

WEB BASED AUTONOMOUS ENGLISH LEARNING : AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENTS ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

Zhu Ming

University of Florida ,USA / Jiangsu Polytechnic University

Abstract

With the issue of “ College English Curriculum Requirements ” ,the integration of computer technologies into foreign language curriculum has become a growing and significant component of foreign language instruction . This paper aims to present the results of a large scale study on Web based learner autonomy . 265 Chinese undergraduate students were asked to report their attitudes toward Web based autonomous English learning (WAEL) and out of class WAEL behaviours . 263 valid questionnaires were collected and processed . The findings of the study reveal that students have a positive attitude toward WAEL in general ,but display only a medium level of autonomous learning behaviours . The correlation between students attitudes and behaviours is not high enough to guarantee that positive attitudes will bring about high frequency of WAEL behaviours ,and consequently the promotion of autonomy in English learning . The paper concludes with the pedagogical implications of the findings that may be useful to universities currently implementing or considering the implementation of technology enhanced language instruction .

Key words

English language teaching ; Web based autonomous English learning (WAEL) ; Chinese undergraduate students ; attitude toward WAEL ; WAEL behaviour

1. Introduction

With the advent of the Internet , Web based language learning (WBLL) has entered the time when computers are used as educational tools which can provide opportunities for students to develop their autonomous language learning (Warschauer 2000) . In the new “ College English Curriculum Requirements ” ,the Ministry of Education (2004) dictates that the new teaching mode should be built on modern information technology ,particularly network technology ,so that English language teaching will be geared toward students individualised autonomous learning . The new requirements emphasize the need of fostering autonomous learning at the tertiary level . Students are encouraged to exercise learner autonomy outside class by making use of the abundant language learning resources on the Internet . Since then , Web based autonomous English learning mode has been on its way to gaining popularity on campus .

Students attitudes are important in planning for Web based learner autonomy because the attitudes students hold have a profound influence on their learning behaviour . All behaviour is governed by attitudes and experience . The attitudes students hold may either contribute to or impede the development of their potential for autonomy (Cotterall 1995) . Erroneous attitudes toward Web based language learning may lead to the deployment of less effective learning . Therefore , investigation of students

perceptions on the WAEL enables teachers to assess their students' readiness for autonomy and then determine appropriate support for the students.

This paper first introduces the research background. Then the paper explains the data collection procedure for the questionnaire, and analyses the attitudinal factors and the behaviour factors. Based on the analysis results, the paper also discusses the problems Chinese undergraduate students have in their Web-based English learning and provides pedagogical suggestions for English teachers about how to combine Web-based autonomous English learning and classroom teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Learner autonomy

Over the last two decades, "autonomy" has been a popular focus for discussion in foreign language teaching. Learner autonomy is often regarded as a defining characteristic of all sustained learning that attains long-term success (Little 1996). It is being promoted far more widely in different contexts than ever before. Autonomy has been described and defined in a number of ways in connection with language learning. Perhaps, the most often quoted definition is that of Holec (1981), who defines autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". To take charge of one's own learning is to have ability and to hold responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of learning. He sees the ability and responsibility as operating in five main areas which are crucial to the practice of autonomy. They are: (a) determining objectives, (b) defining content and progressions, (c) selecting methods and techniques to be used, (d) monitoring procedure of acquisition and (e) evaluating what has happened. Littlewood (1996) defines an autonomous person as one who has an independent capacity to make and carry out the choices which govern his or her actions. This capacity depends on two main components: ability and willingness. He considers learners' ability and willingness to assume responsibility for their learning to be "at the core of the notion of autonomy". He also considers that "willingness depends both on the motivation and the confidence to take responsibility for the choices required". In this view, attitudes translate into practice is a necessary precursor of autonomy. Little (1996) argues that learner autonomy grows out of the individual's acceptance of his or her own responsibility for learning. It presupposes a positive attitude to the purpose, content and process of learning. The learner is perceived as a decision-maker who has or will develop the capacity for choosing from among available tools and resources to create what is needed for the task in hand (Holec 1985; Little 1991; Dickinson 1995). Therefore, developing positive attitudes toward learner autonomy and the necessary skills are regarded as crucial to the success of the development of learner autonomy.

