

# Required Online Autonomous Learning in College English Courses: Problems and Solutions

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## Abstract

**The paper is detailed analysis of the problems and solutions concerning required online autonomous learning in college English courses. First, the importance of required online autonomous learning is highlighted. Then the four major problems, that is, insufficient attention paid, inadequate hardware, teachers' absence and lack of a rewarding system and their corresponding solutions are analyzed.**

## Keywords

**required online autonomous learning; college English courses, problems; solutions.**

## 1. Introduction

The concept of "autonomous learning" is first brought up by linguist Henri Holec in the 1980s. Henri Holec defines autonomous learning as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". According to Henri Holec, autonomous learning includes five essential elements. They are learning goal clarification, learning content and plan clarification, learning methods and skills, supervision in the learning process and evaluation on learning effectiveness. In the Internet plus era, the majority of universities in China have applied autonomous learning in the practice of learning and teaching English.

## 2. The Importance of Required Online Autonomous Learning

The development of information technology provides students with abundant ways of studying by themselves. Students have easy access to online resources and vast learning opportunities. With a computer or mobile phone handy, they may visit an English study website or download an English learning app. But the critical question here is: do you think most students would just log onto the Internet and learn by themselves? The answer is no. Based on the survey our team conducted, only a tiny 7 percent of the surveyed college students said that they would learn online all by themselves and stick to the studying plan.

The solution to the problem is to implement "required online autonomous learning". Actually, most foreign language departments in Chinese universities have already started the program. I will take my school as an example to illustrate the commonplace situation. In my school, online autonomous learning accounts for 10% of the total score, which requires students to go to the school computer lab to spend at least 3 hours per semester and do an online assignment posted by teachers.

## 3. Problems and Solutions of Required Online Learning

There is no doubt that required online autonomous learning is the trend in English teaching, but in reality there is still much room for improvement and perfection. The problems and possible solutions are listed as follows.

### 3.1. Insufficient Attention Paid

First, as far as my school is concerned, not enough attention is paid to online autonomous learning. 10% grading is far from enough to be an effective stimulus for language practice. Based on the law of language acquisition, English language proficiency, especially that in the senior stage for college students is less acquired by passively being taught, but more acquired by active self-learning in practice. The more students learn by themselves, the better learners they will become. Therefore, the suggestion here is that autonomous learning should make up at least 50% of the total score, or even larger. In the same way, 3 hours spent online and one assignment seem so inadequate that students can even ignore the load of work given to them. So we should accordingly prolong the hours to a minimum of 50 hours. To avoid students' being online continuously for, say, 10 hours once at a time, we should also set the frequency. The frequency setting is actually a technical problem that can always be resolved by technicians.

### 3.2. Inadequate Hardware

Second, "hardware", the school computer (language) labs and the autonomous learning platform, should be updated to the latest. The capacity of the language labs can hardly satisfy the needs of the students, because there are just not enough seats available! The learning platform should also be updated to serve the following purposes: 1. to avoid students' cheating and wasting time online 2. to make the self-study materials interesting and relevant to the textbooks and classroom teaching. 3. to ensure teacher-student and student-student interaction 4. to offer effective self-evaluation 5. to add more subjective question types and offer students more speaking opportunities. Unluckily, the present platform lends itself so easily to abuse. Students on the school platform can do whatever they like, either watch a movie or listen to an English song as long as they are present sitting there online. So the newest platform is in urgent need to better stimulate and supervise students' autonomous learning.

### 3.3. Teachers' Absence

Third, some teachers misinterpret "online autonomous learning". In their eyes, online autonomous learning is students' business, and teachers do not have to do anything about it. But that is never the case. Students' inefficiency and ineffectiveness of online autonomous learning all originate from the absence of teachers' guidance and participation. According to the survey by Huang Min, all three English teachers surveyed said they had never given their students systematic training on online autonomous learning. Teachers should experience online autonomous learning just as what the students have done. Then they have to study the term and theories systematically and give students valuable advice. More importantly, teachers should communicate with students and encourage them through various means on a regular basis, as "emotional factors such as motivation and confidence can greatly promote learners' autonomous learning abilities. In addition, teachers within the school or with other schools should work together to design and work out a set of tasks and post them on the online autonomous learning platform so that students can develop a liking for online autonomous learning.

### 3.4. Lack of a Rewarding System

Last, as long as the software used for the autonomous learning platform is scientific and advanced and as long as it can really boost students' real language learning, we can build a reward system for students. Non-materially, they may enjoy a better chance of passing the final with this 50% or even larger in hand; materially, for students who work really hard and make great progress because of their diligence, they should get the bonus in the form of cash or something like a scholarship.

## 4. Summary

To conclude, required online autonomous learning is the reform trend for college English courses. Problems such as insufficient attention paid, inadequate hardware, teachers' absence and lack of a rewarding system renders the represent online English autonomous learning inefficient and ineffective for college students. It is high time that we took the above measures to boost students' online autonomous learning abilities.

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