

**To Enhance Non-English Major Students' English Communicative Competence  
by Improving Students' English Learner Autonomy through Organization  
Development Interventions**

—An Action Research at Zhejiang Yuexiu University of Foreign Languages  
(ZYUFL) in China

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**Abstract**

The research paper analyzed the impact of organization development interventions (ODIs) on learner autonomy (LA) and communicative competence (CC) of non-English major students in ZYUFL, Zhejiang, China. The main objectives were to determine the differences of students' learner autonomy and communicative competence between the pre- and post-ODI phases and to investigate the impact of students' learner autonomy on communicative competence after ODIs. Based on the preliminary diagnosis and pre-ODI results, the researcher conducted purposeful ODIs (three action learning cycles including coaching, goal setting, team building, dialogue and Appreciative Inquiry), but remained the same in the control group. The post-ODI results showed significant improvement on learner autonomy and communicative competence in the experimental group, but stayed almost in the same level in the control group. According to the results of paired sample t-test, there were significant differences between pre- and post-ODI results in learner autonomy and communicative competence. Based on the Simple Linear Regression results, learner autonomy had a positive significant impact on communicative competence. The analysis of the qualitative data (three learning journals, one reflective statement and two post-ODI meetings) triangulated the results. Further researches in the related fields were recommended in the last section.

**Keywords:** learner autonomy, communicative competence, organization development interventions , action learning cycle

## Introduction

The increasingly changing world requires people with continuous learning ability. As both language ability and learner autonomy are the prerequisites of developing continuous learning ability, the research on learner autonomy is significant. This is the most urgent in the educational field. Yet, the educational field responds to the challenges slower than the business field, where researchers adopt to the newest changes in the market. Many successful experiences are related with action learning and action research. No matter in the world-wide scale or in the regional range, researchers are sparing no efforts in doing exploring learner autonomy in depth and breadth. In China, learner autonomy is closely related with communicative competence through English Communicative Teaching. English, as the most popular language in the world, carries great economic and cultural significance. The researcher organized the preliminary diagnosis questionnaire with 200 students' participation and conducted the preliminary in-depth interviews with five teachers. Secondary data were collected from ZYUFL profile, online database, pamphlets, journals and other published documents. The SWOT & SOAR analysis of non-English major students' current situation of English learning in ZYUFL shows a low learner autonomy and a low communicative competence, which requires appropriate interventions to improve the situation. Therefore, the current study aims to initiate the study of English learner autonomy and English communicative competence from the perspective of organization development.

The research objectives of this study are:

1. To assess and analyze the current level of non-English major students' English Learner Autonomy and English Communicative Competence.
2. To design and implement appropriate Organization Development Interventions (ODIs) to improve students' English Learner Autonomy and English Communicative Competence.
3. To determine the differences of students' English Learner Autonomy and English Communicative Competence between the pre- and post-ODI phases.
4. To investigate the impact of students' English Learner Autonomy on English Communicative Competence after ODIs.

In the next section, the literature review of the relationship between learner autonomy and communicative competence will be demonstrated.

## Literature Review

In this section, there are seven parts: action research, action learning, single-loop learning & double-loop learning, learning organization, learner autonomy, communicative

competence, the literature review on the relationship between learner autonomy and communicative competence. The structure of the literature review was designed to fulfill the research objectives of the current study.

**Action Research**

In both fields of OD and education, action research is popular. The comparison of Lewin’s (1946) action research model with Stringer’s (2008) action research cycle in education is as follows:

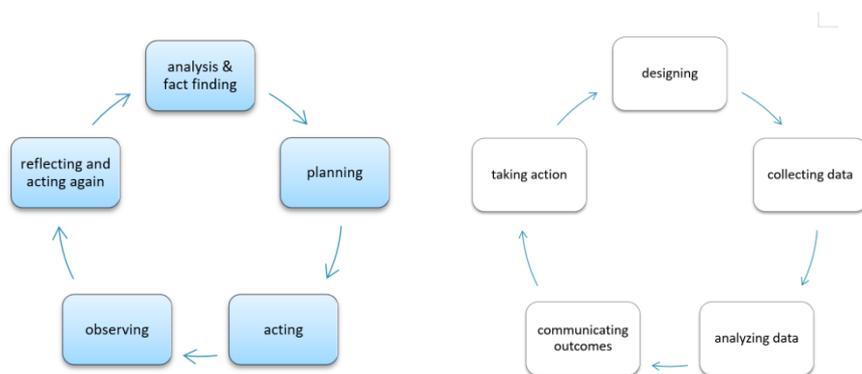


Figure 1. The comparison of Lewin’s (1946) action research model with Stringer’s (2008) action research cycle in education

Source: Lewin, K. (1946). Action Research and Minority Problems. *Journal of Social Issues*, 2(4), 34–46.

Stringer, E. T. (2008). *Action research in education*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

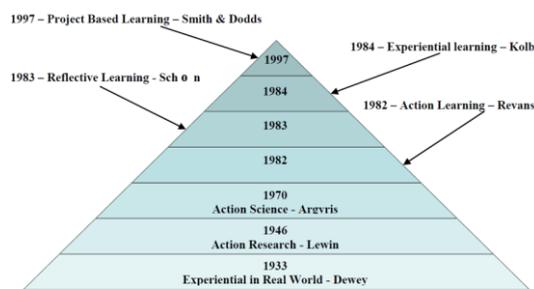
Both the two models have five steps. The left one is Lewin’s (1946) action research model. Lewin’s (1946) model of action research includes five steps in a spiral as he originally depicted. The right one shows a typical action research process in educational environments. The first phase is designing, which means identifying a problem or an area of concern. Then the relevant data should be collected scientifically. After that, the interpretation and analysis of data will be conducted. In the next phase, members share the information together and make joint action planning. When action plans are all carried out, there are evaluation and reflection for better future planning and development.