2.2 Web-based language learning

It has been reported that WBLL have a positive effect on learners' attitude. In Web-based environment, students are exposed to a large amount of language input and audio-visual resources, which can arouse students' interest and stimulate their learning effectively (Deci & Ryan 1985). Ayres (2002) argues that WBLL is relevant to students' needs as it provides them with useful information. Roed (2003) points out that WBLL should be used more frequently in different language courses. This can be attributed to the fact that WB environment is a stress-free atmosphere and more relaxed than the classroom. Ward & Newlands (1998) find out that students prefer WB environment because of the "richer and more effective learning resources and a more flexible pace of learning". Furthermore, more interaction between learners occurs in Web-based learning because learners depend on themselves. Warschauer (2000) believes that WBLL is beneficial to development of learner autonomy, increase of learning motivation and improvement of learning efficiency. WBLL activity amongst non-native speakers can reduce anxiety, improve output and add to learner autonomy (Freiermuth & Jarrell 2006). From the above description, Web-based learning environment can provide a natural context for learner autonomy, but that autonomy needs to be developed or fostered systematically.

2.3 Learner autonomy in China

In recent years, there has been considerable interest in the promotion of learner autonomy in English language learning in China. Compared to their western peers, Chinese students are often perceived as "syllabus dependent, passive and lacking in initiative" (Pierson 1996). It is generally accepted that

schools in China ,in western standards ,are traditional ,rule bound institutions ,where independence , individuality and creativity are far less valued than obedience ,conformity ,discipline and diligence , which are actively encouraged (Evans 1996) .

Numerous reports have also suggested that Chinese students tend to confine their work to what is specifically taught on the course (Balla ,Stokes &Stafford 1991) . For a long time ,English teaching in China has been dominated by a teacher centred ,book centred ,grammar translation method and an emphasis on rote memory (Hu 2003 ;Rao 2002) . The teacher centredness and authority oriented tradition of Chinese education does not seem a promising ground for the promotion of learner autonomy . Constraints ,such as the reliance on the teacher dominated ,expository ,didactic teaching methods ,the emphasis on the strictness of discipline and the excessive pressure of the competitive examination system , could all have meant diminished motivation to learn autonomously (Balla ,Stokes &Stafford 1991) . Consequently ,Chinese students could appear less motivated and ready to learn autonomously than their western peers . However ,research on learner autonomy with Chinese students has not yet come to any definite conclusion about the applicability of learner autonomy in the context of China .

2.4 Rationale for current study

The main impetus for the present study comes from the great deal of academic discussion in recent years on the promotion of learner autonomy in English language learning . Horwitz (1987) argues that a large proportion of students language learning goes on outside class and that how students regulate this aspect of learning is essential to their success as language learners . Moreover ,in the context of China , only the independent learning outside class is autonomous learning in the real sense . Due to the nature of traditional classroom instruction and large class size ,regular English classes still follow the prevailing lecture based teaching style where students do not enjoy much autonomy . Contrastively ,students out of class independent learning should take place in a situation where the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his/her learning and the implementation of those decisions (Dickinson 1993) . However ,not many studies have probed into this dimension of autonomous learning . In addition , previous studies reveal only limited research on the specific relationship between WBL and learner autonomy . Benson (2001) argues that “ claims made for the potential of new technologies in regard to autonomy need to be evaluated against empirical evidence of the realization of this potential in practice ” . Blin (2004) further notes that the relationship between computers and learner autonomy is either discussed at a theoretical level or “ remains only a starting point on which design principles or decisions are based ” . As WBL is a recent development in China ,it is not clear what students perceptions are toward this ,and whether students get ready to take on autonomous learning is still largely unknown .

With the above background ,the present study ,which focuses on English learners in the Web based learning setting ,aims to probe into Chinese non-English major undergraduate students autonomous English learning outside the classroom ,particularly their attitudes and behaviours and attempts to determine how ready they appeared to be to take on Web based autonomous English learning (WAEL) . The key research questions under investigation are as follows :

- (a) What is the general attitude of the sample Chinese undergraduate EFL learners toward WAEL ?
- (b) What types of WAEL behaviours do they report to have ?
- (c) What relationships ,if any ,exist among WAEL attitudes and behaviours ?

