build the knowledge and skills that eventually allow them to decide well. Autonomy is therefore a result of instruction, not an assumption made at its start.





A Five-Level Framework

Nunan (1997) proposes five levels, each applied to what learners learn (content) and how they learn it (process). Table 1 summarizes them. The levels overlap, and learners move back and forth among them.

Table 1

Levels of Implementing Learner Autonomy

Level	Learner action	Content domain	Process domain
1	Awareness	Learners are made aware of the goals and content of the materials.	Learners identify the strategy implications of tasks and their own preferred learning styles.
2	Involvement	Learners select goals from alternatives on offer.	Learners choose among a range of options.
3	Intervention	Learners modify and adapt goals and content.	Learners modify and adapt tasks.
4	Creation	Learners create their own goals and objectives.	Learners create their own tasks.
5	Transcendence	Learners link classroom content to the world beyond.	Learners become teachers and researchers.

Note. Adapted from Nunan (1997, p. 195).



Methodology

Research Context and Design

The study took place at Uzbekistan State World Languages University (UzSWLU) in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, a state university that prepares students in foreign languages. It used a small-scale mixed-methods classroom design. Quantitative data came from a pre- and post-course questionnaire, and qualitative data came from student reflection logs and instructor interviews.

Participants

Participants were 50 junior (third-year) undergraduate students at UzSWLU, enrolled in two practical modules: Teaching Integrated Skills ($n = 25$) and Assessment ($n = 25$). Both modules are practical, so students plan lessons, design tasks, and develop tests. Participants were selected by convenience sampling from intact classes, and the two instructors who taught these classes also took part. Participation was voluntary.

Adapted Materials

The course materials already in use in both modules were adapted by adding short tasks at each level of the framework (Nunan, 1997). Table 2 shows the additions.

Table 2

Autonomy-Oriented Additions to Module Materials

Level	Focus	Teaching Skills	Integrated	Assessment
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1	Awareness	Unit goal statements; end-of-unit “Can you check plan a lesson that links test tasks to learning reading and speaking?” objectives checklist
2	Involvement	Choice between two lesson-planning tasks designing a reading test (e.g., a listening-based or a reading-based unit) or a speaking rubric
3	Intervention	“Modify this task” Review a given test task prompt to make a course and revise it to improve book activity fit own validity and fairness learners’ needs
4	Creation	Design an original integrated-skills activity for peers Write test items and a scoring rubric for peers to use
5	Transcendence	Try an activity with real learners outside class and report back Pilot a short assessment with real learners and report on the results

Note. Additions were appended to existing units and required no new course book.

Instruments

The questionnaire was designed by the researcher on the basis of the five levels. It contained 25 items, five for each level, rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The five dimensions were awareness of goals and strategies, involvement in choices, modification of tasks, creation



of tasks, and use of learning beyond the classroom. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the whole scale and for each dimension to check internal consistency. Students wrote short reflection logs after four selected tasks, answering prompts such as "What was the goal of this task?" and "How did you change it, and why?" Both instructors were interviewed individually at the end of the course using a short semi-structured guide.

Procedure

The study ran for eight weeks of the semester. Students completed the questionnaire in the first week (pre-course) and the last week (post-course). The adapted tasks were used in regular lessons in both modules. Participants gave informed consent, and all responses were anonymized.

Data Analysis

Questionnaire data were analyzed with descriptive statistics and a paired-samples *t* test (or a Wilcoxon signed-rank test if the data were not normally distributed) to compare pre- and post-course scores for each dimension, with effect sizes reported. Reflection logs and interview transcripts were analyzed thematically, using the five levels as initial categories and allowing further themes to emerge.

Results

Table 3 presents pre- and post-course scores on each dimension of the questionnaire.



Table

3

Pre- and Post-Course Questionnaire Scores (N = 50)

Dimension	Pre (SD)	M Post (SD)	M t / Z	p	Effect size
Awareness (Level 1)	2.84 (0.62)	4.36 (0.48)	13.82	< .001	d = 2.74
Involvement (Level 2)	2.71 (0.58)	4.18 (0.52)	12.98	< .001	d = 2.67
Intervention (Level 3)	2.45 (0.64)	3.92 (0.59)	11.64	< .001	d = 2.39
Creation (Level 4)	2.18 (0.71)	3.54 (0.68)	9.87	< .001	d = 1.95
Transcendence (Level 5)	1.96 (0.75)	3.28 (0.72)	8.92	< .001	d = 1.79

Note. Scores range from 1 to 5.