**Action Learning**

According to Revans (1983), action learning can be understood as “the most effective way to learn is by doing”. It is a problem-solving process for “colleagues in adversity” and diversity to find solutions through collaborative questioning and reflective inquiry learning process from multiple perspectives.

Action learning has a rich theoretical foundation, and researches on action learning come from different fields: business education and development, organization learning, action science and research, education, management development (Rigg & Richards,

2006).



*Figure 2. History of Action Learning*

Source: Smith, B., & Dodds, B. (1997). Developing managers in the project-oriented organization. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 21(5), 165-170.

Revans (1998) and Dewey (1933) share two common points in their learning theory: the emphasis on action and the stress on scientific learning. Revans (1998) clearly inherits some legacies of Lewin's action science methodology in designing his action learning cycle. As mentioned above, action research and action learning share some common understandings about organization development. Both involve systematic inquiry, planned changes through actions and continuous reflection. Active learning takes place from individual, group and organization level in both approaches. Action science is another form of action research. It focuses on analyzing the contradictions between people's actual actions and preferred intentions. A vital concept is theory-in-use that helps discover the discrepancy between what have learned and what have been applied (Argyris, 1976).

In summary, action learning theory can find its roots in Dewey's experience-focused learning concept, Lewin's (1951) action research theory and Argyris' (1983) action science theory (single-loop and double-loop learning in particular). Moreover, the emphasis on actions, collective participation in the decision-making process, team learning and social interactions make action learning a distinctive model for the design of organization development interventions in this current research.

### **Single-loop Learning & Double-loop Learning & Deutero-learning**

Single-loop learning and double-loop learning are part of Argyris' theory of action science (Argyris, 1993; Schein, 2004; Senge, 1990). According to Argyris and Schon (1974), there are three models of learning process: single-loop learning, double-loop learning and deuterolearning.

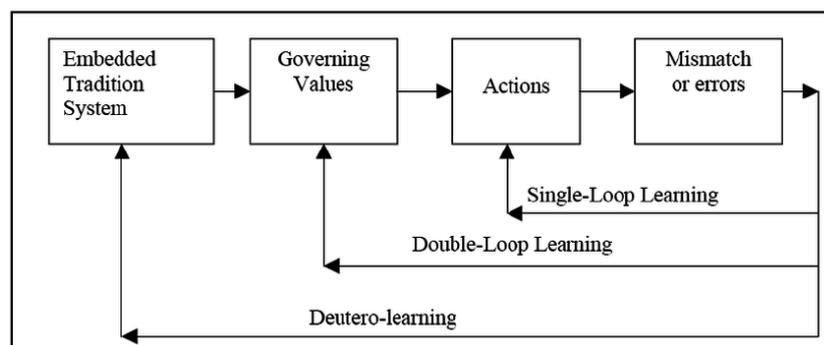


Figure 3. Single-Loop & Double-Loop & Deuterolearning

Source: Argyris, C. & Schon, D. A. (1996). *Organizational learning II: Theory, method, and practice*. MA: Addison-Wesley.

Single-loop learning happens within the existing norms or values, it aims at incremental changes without breaking the current situation. Double-loop learning is applied to change from inside-out. During this learning process, the existing norms or values will be altered; fresh modes or patterns will emerge. Double-loop learning allows for true self-expression and constant reflection (Argyris, 1976). There will be continuous testing and improvement of theories-in-use. Open dialogues, friendly relationships, trust and collaboration characterize interpersonal relationships. When double-loop learning is integrated into the classroom, students are encouraged to interact freely and have open discussions, which is essential to the development of learner autonomy and communicative competence (Dam, 1995; Dam & Legenhausen, 2010; Gunn, 2011; Little, 2004). This research intends to foster students' double-loop learning approach by emphasis on students' reflection on the learning processes and interactional communication in the ODIs. In deuterolearning (from the Greek "deuteros"—second/secondary), one not only learns but also learns how to learn at the same time (Argyris, 1976). Argyris and Schon (1996) describes deuterolearning as a "critically important kind of organizational double-loop learning" (p.29). It enables organization members reflect on the past collective organization memory. By analyzing past successes and failures, organization members unlearn those past mental modes that inhibit learning and learn new strategies for future learning (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

Learner autonomy aims at empowering students to learn how to learn through self-initiation, self-regulation and social communication (Benson, 2001; Holec, 1981; Littlewood, 1999). In an autonomous learning environment, students are encouraged to collaboratively make study plans, select appropriate learning tools and methods, monitor the learning process and evaluate what has been learnt and how learning takes place (Holec, 1981). Deuterolearning provides such reflective inquiry and critical thinking for the growth of learner autonomy, in another word, the development of learner autonomy is a deuterolearning itself. In this current research, students are encouraged to document

their learning processes in the learning journal and make the records available to the whole class. Through discussion, analysis and evaluation combined, students are gaining insights into how to learn effectively and efficiently.

**Job Characteristics Model (JCM)**

According to the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), there are five key dimensions of every position in an institution: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback (see in the following figure). Skill variety refers to the degree to which a job requires employees to use a variety of skills and abilities to engage in a variety of activities. Task identity refers to the degree to which a job requires the completion of a complete and identical task. Task significance refers to the degree to which a task has a substantial impact on the work and life of others. Autonomy refers to the degree of substantive freedom and autonomy that a post gives the incumbent in arranging the progress of work and deciding on the methods applicable to the work. Feedback refers to the direct and clear level of performance information that an individual need to obtain in order to perform the job activities required by his position.