3 . The Study

3.1 Subjects

In order to assess the opinions of a large and potentially diverse student population ,a questionnaire was used to collect the data for the present study . This study involved a survey of 265 non-English major undergraduates from a university in south China . Among them ,263 students completed their questionnaires validly . The sample consisted of 160 males (60 %) and 103 females (40 %) ,coming from a range of academic departments . Their average score of English entrance examination was 119.6 points (full score was 150 points) . They all have taken six years of English study in middle school . At the time of the study ,they were undertaking their first year English course ,a compulsory course that is carried out under the new College English Curriculum Requirements . All the non-English major undergraduates in

this university are required to use New Horizon College English online system to support their English learning .In terms of computer access ,the students can do their course work in the computer learning center or on their own computers .

3.2 Instrument

The study was basically a questionnaire survey .It was designed on the basis of combining theoretical input suggested in the literature with first-hand information initially derived from my own teaching experience and through discussions and interviews with teachers and students .It consisted of three parts . Part One aimed to acquire the subjects personal information ,including gender ,major and score of English entrance examination . Part Two centred on the subjects attitudes toward WAEL . Based on Cotteralls (1995) study about learner belief and attitudes ,the focus of this part was the learners confidence in conducting WAEL ,the effectiveness of WAEL ,the teacher s role and the learner s role in WAEL . Part Three surveyed the subjects autonomous learning behaviours in the Web based learning setting .It mainly derived from Dickinson s (1993) categorization of qualities and characteristics of an autonomous learner in five aspects .

The questionnaire (see Appendix) was administered to the students in regular class time and it took them about 15 minutes to complete all the three parts . Thirty eight items were incorporated into the questionnaire with a statement for each item . Except for Part One about background information ,the students were required to respond to the items in Part Two (Attitude toward WAEL) along a five point Likert type rating scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree ,and to the items in Part Three (WAEL behaviours) along a five point Likert type rating scale ranging "this statement is never or almost never true of me "to "this statement is completely or almost completely true of me " .

3.3 Statistical analysis

In order to identify the general student attitude toward WAEL and their types of WAEL behaviours , students responses for each of the items were tallied ,and the mean and standard deviation for each item and for the total were calculated . Factor analysis was used to identify the underlying constructs that could explain the covariation among responses to the items in the questionnaire .

According to Cotterall (1995) ,factor analysis is a procedure that identifies clusters of items that vary together ,and hence may be linked by a common underlying explanation . Four attitudinal factors and five WAEL behaviour factors were analysed . Next step of data analysis included the calculation of Pearson correlation coefficients in order to see if there was any correlation between the two variables . For all descriptive and inferential statistics SPSS11.0 version was used .

For the measurement of the reliability of the questionnaire ,Cronbach alpha was used as reliability coefficient to measure the reliability of the scale . The Cronbach alpha for the overall reliability coefficient was 0.8589 (38 items) ,the Cronbach alpha for attitudes was 0.6455 (12 items) and the Cronbach alpha for behaviours was 0.8709 (26 items) . The Cronbach alphas for these three coefficients fell in the range of 0.6 or higher figures ,which proved that the scale had good internal consistency and that the results of this study were reliable .

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Attitudes toward Web based autonomous English learning

Table 1 . Students Attitudes toward WAEL

Factor	Attitude	N	Mean	SD
Factor 1	Effectiveness of WAEL (3 items)	263	2.98	0.68
Factor 2	Confidence in WAEL (3 items)	263	2.82	0.72
Factor 3	Teacher s role (3 items)	263	3.37	0.57
Factor 4	Learner s role (3 items)	263	3.50	0.86
	General attitude (12 items)	263	3.17	0.46

