Onboarding for autonomy

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Autonomy can be viewed as a social construct that develops through interdependence and interacting with the environment. This view requires a closer look at the context of learning and the complex interaction of learners with the available assets and with other learners. Individual learners tend to do what their immediate surroundings prompt them to do, rather than just rely on internal traits. This puts the onus on educators to better design or manipulate the contextual features of a program, while at the same time guiding and scaffolding individuals to make better choices, address habits, and become more aware of strategies. Using the design and implementation of an extensive reading program at a Japanese university as a starting point, this presentation will examine how socio-cultural features, pleasantness (cognitive and affective elements), visibility (salience of performance/proficiency) and accountability can together create a system that nurtures autonomy. Modern language programs need to more carefully consider the user experience of learners as they move through our educational systems. Recent research from various fields, including neuro-science, consumer psychology, behavioral economics, and human-computer interaction, in addition to language learning motivation, can all help in understanding that experience and improving its effectiveness. The presentation will look briefly at some ideas not generally applied in the world of language teaching, including choice architecture and habit formation, before discussing some specific activities that can be deployed in an EFL setting. These include a holistic system of formative assessment, effective use of public commitments and performances, mindset education, portfolios, and student behavior tracking and reflection sheets.

Keywords: Onboarding, Program design, Extensive reading.