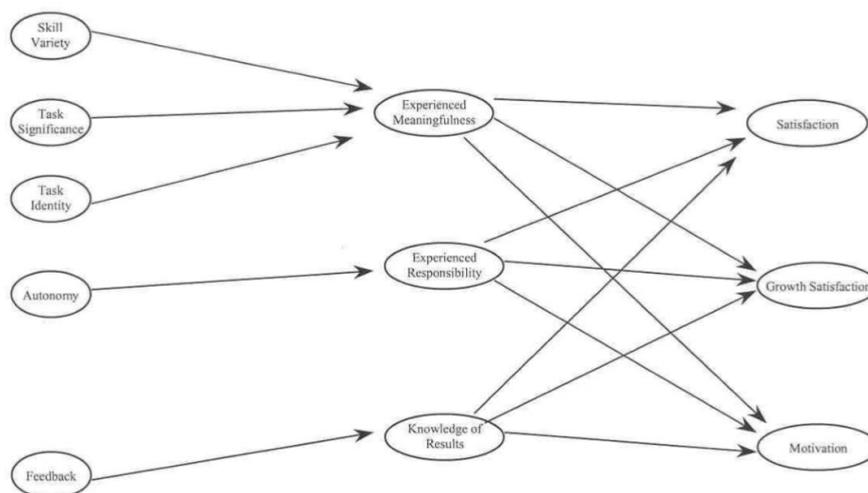


Figure 4. The Job Characteristics Model (JCM)

Source: Hackman J.R. & Oldham, G.R. (1980). *Work Redesign*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc.

In the work context, autonomy means a sense of experienced responsibility for outcome of the work. It will lead to high internal work motivation, high-quality of work performance, high satisfaction with the work and low absenteeism and turnover. Similarly, in the educational field, students’ learner autonomy can be a sense of experienced responsibility for the learning outcome, namely the exam scores or one’s own performance. It may result in students’ high internal study motivation, high-quality of study performance, high satisfaction with the study and low truancy rate.

To summarize, the essence of JCM is that the presence of certain attributes of students' study increases the probability that students will find the study meaningful, will experience responsibility for study outcomes, and will have trustworthy knowledge of the results of their study. Students who have the knowledge and skill needed to perform the study well and who value opportunities for growth and learning will be internally motivated to perform such study tasks, which over time should result in greater overall study satisfaction and higher quality study outcomes. In the next section, learner autonomy in language learning will be introduced in details.

### **Learner Autonomy**

Oxford's (2003) framework of learner autonomy is adapted by the researcher in this study to better fit the objectives of the research. The researcher in this present study makes an operational definition of English learner autonomy as follows: learner autonomy is interpreted in three dimensions—psychological self-initiation, technical self-regulation and sociocultural communication (Holec, 1981; Oxford, 2003).

**Psychological self-initiation** refers to students' awareness, willingness and readiness of LA. **Technical self-regulation** is students' ability of planning, monitoring and evaluating one's learning process. **Sociocultural communication** implies the interpersonal communication and mutual learning in the classroom setting.

### **Communicative Competence**

This current research adopts the model of CC from Celce-Murica (2007). Celce-Murica (2007) classifies ECC into six sub-dimensions: linguistic competence, strategic competence, sociocultural competence, interactional competence, discourse competence and formulaic competence. Operational definitions of the four sub-dimensions are given to better fit the research objectives. Linguistic competence incorporates formulaic competence as a whole because these two categories of competence refer to a repertoire of structural knowledge of a language, and one needs to integrate linguistic competence and formulaic competence together to make a well-structured meaningful sentence. **Linguistic competence** includes one's self-perception of the linguistic competence and one's actual English grammar knowledge and their ability of recognizing and producing general words and concepts to carry on basic conversations. **Sociocultural competence** includes one's self-perception of the sociocultural competence and one's actual knowledge of social and cultural contexts in English and one's ability of choosing appropriate discourse. **Interactional competence** includes one's self-perception of the interactional competence and one's actual ability of making basic information/interpersonal exchanges and using nonverbal cues in English communication. **Strategic competence** includes one's self-perception of the strategic competence and one's command of English learning strategies and communication

strategies. In this current research, learning strategies mainly refer to metacognitive knowledge and ability of planning, monitoring and evaluating one's English learning processes and results; communication strategies mainly refer to seeking out native English speakers to practice English and asking the partner to repeat/rephrase what was said if one has not understood.

### **The Relationship between Learner Autonomy and Communicative Competence**

The relatively comprehensive literature review showed that there was a positive relationship between LA and CC. The researcher argues that language learning and language use are maximized in the autonomy classroom (Little, Legenhausen & Dam, 2017), which, ultimately, will lead to higher communicative competence.

Table 1

*Literature review of empirical researches of the relationship between learner autonomy and language proficiency*

Author	Year	Title	Findings
Dam	2011	Developing Learner Autonomy with School Kids: Principles, practices, results	Higher communicative proficiency with other progresses
Dam & Legenhausen	2010	The acquisition of vocabulary in an autonomous learning environment—the first months of beginning English	Students acquire a better English proficiency much akin to that of native speakers.
Deng	2007	An Exploration of the Relationship Between Learner Autonomy and English Proficiency	To foster students' learner autonomy in language learning classroom might improve students' English proficiency.
Guo & Zhang	2002	An empirical investigation of learner autonomy in some EFL classes in China	There is a positive relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency.
Kumaravadiv elu	2003	Beyond methods: Macrostrategies for language teaching	Learner autonomy can be very important to language teaching.
Legenhausen	2011	The Place of Grammar in an Autonomous Classroom: Issues and research results	Higher grammatical proficiency, communicative competence
Legenhausen	2003	Second language acquisition in an autonomous learning environment	Students can obtain a different kind of language proficiency with a higher learner autonomy.
Little	2004	Constructing a theory of learner autonomy: Some steps along the way	Learner autonomy is very important to language teaching.
Little,	2017	The teaching-learning cycle in the	The autonomy classroom

Legenhausen & Dam		autonomy classroom	benefits learners; language teachers should promote autonomous learning in their classrooms
Liu	2007	Learner autonomy and Chinese university students' English proficiency: A quantitative and qualitative study	The relationship between learner autonomy and language proficiency is positive.
Nunan	1996	A 12-weeks-long project to investigate the effect of an autonomous learning environment	The autonomous learning environment affects students' learning in a positive way
Pu	2009	An investigation of the relationship between college Chinese EFL students' autonomous learning capacity and motivation in using computer-assisted language learning	Positive relationship between students' autonomous learning capacity and motivation.
Savignon	2003	Communicative language teaching in EFL contexts: Learner attitudes and perceptions	In communicative language teaching, learner autonomy is an important target.
Zhang & Li	2004	A comparative study on learner autonomy between Chinese students and west European students	Comparison of Chinese students' learner autonomy and West European students' learner autonomy. The Pearson Coefficient was 0.6088.