Table 1 gives an overall picture of students attitudes toward Web based autonomous learning . As can

be seen in Table 1 ,the overall mean for student attitude was 3 .17 ,which means that students had a general positive attitude toward their WAEL experience . For Factor 3 and Factor 4 ,the means of respectively 3 .37 and 3 .50 indicated that psychologically the students have partly accepted the shift of responsibility for taking charge of their learning from their teacher to themselves . In contrast with the higher mean scores for teacher s role and learners role under attitudes toward WAEL ,the mean scores of Factor 2 (confidence in WAEL) and Factor 1 (effectiveness of WAEL) were relatively lower (2 .82 and 2 .98) . Lower scores on these two factors tended to illustrate that although nearly half of the students had confidence in conducting WAEL ,there were a quite number of students who did not think that WAEL was beneficial to English learning and expressed a low interest level in WAEL . This may be due to the fact that students did not know much about Web based language learning and had preference for the language teaching paradigm in middle schools . A lack of prior autonomous learning experience was considered another important factor in the development of learner autonomy .

Based on the results of four attitudinal factors ,it can be extrapolated that students in general have a positive attitude toward WAEL . This finding has been supported by other research done to identify student attitude toward WAEL . For example ,Ayres (2002) finds that “learners appreciate and value the learning that they do using the computers ” and that 80 % of the students see Web based language learning as relevant to their needs . Stepp -Greany (2002) also reports that students attitude toward online learning and assessment is positive . Similarly ,Greenfield (2003) finds that 84 % of the students who are included in her study indicate a preference for learning English with computers .

4 .2 Web based autonomous English learning behaviours

Table 2 . Students WAEL Behaviours

Factor	Behaviour	N	Mean	SD
Factor 1	Formulating learning objectives and plans (3 items)	263	2 .86	0 .72
Factor 2	Choosing learning materials and resources (5 items)	263	2 .54	0 .66
Factor 3	Monitoring the use of learning methods (8 items)	263	2 .24	0 .58
Factor 4	Monitoring the learning process (6 items)	263	3 .03	0 .61
Factor 5	Evaluating learning performance (4 items)	263	2 .76	0 .72
	Overall Behaviour (26 items)	263	2 .63	0 .48

Along five point Likert scale ,averages of 3 .5 or higher are generally designated as high use , averages of 2 .5 -3 .4 are considered as medium use ,and averages of 2 .4 or lower are regarded as low use (Oxford &Burry Stock 1995) . As it can be seen in Table 2 ,none of the five WAEL behaviour factors reached the high level of use . The overall mean for all the behaviour factors was 2 .63 ,which means that students exhibited only moderate frequency of autonomous learning behaviour out of class . Four factors fell within the range of medium and one factor fell in the range of low level of use . Among the five factors ,the highest mean score (3 .03) was for Fact 4 (monitoring the learning process) ,which showed that most of the students paid much attention to adjusting learning contents and pace . As for Factor 1 (formulating learning objectives and plans) ,the subjects reported the relatively frequent use of behaviours ,such as setting learning goal and arranging learning time . This behaviour factor was followed by Factor 5 (evaluating learning performance) and Factor 2 (choosing learning materials) ,with the means of 2 .76 and 2 .54 respectively . Out of these five factors ,Factor 3 (monitoring the use of learning methods) had the lowest mean and the lowest standard deviation (M =2 .24 ,SD =0 .58) . This showed that students did not know how to employ WAEL learning strategy . The low standard deviation also indicated that most of the respondents homogeneously admitted that they lacked WAEL learning methods . To put it in more detail ,in the questionnaire ,students reported that they did not have the knowledge or the skills to make the right choices . They felt uncertain about making the appropriate and relevant learning related decisions .

Furthermore ,many of the students in the survey appeared to exhibit only the kind of autonomous behaviour which allowed them to react to the heavy workload demands of the curriculum and to cope with their studies in general . In other words ,they could be adopting an extrinsically motivated approach (that aimed only to meet the requirements for passing the course) and resorting to surface learning approaches

that precluded any extra effort for more proactive language learning .

