

Chapter 3, Activity 1: Sources of information and conducting searches

In Chapter three, the identification of appropriate key words for literature searching is discussed. In this activity, practice is given in the identification and use of key words to search for relevant sources.

Task one: Using the abstract below from the MA dissertation on 'learner autonomy', identify key words that you would use if conducting a search for further literature on this topic.

Sample extract 1

Teachers' perspectives of learner autonomy in language learning

Abstract

This project is an investigation into teachers' perspectives of learner autonomy in language learning. Research was carried out with English language teachers and the Director of Studies (DOS) at a private ESL (English as a second language) school in Vancouver, Canada. The report focuses on teachers' beliefs in five areas: (1) teacher/student roles and responsibilities, (2) opinions and evidence of students' autonomous learning, (3) autonomous learning activities inside and outside the classroom, (4) interpretations of learner autonomy and (5) learner autonomy and the curriculum. A mixed methods approach was employed which consisted of a questionnaire survey, in which all teachers had the opportunity to take part, followed by semi-structured interviews with a small sample of teachers. Findings show that teachers feel mainly responsible for most teaching and language-related decisions inside the classroom. Student learning and progress outside the class is generally believed to be the responsibility of the student. The majority of teachers do not view their students as very autonomous, a belief also shared by the DOS. Teachers have very positive attitudes towards autonomous learning activities both inside and outside the classroom. They believe using English outside the classroom is essential in the learning process; however, they do feel that many students do not use opportunities to learn English outside class time. Teachers have a clear understanding of the concept of learner autonomy and feel it is important in language learning. There are concerns, however, that constraints within the school system such as time pressures, frequent class changes, and increased class sizes may hinder the development of learner autonomy. Some teachers feel specific courses within the school curriculum offer more opportunities for autonomous learning, others feel developing learner autonomy does not depend on the curriculum, but is rather teacher dependent.

While discussing the findings of this study, the implications for professional practice within the school where I work will also be considered. The final part of this paper will summarise the key findings and offer recommendations for future research.

Some possible choices of key words:

Autonomy; autonomous learning; English language teaching; English as second language; second language teaching; teacher perspectives; teacher beliefs; English language teaching curriculum.

Task two: Using Boolean logic and depending on the catalogue or database you are using these words can be combined in a variety of ways. Decide on a few possible combinations. For example, the following could be used.

autonom* AND "second language teaching"

autonom* AND curriculum AND "second language"

Try searching using your key word combinations in:

1. your library catalogue search tool,
2. an electronic bibliographical database such as the *British Education Index*, and
3. an Internet search engine such as *Google Scholar*.

In each of the tools above try narrowing your search by selecting 'journal articles' or 'scholarly journals' and make a note whether and how this reduces the number of 'hits'.

Compare your results from each search tool and keep a record of the relevant results retrieved (Chapter 3, Table 3.1).

Remember that if you log on through your university account, you will be able to access journal articles free if your university subscribes to the journal you wish to use.