One of the objectives of this current research is to design and implement appropriate Organization Development Interventions (ODIs) to improve students' English Learner Autonomy and English Communicative Competence.

### Theoretical Framework

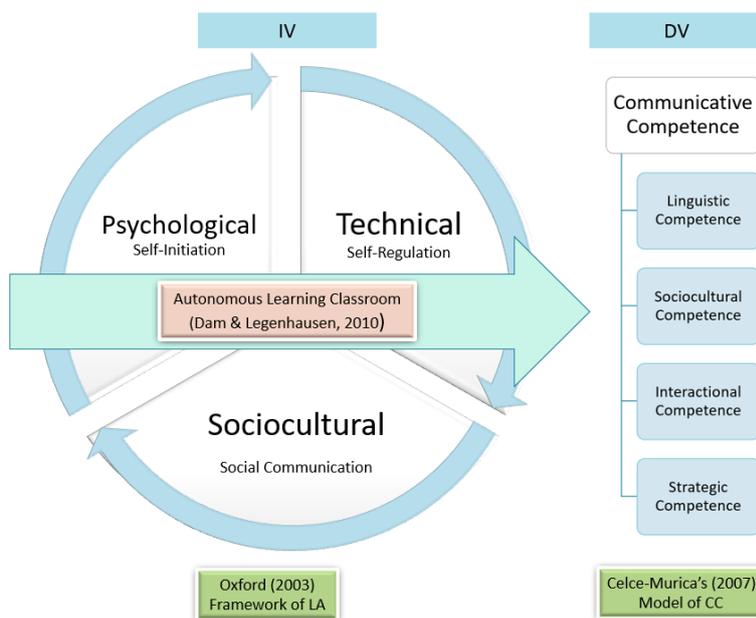


Figure 5. Theoretical Framework

Figure 5 shows the theoretical framework of this research. Based on the literature review, many researchers interpret LA from the psychological, technical, socio-cultural perspectives (Oxford, 2003; Benson, 2001). In the theoretical framework, the researcher adopted the Oxford (2003) four-dimensional model of LA and applied three dimensions in this current research to improve LA for students' higher CC.

### Conceptual Framework

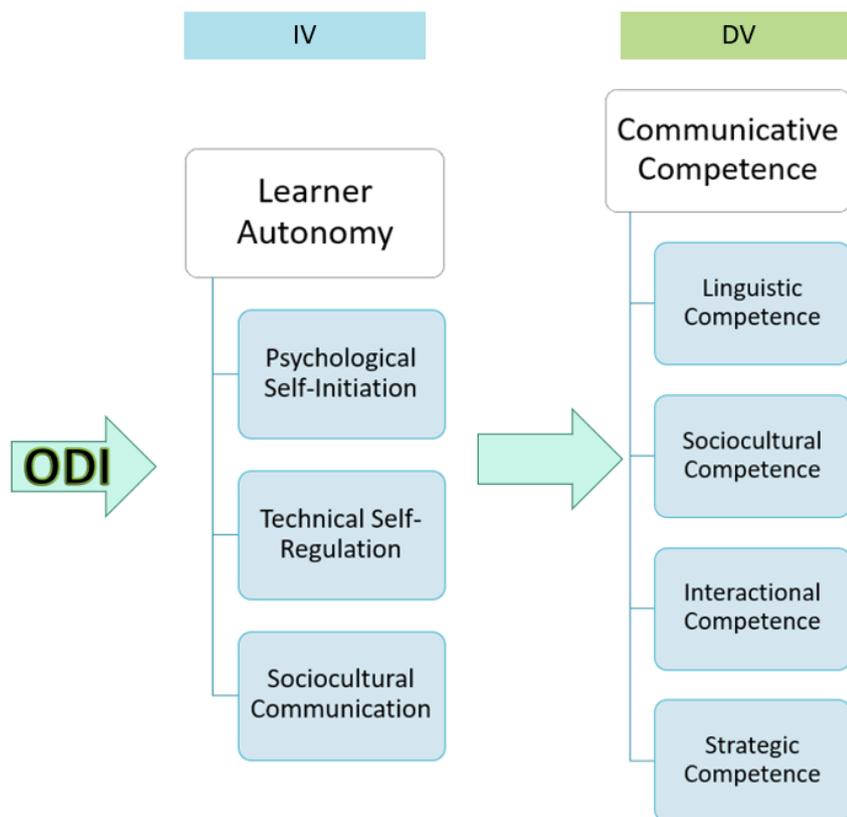


Figure 6. Conceptual Framework

Source: adapted from Oxford (2003), Celce-Murica (2007)

Figure 6 shows the conceptual framework of this current research. The conceptual framework was developed based on the theoretical framework of the researcher. Learner Autonomy (LA) was the independent variable and Communicative Competence (CC) was the dependent variable. The researcher assumed that students' CC could be improved through the enhancement of students' LA.