Table 3 . The Seven Most Frequently Reported WAEL Behaviours

Item	Individual Behaviour	Mean	OT
15	I set up learning objectives based on the actual situation of my English study .	3.40	55.1 %
22	After finishing online assignments ,I checked the answers with the help of the Web based Learning System .	3.38	53.4 %
38	I made use of the Web to do test related exercises outside class .	3.18	41.1 %
30	I controlled the pace of Web based English learning .	3.14	39.9 %
29	When some interesting information appeared on the Web ,I first finished my learning tasks and then clicked them .	2.95	31.2 %
32	I adjusted the contents of Web based learning based on different situations .	2.95	30.0 %
23	I checked whether I had finished the online tasks planned in advance .	2.87	39.9 %

OT = combined response percentage of "this statement is usually true of me" and "this statement is completely or almost completely true of me"

As the broad categorization scheme may obscure some interesting features with regard to the respondents WAEL behaviours ,seven most frequently used behaviours reported by the subjects were ticked out and shown in Table 3 . They were spread across the first four behaviour factors except Factor 5 (evaluating learning performance) . The most frequently used behaviour that most respondents reported to do was to determine their objectives for WAEL (55.1 %) ,which can be treated as the starting point in the process of autonomous learning outside the classroom . The second one that most respondents reported to do was to check learning record (53.4 %) , which showed that students had a medium degree of awareness of monitoring learning .

Table 4 . The Seven Least Frequently Reported WAEL Behaviours

Item	Individual Behaviour	Mean	OT
26	After class ,I communicated with the teacher through e-mail , QQ or blog .	1.57	3.0 %
27	I participated in online discussions	1.70	3.0 %
25	When I had questions ,I would post them in BBS or Blog for help .	1.71	6.1 %
17	I cooperated with classmates to finish online learning tasks .	2.11	12.1 %
24	When I met difficulty with Web based English learning ,I would ask the teacher for help .	2.16	8.0 %
13	I decided what I should do next in Web based English learning .	2.41	12.5 %
36	When finding the learning methods not appropriate ,I changed for more proper ones in time .	2.44	11.0 %

OT = combined response percentage of "this statement is usually true of me" and "this statement is completely or almost completely true of me"

As for the least frequently reported WAEL behaviours ,the seven items were calculated and shown in Table 4 . They fell in the categories of Factor 2 ,Factor 3 and Factor 5 . The two behaviours that the least students reported to do were to communicate with the teacher through e-mail , QQ or blog and to participate in online discussion .

E-mail is an effective CALL activity that contributes to learner autonomy by providing opportunities for language improvement through real life communication and increasing awareness of language shortcomings (Greenfield 2003) . However ,in the present study ,only 3 % respondents reported that they employed e-mail to communicate with the teacher or participate in online discussion activity . This

suggests that students did not know much about using information technology to exchange ideas and to promote their learning . They did not view the computer as a medium through which they can negotiate meaning through interaction and collaboration . Armatas , Holt & Rice (2003) find that students have expectations based on traditional learning paradigms and have difficulty understanding what the benefits might be for learner to teacher and learner to learner online interaction .

In addition ,online discussions represent a huge change in students learning mode ,therefore ,it is essential that the teacher should explain to students their role in learning . Another issue for teachers is their role in the online discussions . Teacher presence can be beneficial through direct interaction and feedback to students . However ,if the teacher is not participating in the online discussion ,then this may create a space where students are responsible for discussion and this may result in more dialogic activity (Dysthe 2002) . Feedback to students can still be provided by the teacher in class .

4.3 Relationships among WAEL attitudes and behaviours

Table 5 . Pearson Correlations among WAEL Attitudes and Behaviours

		FO	CM	M M	MP	EP	OB
OA	Pearson Correlation	.304 *	.272 *	.217 *	.207 *	.127	.295 *
	Sig .(2 tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.001	.040	.000
CA	Pearson Correlation	.349 *	.314 *	.297 *	.176 *	.216 *	.355 *
	Sig .(2 tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.004	.000	.000
EA	Pearson Correlation	.330 *	.289 *	.197 *	.177 *	.079	.276 *
	Sig .(2 tailed)	.000	.000	.001	.004	.205	.000
TR	Pearson Correlation	-.218 *	-.139	-.170	-.068	-.154	-.192 *
	Sig .(2 tailed)	.000	.024	.006	.275	.013	.002
LR	Pearson Correlation	.224 *	.169	.164	.189 *	.128	.229 *
	Sig .(2 tailed)	.000	.006	.008	.002	.039	.000

* Correlation is significant at the 0 .05 level (2 tailed) .

