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**The review of Haishen YU's PhD thesis
'Strategies for Student Autonomy in Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign
Language in Poland and China. Comparative studies' written under the supervision
of prof. zw. dr hab. Marii Czerepaniak-Walczak**

The issues of student strategies for autonomy in the process of learning English, discussed in the dissertation by Haisen YU, is very important for education and constitutes an important contribution to the development of pedagogical thought. Especially in times when education is focused on standardization, compliance, preparation for writing tests, the issue of strategies for autonomy is crucial for changing the current and dominant scheme. In the dissertation, the author presents three groups of strategies for autonomy: student, teacher and institutional. They all contribute to an environment that is conducive to, or not conducive to, the exercise of student autonomy. It is worth emphasizing the comparative aspect of the reviewed work, which is expressed in the comparison of the Chinese and Polish education systems. Such a juxtaposition of two school cultures has a significant cognitive value and enables the presentation of a wider context of education. The PhD student adopted critical pedagogy as the theoretical background of the thesis, which I consider to be the right decision, because it is a pedagogy of possibilities (Giroux 2011), which not only indicates problematic areas in education, but also studies them and proposes solutions. This theoretical perspective shows that in relations based on power and domination, there is also room for resistance (Foucault 1990, McLaren 2015).

The dissertation comprises 205 pages, of which the main text is 170 pages long. The main part of the work consists of an introduction, seven chapters, a final conclusion and a summary. The work also includes Acknowledgments, Annexes and a List of charts, tables and photos.

The actual part of the doctoral dissertation consists of three parts. The first part is theoretical and consists of two chapters (chapters 1 and 2). The author presents his understanding of autonomy and theoretical analyzes of this category. Mr. Haishen YU briefly

presents metacognitive, cognitive as well as social and affective strategies, which he developed on the basis of the works of O'Malley and Chamot (1995), Rebecca L. Oxford (1993), and Rebecca L. Oxford (2017). In chapter 2, the author presents the theoretical framework of his research project, which is constituted by critical pedagogy with particular emphasis on the works of Paulo Freire, as well as references to Henry A. Giroux. The PhD student points out that 'Conscientization, problem-posing, praxis, and dialogue are central to Freire's theory of critical pedagogy' (p. 44) and therefore it can be expected that through their prism an analysis of the collected empirical material will be made. Mr. Haishen YU also invokes in the theoretical assumptions of the work the perspective of political philosophy, where he tries to invoke I. Kant's understanding of autonomy. Unfortunately, this reference is very cursory. The author does not even refer to Kant's works, but he relies on other authors discussions. The PhD student also mentions other authors in this part, but it is very sketchy and confines itself to quoting literal definitions without analyzing them. The entire subsection (2.1) entitled *Personal autonomy - from the perspective of political philosophy* is on a little more than one page. It is definitely not enough to admit that it is one of the theoretical perspectives of the work. Another perspective indicated by the author is constructivism. Haishen YU brings up here the concept of 'more knowledgeable others' and 'zone of proximal development' by Vygotski. However, also in this case, the presentation is very sketchy.

The second part of the dissertation is a methodological chapter in which the author presents the methodological assumptions of the completed research project. This chapter is written coherently and logically and contains almost all the elements necessary to analyze the course of research. What draws attention, however, is the lack of a clearly defined research subject in this part, which is also reflected in the incorrectly formulated main problem. The author points out that the main problem of his research is 'What strategies are used by students, teachers, and schools in learning and teaching to foster learner autonomy?' (p. 51). It is a question of three different variables, which then form the basis for distinguishing specific questions:

1. 'What are Students' Learning Strategies for autonomy?
2. What are teachers' teaching strategies for student autonomy?
3. What are Institutional Strategies for Student Autonomy?' (p.51).

Perhaps the following formula of the main question would be more adequate: What strategies for autonomy occur in the process of education in Chinese and Polish schools? The author also defines only one research goal: 'the main of my research aim are educational practices of teaching and learning English as a second language for developing learners' autonomy in

different cultural contexts' (p. 51). In my opinion, it does not reflect the real purpose of the research, which is to identify and describe the strategies for autonomy in the process of teaching / learning English in Chinese and Polish schools. A practical goal may take place here, which is to develop guidelines for changing elements of educational reality that are inappropriate, in terms of the implementation of strategies for autonomy. This should be the aim of critical research. It is worth emphasizing that the author has chosen the right approach and research method. Undoubtedly, he is also aware of the purposefulness of choosing a qualitative method. The PhD student conducted ethnographic research in which he observed classes in Poland and China and interviewed teachers and students from both countries. He also watched his son and wife 'in order to get a full understanding of their situation' (p. 52).