### Action Research Framework

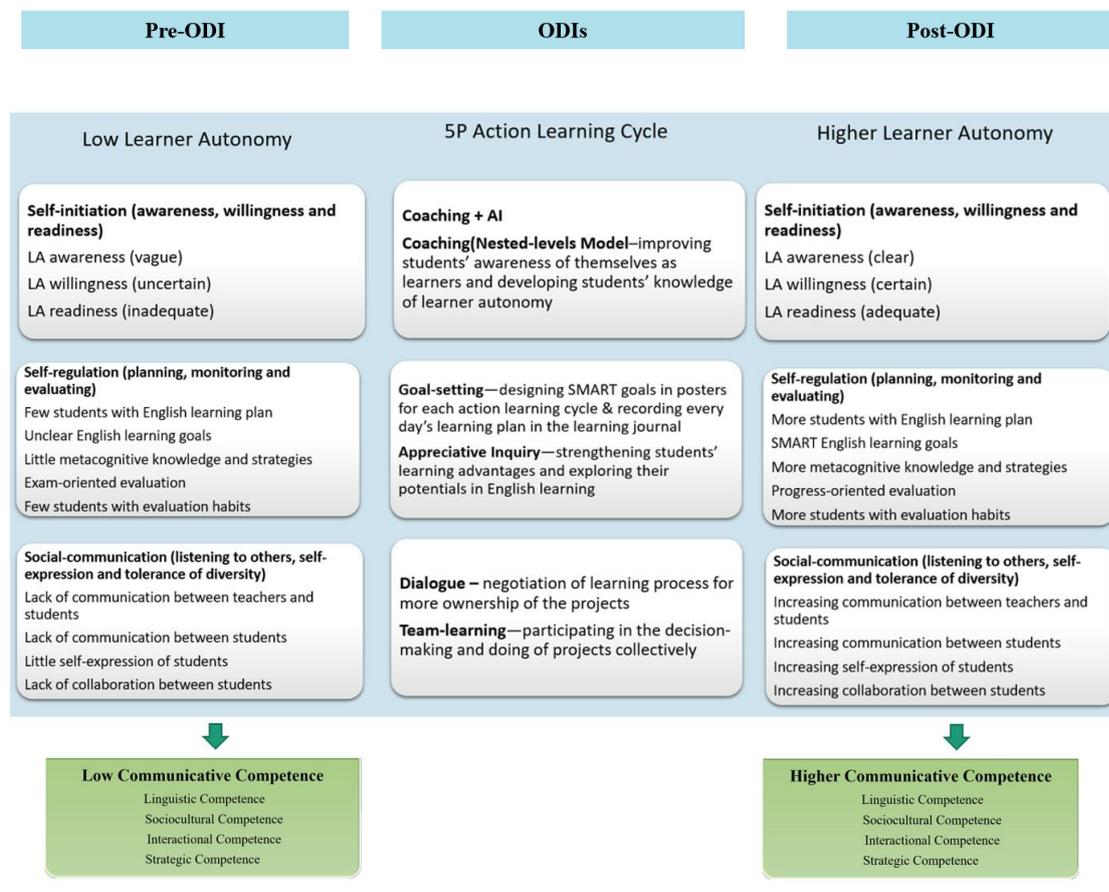


Figure 7. Action Research Framework

Figure 7 shows the action research framework of the current study. At the Pre-ODI stage, students’ awareness of LA was superficial or vague; and some of students were not willing to learn English at all. Students’ metacognition awareness and knowledge were in severe shortage. Most of them did not have learning plans, and they kept little track of their learning process, not to mention monitoring it. As for evaluation, most students thought it as a responsibility of teachers rather than theirs. They seldom took self-assessment for their English learning, and students were not used to the form of peer-assessment. They believed that assessing others’ work might humiliate others and study was something of one’s own. Therefore, there was a lack of interaction and communication among students. On the other hand, students’ communicative competence was comparatively low. They did not have learning plans, and they seldom monitored their learning process and evaluated their learning results, which resulted in a low strategic competence and linguistic competence. As students were accustomed to learning alone, their interactional competence and socio-cultural competence were of great concern.

The researcher introduced and conducted organization development interventions

(ODIs) to solve the current difficulties in the English learning classroom. The researcher first organized coaching sessions about key concepts of organization development, learner autonomy and communicative competence. During the coaching sessions, students found their teams and were familiar with 5PALC model. Next, in the first 5P action learning cycle, students assigned team tasks and differentiated team roles under the researcher's guidance at first, then they gradually took control of the process in a 5PALC autonomously. They grew from semi-autonomous to fully autonomous after the three 5P action learning cycles. After the three 5PALCs, students completed a reflective statement of ODI. They learned from the last cycle and gained insight into the new one, which was core to the critical action learning (Rigg & Trehan, 2004). In the Post-ODI phases, students were gathered together for four times to sustain their momentum of change.

The focus of the study was on the increase of students' English learner autonomy and the development of students' English communicative competence through organization development interventions (ODIs). This research determined the change level of organization development interventions (ODIs) on students' English learner autonomy and English communicative competence between pre- and post-ODI phase. In addition, this research investigated the relationship between students' learner autonomy and communicative competence.

### **Hypotheses**

The research hypotheses are formulated as follows:

Research Hypothesis 1:

H1o: There is no significant difference of students' English Learner Autonomy between pre- and post-ODI phase.

H1a: There is a significant difference of students' English Learner Autonomy between pre- and post-ODI phase.

Research Hypothesis 2:

H2o: There is no significant difference of students' English Communicative Competence between pre- and post-ODI phase.

H2a: There is a significant difference of students' English Communicative Competence between pre- and post-ODI phase.

Research Hypothesis 3:

H3o: There is no significant impact of students' English Learner Autonomy on English Communicative Competence after ODIs.

H3a: There is a significant impact of students' English Learner Autonomy on English Communicative Competence after ODIs.