OA =overall attitude toward WAEL ;CA = confidence in conducting WAEL ;EA =effectiveness of WAEL ;TR = teacher s role ;LR = learner s role ;OB = overall WAEL behaviours ;FO = formulating learning objectives and plans ;CM = choosing learning materials and resources ;M M = monitoring the use of learning methods ;MP = monitoring the learning process ;EP = evaluating learning performance

The Pearson correlations for four attitudinal factors and five WAEL behaviour factors were conducted to examine the relationships among them . From Table 5 with the correlation coefficient being 0 .295 ,the general WAEL attitude was slightly correlated with overall WAEL behaviour . This correlation stayed at a relatively rather low level . According to Connolly & Sluck (1957) (cited in Gui & Ning 1997) , if the correlation coefficient is or lower than 0 .20 ,the correlation is low and such a relationship can fairly be ignored . Compared with the other specific attitudinal factors ,Factor 2 (confidence in WAEL) , displayed relatively higher correlation with overall WAEL behaviour . This suggests that the more autonomous actions are taken outside class for English learning ,the more confident the students feel about their ability to carry out successful WAEL . As for Attitudinal Factor 4 (the learner s role) , students in the study claimed fairly high levels of awareness of their own role . Unfortunately ,this did not appear to translate into the expected autonomous learning behaviour . Attitudinal Factor 3 (the teacher s role) ,surprisingly ,did not show any positive correlation but significantly and negatively correlated with all the WAEL behaviours .

The negative correlations between students attitude toward the teacher s role and all the WEAL behaviour factors suggest that the more dependent students are on the teacher for English learning ,the less likely they will use autonomous learning strategies . It may indicate the complex relationships among these factors in the English learning context of China . This is partly due to the fact that students did not know much about how to conduct autonomous learning and they lacked the ability to tackle problems encountered in WAEL . We may also infer that a few teachers did not fulfill their roles well . Only when teachers provide adequate both psychological and methodological support for learners learning and give

expert advice when needed and where the focus is on one to one interaction can they establish a truly collaborative and supportive environment for students to benefit from Web based autonomous learning experiences .

It is generally believed that students attitude toward language learning can and do influence their language learning behaviour (Cotterall 1995). Unfortunately ,this is not reflected in the present study which suggests that students attitudes do not always operationalise into autonomous behaviour . In other words ,positive attitude toward WAEL does not necessarily bring about autonomous learning behaviours . There is a gap between the two . To bridge this gap and make students actually assume greater control over their own learning ,the right attitude alone is apparently far from enough . The skills to carry out WAEL are necessary ingredients in the recipe for successful promotion of learner autonomy . It is possible that some students have a predisposition to assume responsibility for their English learning but lack the ability to do so ,for example ,not being able to make use of learning strategies properly . Thus ,students should be trained in cultivating both awareness and practical skills of developing a WAEL learning approach . Teachers should play a vital role in the process of helping learners develop these skills . They may combine strategy instruction with the content course ,guiding students through the process of self - assessment ,goal setting ,planning , monitoring and evaluating language learning (Yang 1998). In addition ,both the preparation and the knowledge of teachers about technology ,as well as how to integrate and refine the lesson with technology ,are the key to whether it is effective or not to conduct WAEL .

5 . Pedagogical Implications and Conclusion

The present study has provided a source of information on Chinese undergraduate EFL students perspectives and their Web based language learning experience regarding learner autonomy . On the one hand ,it has been found that most of undergraduate students held positive attitudes toward WAEL and reported only a medium level of autonomous learning behaviours . On the other hand ,lower correlations were detected between students attitudes and behaviours ,suggesting that there are still other factors that may affect their autonomous English learning either in or outside class . Through the implementation of an investigation of students attitudes and behaviours in the Web based learning environment ,we gain the implications as follows .

(a) The technology does not automatically result in learner autonomy .

