



# The influences of group processes on learners' autonomous beliefs and behaviors ☆

Lilian Ya-Hui Chang

*Department of Foreign Language Instruction, Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages, No. 900,  
Mintsu First Road, 807, Kaohsiung City, Taiwan, ROC*

Received 30 January 2006; received in revised form 26 February 2007; accepted 5 March 2007

---

## Abstract

This study explores how group processes, such as group cohesiveness and group norms, influence an individual EFL learner's autonomy – their autonomous beliefs and actual autonomous behaviors. Questionnaires were administered to 152 Taiwanese university students from the English Department of a National Science and Technology University in southern Taiwan. The results from the questionnaires show that there is no correlation between group processes (group cohesiveness and group norms) and students' autonomous beliefs; however, there is indeed a correlation between group factors and students' autonomous behaviors. A dozen students from the 152 participants in this study were asked to give further information during an in-depth interview. During those interviews, several students commented that their classmates within the learner group are indeed important to their learning, as being around autonomous, motivated classmates positively influences their own autonomy.

© 2007 Elsevier B.V.. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Group dynamics; Group cohesiveness; Group norms; Learner autonomy; Foreign language classrooms

---

## 1. Introduction

For a long time, autonomy research has adopted an individualistic perspective. This tendency of looking at autonomy from an individualistic perspective certainly makes a

---

☆ This study is part of a doctoral research study and part of the data in this paper was presented at “ILA Oceania Conference 2005” Auckland, New Zealand, 9th–12th September 2005.

E-mail address: [yhchang@ccms.nkfust.edu.tw](mailto:yhchang@ccms.nkfust.edu.tw)

lot of sense as “the basis of learner autonomy is that the learner accepts responsibility for his or her learning” (Little, 1995, p. 175). Individual learners do have to decide what and how they want to learn, set their learning goals, reflect on their learning, and so forth. However, while learning may seem to be the endeavor of an individual, most learning situations, especially in schools or universities, take place in groups. The context of the group may exert many influences upon the individuals within. Through social interactions with their classmates within the group, individual learners may be interdependent, and thus affected significantly by their learner group. As Schmuck and Schmuck (2001) express it:

The students of a class are more than a collection of individuals. They form a social system with peers in which they experience interdependence, interaction, and common goal striving (p. 40).

Ushioda (2003) also points out that it is commonplace in communicative classrooms for learners to frequently exchange information with classmates within their group. These descriptions emphasize that the context of the learner group may exert many influences upon the individuals within.

Keen teachers have no doubt recognized the importance of group interactions in influencing the behavior of individual learners. Partly in response to teachers’ concerns in this regard, recent years have witnessed the publication of useful practically oriented texts on promoting good classroom dynamics and group dynamics (e.g., Dörnyei and Murphey, 2003; Hadfield, 1992). In addition, there has been an increasing number of more theoretical treatments of the topic (e.g., Dörnyei and Malderez, 1997; Ehrman and Dörnyei, 1998). Yet surprisingly, there have been few empirical studies on group dynamics or group processes. There is clearly a need for empirically grounded research to illuminate our understanding of how group processes, such as group cohesiveness and group norms, in a foreign language classroom may influence individual learners’ behaviors. The study reported in this paper is one attempt to respond to this need.

## 2. Literature review

This section discusses two main theoretical foundations of this study. It will begin with some group processes essential to this study. Then, since the study focuses on how these group processes may affect individual learners’ level of autonomy, background on learner autonomy will also be introduced.

### 2.1. Group processes

Group processes in this paper derive from group dynamics theory in language classrooms (for a review see, Dörnyei and Malderez, 1997; Ehrman and Dörnyei, 1998). Researchers of group dynamics define the term “group” in accordance with the definition established in social psychology. They refer to the *whole* class as one “group,” distinct from small groups teachers might configure during a lesson’s work activities *within* the class. This study maintains this usage of the term “group” – the entire language class is one group while group members refer to classmates within that same whole entity.

A further distinction is made between teacher-led groups in a school setting – the focus of this research – and other more informal groups. Informal groups such as study groups learners themselves might form or groups learners belong to through online communities

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/373759>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/373759>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)