## Research Methodology

### Participants

The participants of the study, 60 undergraduate sophomore students from College of International Business (CIB), enrolled in two separate yet same English classes and they were kept in two intact groups as assigned by CIB and Department of College English (DCE). That is, random sampling method was used in the current study. There were one control group (C1701-30) and one experimental group (C1702-30). In C1701, 75% of the students had passed CET-4 and 26% had passed CET-6. In C1702, 76% of the students had passed CET-4 and 27% had passed CET-6. This study was carried out in the Integrated English class of the fall semester of 2018.

Table 2

#### *Target Respondents*

Source: the researcher, 2018

Group	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Experimental Group (C1702)	Male	9	30%
	Female	21	70%
Control Group (C1701)	Male	7	23%
	Female	23	77%

### Methods and Instruments

Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Mixed Methods) were used for Action Research. Survey questionnaires were used for quantitative data collection while qualitative data was collected through three learning journals, one reflective statement, two post-ODI meetings, observation, video and photo recording. During Pre and Post ODI stage, survey questionnaires designed in a Five-Likert-scale (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=always) format were distributed to the respondents.

Two major variables were measured: learner autonomy and communicative competence. All the instruments used in this research were checked for the relevance of the objectives, the reliability and validity before collecting data from the sample. A sample of 31 students were used for pilot testing. In order to gauge the reliability of the questionnaires, Cronbach's Alpha scales were used and the acceptable values were  $> 0.75$  (Nunnally, 1978). In this study, Learner Autonomy was measured by using 13 items from the literature that match the context of the focal organization based on three sub variables:

self-initiation, self-regulation, social-communication. The validity of Learner Autonomy questionnaire was tested and its KMO value is 0.773. The reliability of Learner Autonomy questionnaire was tested and its Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.920. Communicative Competence was measured by using 15 items from the literature that match the context of the focal organization based on four sub variables: linguistic competence, sociocultural competence, interactional competence, strategic competence. The validity of Communicative Competence questionnaire was tested and its KMO value is 0.778. The reliability of Communicative Competence questionnaire was tested and its Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.919.

### **Procedure**

Action Research Model was employed in conducting this research which focused on studying the impact of ODI on Learner Autonomy to improve Communicative competence and the relationship between learner autonomy and communicative competence. The process included three stages: Pre-ODI, ODI and Post-ODI.

#### **Pre-ODI Stage (Preliminary Diagnosis)**

At this stage, the problem was clearly identified based on the preliminary diagnosis questionnaire, interviews and SWOT & SOAR analysis. 200 survey questionnaires were used to measure the perception of respondents on the current situation of learner autonomy and communicative competence. The researcher conducted SWOT & SOAR analysis together with the related teachers. Tailored ODIs were designed to address the problem in consultation with students and teachers.

#### **ODI Stage**

The specific OD interventions were developed based on the three action learning cycles. This ODI stage was aimed to (1) propose and implement a variety of OD interventions to improve the level of Learner Autonomy of non-English major students in ZYUFL and (2) to determine the impact of ODIs on Learner Autonomy and Communicative Competence. The trainings and workshops were designed and implemented from August 2018 to March 2019 focusing on the enhancement of learner autonomy which in turn improved communicative competence, consisting of the following: coaching (preparation), goal-setting (planning), dialogue (participation), team-building (presentation), AI (peer & self - assessment).

ODI activities were designed as three action learning cycles. In each learning cycle, students went through preparation, planning, participation, presentation and peer & self-assessment. During the stages, students were asked to set up their learning goals at first; then they gathered together to discuss about their topics and projects, their respective responsibilities in the team and reflected about their learning processes. Student Council Discussion was held every two weeks for better communication and

mutual help in their study process. Peer-assessment and self-assessment were conducted at the end of each learning cycle. Post-ODI meetings were held to reflect upon their learning processes.

Table 3

*The Deliberated ODIs*

Participants	Type of ODI	Date and Place	Purpose
30 students from the Experimental Group	Coaching	10-21 September 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Coaching model LA & CC & OD
30 students from the Experimental Group	Goal-setting 1 <sup>st</sup>	22-28 September 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Set goals for the first learning cycle
30 students from the Experimental Group	Dialogue 1 <sup>st</sup>	8-12 October 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Discuss about the project or the topic
30 students from the Experimental Group	Class Committee Meeting 1 <sup>st</sup>	13-19 October 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Discuss about the preparation process
30 students from the Experimental Group	Team-building 1 <sup>st</sup>	20-26 October 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Clarify the responsibilities of team members
30 students from the Experimental Group	AI 1 <sup>st</sup>	27 October-2 November 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Summarize the first learning cycle and look forward into the second one
30 students from the Experimental Group	Goal-setting 2 <sup>nd</sup>	3-9 November 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Set goals for the second learning cycle
30 students from the Experimental Group	Dialogue 2 <sup>nd</sup>	10-16 November 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Discuss about the project or the topic
30 students from the Experimental Group	Class Committee Meeting 2 <sup>nd</sup>	17-23 November 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Discuss about the preparation process
30 students from the Experimental Group	Team-building 2 <sup>nd</sup>	24-30 November 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Clarify the responsibilities of team members
30 students from the Experimental Group	AI 2 <sup>nd</sup>	1-7 December 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Summarize the second learning cycle and look forward into the third one
30 students from the Experimental Group	Goal-setting 3 <sup>rd</sup>	10-16 November 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Set goals for the third learning cycle
30 students from the Experimental Group	Dialogue 3 <sup>rd</sup>	8-14 December 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Discuss about the project or the topic
30 students from the Experimental Group	Class Committee Meeting 3 <sup>rd</sup>	15-21 December 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Discuss about the preparation process

30 students from the Experimental Group	Team-building 3 <sup>rd</sup>	22-28 December 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Clarify the responsibilities of team members
30 students from the Experimental Group	AI 3 <sup>rd</sup>	29 December–4 January 2-403, Jinghu Campus	Summarize the first learning cycle and look forward into the second one
30 students from the Experimental Group	Post-ODI Meeting One	5-7 January 2019 2-403, Jinghu Campus	To diagnose the sustainable effect of ODIs.
30 students from the Experimental Group	Post-ODI Meeting Two	27-28 February, 2019 2-403, Jinghu Campus	To diagnose the sustainable effect of ODIs

From the above table, it can be clearly seen that students took part in different ODI sessions during the semester. Except the coaching session, other ODI sessions were held three times to simulate the path of a person's personal growth. It was observed that students were more encouraged to do better at the second time or the third time, which gave them confidence and motivation to continue English learning on their own in the future.