Although Web based learning environment is different from the traditional learning environment and students learning mode is changing ,a network cannot improve students behaviour by itself . In other words ,introducing technology resources alone into students learning experience does not automatically cause autonomy . The teacher needs to support students progress toward autonomy ,that is ,teachers need to scaffold instruction using technology . Only when the students have a repertoire of certain skills and strategies ,can they make effective use of network and thus develop their autonomy further . It is recommended that classroom based input be given into using WAEL ,so that all the students are in a position to make use of WAEL .

(b) Collaborative learning should be encouraged .

Second language acquisition research has shown that collaboration among learners facilitates language acquisition . Such advantages of collaboration have been noted in Web based collaborative activities ,such as project based learning (Debski 2000) or other task based activities that require collaboration (Shield , Weininger & Davies 1999) . As a matter of fact ,the traditional mode of learning in China is “learning by instruction ” ,which emphasizes the teachers instruction and avoids communication among students . Besides ,many Web based learning systems in China still abide by the traditional instruction mode so they are not different from traditional classes in the students eyes . In those systems ,students can feel isolated and lack collaboration to solve problems effectively . In order to improve this situation ,collaborative learning should be encouraged ,in which the interactions among the students are monitored and controlled by a collaborative learning system . This mode has the potential to allow students to learn in relatively realistic and socially enriched learning contexts . On the other hand ,as educators ,we should provide students with more electronic collaborative experiences and incorporate collaborative learning throughout our courses . In other words ,we should increase students exposure to the use of computer technologies for

collaborative tasks ,making them experience the benefits of collaborative learning . We believe the use of computer technologies for collaborative learning will be a successful reform of the traditional learning mode .

(c) Teacher s role should be redefined in the technology enhanced language instruction .

This study also implies that language teachers have an important role in the Web based learning environment . The negative correlations between students attitude toward the teacher s role and all the WEAL behaviors imply that teacher facilitation is still insufficient . This may be especially true for students with little prior background ,who have needs for increased assistance (Young 1986). Teachers working in technology enhanced learning environment need preparation to adopt new roles . The teacher s beliefs are important components of their teaching practices . Learner autonomy cannot be fully encouraged without the relevant and knowledgeable support from the teacher . Good instruction does more than just present information —it provides guidance ,advice ,coaching ,and feedback (Merrill 1991). By means of the notice board ,question and answer field and e-mails ,teachers can give students necessary instructions and help them improve their learning behaviour effectively . Therefore , professional development must include those skills necessary for teachers to function appropriately as a facilitator and co learner ,rather than an information purveyor . The development of professional skills must also include new pedagogical as well as technical and routine management skills . Teachers must also learn to create opportunities for increased person to person interaction in the Web based learning environment ,and at the same time ,manage these interactions and keep them task focused .

On the other hand ,teachers also need to provide learner training . Galloway & Labarca (1990) recommend that teachers provide “scaffolding ” for their students ,gradually withdrawing support as students gain greater task autonomy . Tudor (1993)claims that teachers need to prepare students for their new role by developing students self awareness as language learners and their awareness of learning goals and options and of language itself . In addition ,teachers need to identify which areas of responsibilities to transfer to the students ,where there is more scope for student involvement and what contribution students could make in the Web based language learning process .

As discussed earlier ,researchers on learner autonomy have questioned whether Chinese learners are different from their western peers with respect to autonomy . One important conclusion of the present study is that there are some constraining factors that hinder the development of learner autonomy . It implies that students might possibly be less ready to learn autonomously in the technology enhanced environment . The study reveals that even when students have fairly positive attitudes toward WAEL , they could be insufficiently motivated to take full control of their language learning . Therefore ,it is important that students should be helped to develop positive and favourable attitudes toward learner autonomy (Dickinson 1995).

In the preset study ,only quantitative data from a questionnaire survey have been utilized to analyze students WAEL attitudes ,behaviours and their relationships . If qualitative ways such as interviews and students journals on out of class WAEL can be employed to supplement the quantitative analyses ,more objective ,detailed information will be obtained . Nevertheless ,since little research is available on Chinese EFL students perception about WAEL ,this study may be useful to universities currently implementing or considering the implementation of technology enhanced language instruction .

