

SSH/OP/02

Investigating the Role of Task-Based Instruction in Facilitating Learner Autonomy: A Study on the Perceptions of Students at the University of Kelaniya

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Background: In recent years, the emphasis on learner autonomy in language education has gained popularity within universities. As a pedagogical approach, task-based instruction provides meaningful learning to improve their responsibility for their own learning. Although it has become a global interest, limited research has been conducted within the Sri Lankan context, especially regarding undergraduates' perceptions. Therefore, this study investigated the students' perceptions of the role of TBI in promoting learner autonomy.

Objectives: This study aims to investigate the role of task-based instruction in facilitating learner autonomy, as it could be beneficial for both language teachers and learners.

Methodology: This paper reports on a qualitative study examining the effect of task-based instruction to facilitate learner autonomy. The sample consists of six undergraduate students teaching English as a second language, selected using the purposive sampling method. Although the sample is limited, it provides an in-depth exploration of individual experiences. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis.

Results: Participants often described that the use of task-based instruction supports the enhancement of their autonomy. In their learning process, they recognise TBI as an engaging and instructional method because they identify the benefits of using TBI to enhance their learning. Considering their perceptions, the following themes are identified: "collaborative learning", "increased motivation", and "implementations of TBI". One student reported that "working in groups supported me to determine independently, while sharing ideas". Moreover, as indicated in the responses to the last question in the interview, some implementations are also suggested.

Conclusion: The study concludes that task-based instruction positively contributes to facilitating learner autonomy among TESL undergraduates. Further, it is reported that more structured task-based instruction should be recommended to foster learner autonomy.

Keywords: learner autonomy, perceptions, task-based instruction, undergraduates