### Post—ODI Stage

The impact of OD interventions on the targeted variables was measured to identify any changes in Learner Autonomy and Communicative Competence. Data in learner autonomy and communicative competence on pre-ODI and post-ODI was collected, analyzed and compared employing the same questionnaires used at pre-ODI stage. The researcher presented the outcomes and the comparison of data between pre-ODI and post-ODI to the students and teachers. Open discussion and comments on the results of ODIs were set up and led by the researcher in the post-ODI meetings to enhance the mutual understanding among the students and the teachers.

### Statistical Procedure

During Pre- and Post-ODI, the learner autonomy was assessed and the impact of Learner Autonomy on Communicative competence was measured and analyzed. Frequency distributions and percentages were employed to measure the demographic data. To measure and compare the improvement of pre- and post-intervention on the outcomes of each variable, mean, median and standard deviation together with paired sample t-tests were used to evaluate whether the variables were significantly improved between the pre- and post-ODI. In order to examine the relationship between Learner Autonomy and Communicative Competence, correlation statistics was employed (Yule, 1896). The significance level is predetermined at  $p < 0.05$ , with the corresponding confidence level of 95%.

**Results**

**Quantitative findings**

**Learner Autonomy**

The overall mean score of Learner Autonomy of the experimental class was 2.705 (M= 2.705, SD = 0.736) at Pre-ODI stage and 4.036 (M= 4.036, SD= 0.481) at Post-ODI stage. The results of Paired sample t-test are shown in table 4.

Table 4

*Paired sample t-test of Learner Autonomy at Pre- and Post-ODIs*

	Pre-ODI	Post-ODI	Improved/Declined	Paired Differences
	Mean	Mean		
Learner Autonomy	2.705	4.036	1.331	t = 9.784 Sig = .000

\*p ≤ 0.05

**Research Hypothesis 1:**

H1o: There is no significant difference of students’ English Learner Autonomy between pre- and post-ODI phase.

H1a: There is a significant difference of students’ English Learner Autonomy between pre- and post-ODI phase.

From the above table, it is evident that there is a significant difference of students’ English Learner Autonomy between pre-and post-ODI phase. Therefore, H1o is rejected.

**Communicative Competence**  
The overall mean score of Communicative Competence of the experimental class was 2.853 (M= 2.853, SD = 0.861) at Pre-ODI stage and 4.027(M= 4.027, SD= 0.622) at Post-ODI stage.

Table 5

*Paired sample t-test of Communicative Competence at Pre-and Post-ODIs*

	Pre - ODI	Post - ODI	Improved	Paired Differences
	Mean	Mean	/Declined	
Communicative Competence	2.85	4.03	1.18	t = 6.413 Sig = .000

\*p ≤ 0.05

**Research Hypothesis 2:**

H2o: There is no significant difference of students’ English Communicative Competence between pre- and post-ODI phase.

H2a: There is a significant difference of students’ English Communicative Competence between pre- and post-ODI phase.

From the above table, it is obvious to see that there is a significant difference of

students’ English Communicative Competence between pre- and post-ODI phase. Therefore, H2o is rejected.

**Research Hypothesis 3:**

H3o: There is no significant impact of students’ English Learner Autonomy on English Communicative Competence after ODIs.

H3a: There is a significant impact of students’ English Learner Autonomy on English Communicative Competence after ODIs.

Table 6

*The Simple Linear Regression between Learner Autonomy and Communicative Competence*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1 (Constant)	-.526	.485		-1.086	.287
Post LA	1.128	.119	.873	9.461	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Post CC

As the p-value was less than 0.05 ( $p < .05$ ), it can be said that the estimated model could prove the impact of LA on CC. Therefore, H3o is rejected.

**Qualitative findings**

**Learner Autonomy**

Self-initiation

According to the content analysis of three learning journals and the reflective statement, students in the experimental class showed a growing sense of **goal-setting**. Most of them became more **positive** about autonomous learning and communicative competence. Those who could not get used to the action learning cycle gradually adapted themselves to the new style. With the increasing **motivation**, they made attempt to expand the autonomous learning into other circumstances.

Self-regulation

Based on the content analysis of three learning journals and the reflective statement, **goal-setting and team building** contributed to students’ development of self-regulation ability. For one thing, goal-setting kept students in the track of their original plan; for another, team learning motivated students to be more self-regulated. Moreover, the **self & peer-assessment** also played an important role in students’ development of self-regulation ability. Constant self-assessment and peer-assessment let students reflect on their learning process and adjust their learning plans.

Social-communication

On the basis of the content analysis of three learning journals and the reflective

statement, students enjoyed “**posters**” and “**presentation**” the most. By doing posters of different projects together, team members improved their interpersonal ability and communication skills. Through presentation, students also noted in their journal that their spoken English had improved the most.

### **Communicative Competence**

#### Linguistic Competence

Through the content analysis and codes of three learning journals and the reflective statement, students in the experimental class made considerable progress in terms of their **vocabulary, grammar and skills**. In the process of searching for materials, they improved their reading and writing capabilities. When delivering the presentation, they developed their listening and speaking abilities.