More empirical studies should be conducted concerning the effect of such learner variables as motivation ,strategy use on students autonomous learning behaviours in the Web based environment . In addition ,studies should be conducted concerning the role of the teacher in the technology enhanced environment ,in order to identify those teacher behaviours and interactions most favourable to students language acquisition . Such studies may contribute to a future knowledge base that will improve and reform pedagogy in English teaching .

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Appendix

Questionnaire of Web based English Learning

Please fill out this questionnaire as honestly as possible . Your answers are absolutely confidential . Thank you very much for your time and effort .

I . Background Information

Age _____ Gender _____
 Score of English Entrance Examination _____ Major _____

II . According to the following statement ,please check the appropriate scale (1-5) .

(1) = Strongly disagree ,(2) =Disagree ,(3) = Agree somewhat ,(4) = Agree ,(5) = Strongly agree

- 1 . The use of the Web as part of an English course helped me learn English in a meaningful way .
- 2 . Web based English learning is beneficial to the improvement of my English .
- 3 . I learned more English language skills than I would have learned in a regular English course .
- 4 . I knew how to learn English well with the help of the Web .
- 5 . I gained confidence in my learning ability as an independent learner .
- 6 . I enjoyed doing online assignments better than traditional assignment .
- 7 . The teacher should assign online language tasks for us to accomplish .
- 8 . The teacher should stimulate my interest in learning English .
- 9 . The teacher should give students guidance for Web based English learning .
- 10 . To learn English well ,I myself should be responsible for English learning .
- 11 . In English learning ,students must be active and the teacher can only assist their English learning .
- 12 . It is my responsibility to promote effective Web based English learning .

III . According to the following statement ,please check the appropriate scale (1-5) .

(1) = This statement is never or almost never true of me ,(2) = This statement is usually not true of me ,(3) = This statement is sometimes true of me ,(4) = This statement is usually true of me , (5) = This statement is completely or almost completely true of me .

- 13 . I decided what I should do next in Web based English learning .
- 14 . I arranged out of class learning time in order to have adequate time to conduct Web based learning .
- 15 . I set up learning objectives based on the actual situation of my English study .
- 16 . I formulated my own study plan for Web based English learning .
- 17 . I cooperated with classmates to finish online learning tasks .
- 18 . I did online assignments which were not compulsory .
- 19 . I chose learning materials and resources on the Web .
- 20 . I evaluated my learning methods to find out the problems and solutions .

- 21 . I chose and used learning strategies appropriately .
- 22 . After finishing online assignments , I checked the answers with the help of Web based Learning System .
- 23 . I checked whether I had finished the online tasks planned in advance .
- 24 . When I met difficulty with English learning , I would ask the teacher for help .
- 25 . When I had questions , I would post them in BBS or Blog for help .
- 26 . After class , I communicated with the teacher through E-mail , QQ or Blog .
- 27 . I participated in online discussions .
- 28 . I exchanged opinions with classmates about the process of Web based learning .
- 29 . When some interesting information appeared on the Web , I first finished my learning tasks and then clicked them .
- 30 . I controlled the pace of Web based English learning .
- 31 . In Web based learning , I identified my weaknesses in English .
- 32 . I adjusted the contents of Web based learning based on different situations .
- 33 . I discussed online learning problems with classmates .
- 34 . I made appropriate online learning related decisions .
- 35 . After finishing online learning tasks for each unit , I assessed my English learning progress and performance with the help of Web based Learning System .
- 36 . When finding the learning methods not appropriate , I changed for more proper ones in time .
- 37 . I decided how long to spend on Web based learning .
- 38 . I made use of the Web to do test related exercises outside class .

(...continued from p .51)

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本刊更正声明

本刊2009年第3期刊发的《高中英语交互式阅读教学研究》(A Study on the Interactive Approach to the Teaching of English Reading in Senior High Schools) 一文的作者解冰和魏立明的拼音标注应分别为 Xie Bing 和 Wei Liming 。 另外解冰的工作单位应为东北师范大学外国语学院。该研究得到国家社科基金重点项目(07AYY003) 资助。特此更正说明, 并深表歉意。