The next part of the work consists of analytical chapters 5 to 7. The author precedes them with chapter 4, which outlines the educational background in China and Poland. This is a very good solution that introduces the reader to the meanders of education in both countries, which have different cultures. The PhD student also presents the most important changes in the education system in both countries, which took place in the 20th and 21st centuries. At the end of the chapter there is a summary in which the author summarizes the most important differences and similarities between the two educational cultures. At this point, I would like to add that summaries follow each empirical chapter, which helps the reader to structure the analyzes contained in each chapter.

Chapter 5 discusses student autonomy strategies manifested during the learning process. The first part of the chapter describes the strategies diagnosed among Chinese students, to which the author included: extra-curricular activities, memorization, note-taking, deduction, and questioning established social strategies. In the second part of Chapter 5, the author discusses the strategies of autonomy manifested by Polish students. These are: practicing language skills through social media, understanding, and remembering through senses and deductions, as well as discussing and questioning established social strategies for teaching English. The author discusses these strategies referring to the division into metacognitive, cognitive, and social / affective strategies adopted in the theoretical part of the dissertation, which shows that he can use the theory to analyze the collected data. The chapter ends with a part devoted to the discussion of the obtained research results around student strategies for autonomy. It is worth emphasizing that Haishen YU presents a lot of descriptions relating to specific strategies, and thus correctly grounds the adopted divisions in the data. The author also notices the different strategies of autonomy applied in both countries: 'Chinese students and Polish students develop their autonomy in different ways during their language learning. They

school and Polish school mostly know the popular teaching theories. But most Chinese teachers do not fully understand them or put them into use. The Polish teachers seems know more about the teaching theories and can practice the theories in teaching. But according to my observation, both the Chinese classes and Polish classes are still teacher centered '(p. 126). The conclusion has its justification in the analyzes conducted in the chapter, which indicates that the PhD student has the ability to analyze and interpret empirical material.

The last chapter is devoted to institutional strategies for supporting student autonomy. At this point, the PhD student perfectly demonstrates and deconstructs institutional practices. In my opinion, this is the best written part of the thesis. An interesting solution is the reference to film materials, which additionally justify the analyzes conducted in this chapter. I propose to attach to the video materials about the Chinese school, also such materials showing the Polish school.

In the section devoted to the discussion in chapter 7, the author notes: 'The Chinese are trying to control all students as a whole and the Polish school have the intention to treat students as individuals' (p. 163). Although both educational systems are systems based on traditional forms of education, Mr. Haishen YU noticed in his research a significant difference between them. The author writes: 'Chineses' parents, teachers, and students pay much attention to the examination s and neglect the other aspects of education, including morality, psychology, and so on. (...) The Polish school creates a relaxing atmosphere for students to study in. (...) From this point, the Polish school is better than the Chinese school in developing student autonomy '(p. 166).

The doctoral thesis is crowned with *Final Conclusion* and *Summary*. The author aptly concludes the situation of Polish and Chinese schools in terms of developing students' autonomy. He writes that the Chinese school environment is conducive to the development of dependent autonomy among students. Polish schools, on the other hand, allow the practice of interdependent autonomy. However, the conclusions do not compare the list of differences and similarities in the strategies for autonomy in Polish and Chinese schools. There are also no guidelines on what to do to improve the situation in both countries. The only recommendations given by the author concern Chinese schools.

Summing up, it should be emphasis once again that Mr. Haishen YU's dissertation is written correctly and contains all the elements typical for research works. This proves the methodological and research awareness of the PhD student. Mr. YU also showed research insight and extensive knowledge of the phenomenon under study. The author has done a lot of work in conducting ethnographic research in two countries. He interviewed 4 teachers and 14

students in Poland and 7 teachers and 10 students in China. He also conducted 3 group interviews with 16 students in China (p. 52). The ethical awareness of PhD student should also be emphasized, which is expressed in the discussion of ethical issues related to the research project presented in the dissertation. The reviewed thesis also has great application value, as it can be the basis for verifying the methods of creating conditions for autonomous learning at school.

However, I have a few comments that, in my opinion, a PhD student should consider when preparing a book. Firstly, it would be worth showing in the book the content analysis diagrams that can be created in the ATLAS.ti program, which the doctoral student used for the analyzes. Second, it would be interesting to know how students and teachers understand autonomy. These definitions are difficult to deduce from the thesis. Although, the teacher interview questionnaire includes questions that address this aspect (p. 195), students' questionnaire not. This situation surprises me a bit especially in PhD thesis that focuses on students autonomy. Third, I would recommend that the author should avoid creating single-letter subsections (see subsection 7.3.3). Fourth, I propose to go deep in the interpretation of the empirical material. It is worth referring more to the background constituting the theoretical framework of the thesis.

Summing up, I can state that the PhD dissertation of Haishen YU, written under the supervision of prof. dr hab. Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak, meets the requirements for dissertations contained in Art. 187 paragraph. 1 and 2 of the Law on Higher Education and Science form July 20, 2018 (Journal of Laws 2018, item 1668, as amended). I am applying for admission of Haishen YU to further stages of the procedure.

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