#### Sociocultural Competence

Via the content analysis and codes of three learning journals and the reflective statement, students’ responses were mostly positive towards free choices towards each learning cycle’s topics and projects. They took the chance to explore into **the artistic and historical aspects** of the target language. Moreover, two students mentioned about their **smoother communication** with their foreign friend as better cultural exchanges promote mutual understanding. The most important was that they were able to **expand** what they’ve learned to other disciplines and out-class activities.

#### Interactional Competence

According to students’ comments in the three learning journals and the reflective statement, **team learning** not only helped them learn English, but also improved their ability as a leader. It enabled them to arrange tasks appropriately and communicate with different team members in different ways. In addition, **peer-assessment** was also a good way for them to interact with each other.

#### Strategic Competence

Students’ responses in the learning journals and reflective statement showed that top one beneficial strategy was **team learning**. Learning together with team members was more motivating and interesting for them. The top two beneficial strategy was **presentation**. Students’ confidence and motivation were greatly strengthened with the development of their spoken English. The top three was **goal-setting**, which opened up their door to how to set up an appropriate goal and stick to it.

### **Conclusion with 5PALC Model**

This research was conducted with the purpose of using OD interventions in the focal organization to improve learner autonomy and communicative competence. A series of interventions designed to enhance learner autonomy and communicative competence

were conducted: coaching by New Nestled Model, goal-setting by SMART model, team-building by Nine-role Model, dialogue among students and teachers and AI by 4-D model. In this action research, all the findings show that OD interventions activities conducted in this research significantly improved Learner Autonomy and Communicative Competence, showing significant differences Pre- and Post-ODI. The simple linear results indicate a positive impact of Learner Autonomy on Communicative Competence. These ODIs effectively shaped and influenced the students’ mindset, perception, and the way they learn. The qualitative analysis showed that students’ increasing learner autonomy resulted in a developing communicative competence.



Figure 8. 5P Action Learning Cycle (5PALC)

The advantages of 5P Action Learning Cycle as an intervention method were mainly demonstrated from the following aspects: students’ positive attitude towards autonomous learning; students’ growing interests and confidence in English learning; students’ gradual adaptation and expansion in other fields and disciplines of autonomous learning. Therefore, it is recommended that 5PALC model should be further practiced in different contexts.

### Discussion

In similar higher education context in China, there used to be many researchers who conducted related studies, resulting in a positive relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency (Guo & Zhang, 2002; Zhang & Li, 2001; Liu, 2007; Deng, 2007).

In this current research, the large context was in ZYUFL—a private language university in Zhejiang Province of China. Students were from the College of International Business. It was more closely to the research conducted by Guo and Zhang in 2002. They involved students from Shanxi University of Finance and Economics. Another one is

Liu's research in Xiamen University in 2007.

The similarity lies in the positive results of the three researches. This current research aligns with the positive results of Guo and Zhang's and Liu's. In the first two previous studies, learner autonomy (or fostering learner autonomy of students) had a close positive relationship with language proficiency. In this current study, after four months' organization development interventions (three action learning cycles), students proved to be more capable of conducting autonomous English learning and be competent in their English communicative competence in terms of linguistic competence, sociocultural competence, interactional competence and strategic competence. In addition, the Pearson Correlation Analysis result was also in alignment with that of the two previous studies: there was a close positive relationship between learner autonomy and communicative competence.

At the same time, there was something new and insightful in this research. The previous studies were from traditional educational point of view, while this current research was a cross-field study of education and management. To make use of a flexible OD tool—action research, the research may initiate the interdisciplinary study of two disciplines. It might be a brand-new research direction for “the opening up and reform” of Chinese educational field. With an increasing number of educators participating in this research field, a spark can start a prairie fire in the future.

### **Implication**

From what have been found in the study, discussions on findings led to several implications for English learning and teaching. To empower students: teachers need to involve students in decision-making from goal-setting at the very beginning, to problem-solving in the middle, until self-assessment and peer-assessment at the end. When students feel a sense of autonomy, there is also a sense of responsibility. This sense of responsibility is the stimuli that motivates students to hold on.

Teachers may give up some degree of control and empower students to decide their own learning schedule within the syllabus. Student-centered classroom will be very instructive. Despite all the difficulties, teachers may try to make a balance between room for autonomy and a well-structured learning environment. Students' expectations should be taken into consideration when adjusting the curriculum schedule.

Language skills and modes of communication are interrelated with each other. Teachers need to inspire students to improve language skills through the changes of modes of communication on the basis of proficiency-based communication rather than perfection-based communication. When students take the first step, the following steps

are much easier.

Teaching is also a management process. The class is the “small” organization. The students are the “staff” members. How to inspire students to learn is similar to how to inspire staff to work. Organization develop philosophy, thus, can also be very helpful in classroom settings. Coaching helps students to develop their awareness, readiness and willingness in practicing autonomous learning. Goal-setting enables students to have clearer objectives of learning in each phase. Dialogue facilitates the discussing process and makes negotiation possible. Team learning would be of great help to students who are not independent enough. The group dynamics in the growth of a team also contribute to group members’ development of interpersonal skills. AI encourages students to think/feel in a positive manner. All these related ODI information and tools are proved to be practical in the educational context.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

From the above analysis, there are some areas wait for further researches.

First, the external validity of the results of this study is limited to the specific background of ZYUFL. Therefore, future research could be carried out in other private universities in China or other countries to prove the validity of the theoretical significance of the findings.

Second, the range and categories of activities performed in ZYUFL should be expanded and considered for the different needs of students in other contexts, such as private language universities, private universities, public language universities. This may also contribute to the adaptability of the Action Learning Cycle.

Third, students’ perception of autonomous English learning and its impact on motivation can be thoroughly investigated. There should be more action research that describes, observes, evaluates the implementation of autonomous learning.

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