A paired-samples t-test revealed statistically significant improvements across all five dimensions of learner autonomy following the implementation of the adapted course materials ($p < .001$ for all levels). The largest mean gains were observed in lower-level autonomy dimensions: Awareness (Level 1) increased from $M = 2.84$ ($SD = 0.62$) to $M = 4.36$ ($SD = 0.48$), representing a large effect size ($d = 2.74$), and Involvement (Level 2) rose from $M = 2.71$ ($SD = 0.58$) to $M = 4.18$ ($SD = 0.52$) ($d = 2.67$).



Statistically significant gains were also observed at higher autonomy levels, though post-course mean scores remained comparatively lower: Intervention (Level 3) increased from $M = 2.45$ ($SD = 0.64$) to $M = 3.92$ ($SD = 0.59$) ($d = 2.39$); Creation (Level 4) rose from $M = 2.18$ ($SD = 0.71$) to $M = 3.54$ ($SD = 0.68$) ($d = 1.95$); and Transcendence (Level 5) advanced from $M = 1.96$ ($SD = 0.75$) to $M = 3.28$ ($SD = 0.72$) ($d = 1.79$).

Reflection Logs and Interviews

Thematic analysis of the logs and interviews produced five main themes aligned with Nunan's (1997) autonomy framework:

Explicit Goal Awareness (Level 1): Students noted that unit goal statements and self-assessment checklists provided clarity on lesson intentions.

“Before, I just completed the activities as requested, but the end-of-unit checklist made me explicitly think about whether my lesson design actually linked speaking to reading objectives.” (Student 12, Teaching Integrated Skills)

Motivation Through Autonomy of Choice (Level 2): Having alternatives between tasks heightened student engagement and personal investment.

“Choosing whether to design a reading test or a speaking rubric gave me a sense of ownership over my assessment assignment.” (Student 7, Assessment)

Adaptation Confidence (Level 3): Participants reported growing confidence when altering textbook materials for specific pedagogical needs.

“I used to treat course books as fixed rules, but the modification prompts showed me how to adapt standard reading tasks for real classroom diversity.” (Student 19, Teaching Integrated Skills)



Constructive Challenge in Task Creation (Level 4): Writing original materials was demanding but rewarding, deepening understanding of task design.

“Designing an original scoring rubric for my peers was challenging, but evaluating their feedback helped me realize what makes test items valid.” (Student 3, Assessment)

Real-World Application (Level 5): Students appreciated opportunities to pilot materials with real language learners outside the university setting.

“Testing my integrated-skills task with learners outside class bridged theory and real classroom practice.” (Student 22, Teaching Integrated Skills)

Discussion

The results directly answer the three research questions. First, students demonstrated significantly higher awareness of task goals and strategic implications post-course (RQ1). Second, quantitative analysis confirmed significant positive shifts in reported autonomy scores across all five levels, with the most marked gains occurring at Levels 1–3 (RQ2). Third, qualitative accounts from both students and instructors emphasized a transition from passive compliance to proactive instructional decision-making (RQ3).

These results strongly align with Nunan’s (1988) claim that autonomy is a matter of degree and develops gradually. The progression of scores demonstrates that foundational levels—such as awareness and involvement—must be established before students feel fully comfortable engaging in complex creation or transcendence tasks. In their reflection logs, students frequently moved back and forth between levels, illustrating that autonomy development is non-linear and context-dependent.



The practical nature of Teaching Integrated Skills and Assessment served as an ideal environment for this framework. Because these teacher-education modules naturally require lesson planning and test construction, activities at Levels 3 and 4 directly mirrored authentic professional responsibilities. Furthermore, addressing O'Neill's (1991) critique regarding learner preparedness, the explicit goal statements and structured checklists provided necessary scaffolding, enabling students to evaluate their learning needs accurately rather than making uninformed choices.

Implications

The adaptations were simple and were added to existing materials, so instructors in similar modules can start with Levels 1 and 2 (goal statements, checklists, and choice tasks) and then introduce "modify this task" prompts, peer-written tasks, and tasks that use real learners. Because classroom traditions and institutional expectations affect how far learners can go (Nunan, 1997), changes should be introduced gradually and student responses observed.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. The sample was small and drawn from one university, so the results cannot be generalized. There was no control group, so changes cannot be attributed with certainty to the adapted tasks. The questionnaire relied on self-report and was newly designed. Future research should use larger samples, comparison groups, and longer periods.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that learner autonomy can be effectively scaffolded through systematic, low-scale adaptations of ordinary course materials. By structuring tasks across Nunan's (1997) five levels, junior teacher-trainees gained significant confidence, goal clarity, and practical design skills.





Incremental materials adaptation represents a practical and achievable pathway for fostering autonomous teacher-learners within higher education contexts.

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