

学習者の「自主性」に関する一考察

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Learner Autonomy: How Spoon-Fed Learners Could Be Transformed

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要 旨 外国語学習を成功させる条件の一つに学習者の「自主性」が上げられる。この「自主性」については“learner autonomy”と言うテーマでいろいろ論じられている。たとえば「自主性」とは教える事が可能なものか否か。教えられるとすればどのような方法が効果的か。本稿は英語学習者が、教職課程を履修することにより、英語力がいかに重要であるかを深く再認識し、積極的に英語学習と英語指導法の勉強に励んだ本学の3年生13人について観察・分析したものである。この学生達が担当教師の予想以上の学習量を自宅でこなし、それぞれ自分なりの達成感を得られた主な理由は、以下の4項目に集約できるものと考えられる。(1)ほとんど全員の学生が明確な目的意識（英語教師になりたいと言う願望）を持っていたこと。(2)数ヶ月後に迫った教育実習に焦点を当て、集中できたこと。(3)教育実習校の生徒・先生方に対する責任感を強く抱いていたこと。(4)小人数のクラスで各々の学生が程よい競争心を持ち、意識を高め合い助け合えたこと。

Introduction

Taking responsibility for one's own learning is one of the most crucial aspects in successful learning, especially in foreign language learning since it requires immense amount of time and endless effort, both inside and outside the classroom. To put it simply, it is almost impossible to become a successful language learner without acquiring self-managed learning skills and strategies: that means becoming autonomous learners.

Is autonomy teachable? Little (1990) advocates that autonomy is not something that teachers can do for learners and it is not another teaching method. Hill (1994) says, however, “. . . several commentators have indicated that introduction of learner autonomy can take many different forms. Paradoxically, but perhaps inevitably, many learner autonomy initiatives have been teacher-led and the literature focuses principally on the means by which teachers can enable learners to take increasing charge of their own learning” (p. 213).

Suppose autonomy is a teachable aspect of language teaching, then how can it be approached? Learner autonomy is not a single, easily described behavior but can be revealed in various learning behaviors and activities. In this paper, I would like to share my observations and reflections on one

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unique group of third-year female university students that has given me encouraging clues to foster learner autonomy. At the end, several implications are drawn from the results of this study.

Background: *Thirteen English-major students in the teacher-training program*

Those thirteen students were finishing up their second year when they were informed that their university was accredited to start the teacher-training program from April 1994. It would not be easy but possible for the students to complete twenty-one extra required credits for the program by their graduation. If they successfully completed the program, they would be eligible to take examinations to become junior and senior high school English teachers. Since the program is designed for a three-year period, finishing the extra credits in two years would be very challenging for them, but they decided to enroll in the program.

In order to catch up, they had to take some extra required courses with over ninety second-year students in big lecture rooms, but eventually they managed to finish most of the lecture courses in which they were mainly spoon-fed teaching theory and educational psychology. One of the hardest parts of the program left for them was that they had to take an intensive methodology course during their spring break to prepare for their student teaching, a nerve-racking and totally new experience, in the first term of the next academic year.

The intensive methodology course: Five days/10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Goals:

1. To provide the students with a variety of activities to experience hands-on teaching skills.
2. To enhance their self-managed learning skills and strategies so that they would be equipped with good habits of self-learning, which is an important quality to be a successful teacher.
3. To sustain and increase their motivation--they had different reasons (I consider these reasons as some sort of motivation) to enroll in the program; therefore, it was imperative to sustain the motivation and if possible, it should be enhanced.
4. To polish the students' English through learning how to teach the language.

In this intensive course, different methods and practical teaching techniques were introduced hand in hand, and the merits and demerits of the methods were discussed. Then, the students actually practiced the methods and techniques in front of their peers. What they needed was practice to get familiar and comfortable with teaching. In addition, they had to focus on their English which is, in fact, the most important asset for their student teaching. Since they were used to lectures, i.e. being passive learners, I intentionally tried to get them involved in student-centered activities; for example, having them plan a lesson in a written form, develop teaching materials for the lesson, tape-record their presentation of the lesson and present it before their peers. Finally, there was a feedback session in which they were encouraged to give "honest" comments that would help the presenter improve her performance. The main thrust was not to "lecture" them on methodology

but have them go through diverse activities and procedures so that hopefully they would be able to apply the acquired teaching methods and techniques to their future teaching.

In the light of “lecture vs. hands-on experience”, Murdoch (1994) states that “trainees whose methodological knowledge is mainly communicated to them via a lecture mode of presentation are likely to adopt a transmission style of teaching with their own pupils later on, By contrast, hands-on experience of diverse activities and procedures in the teacher education classroom will provide an excellent basis for trainees to determine the type of activities and groupings that can be usefully utilized in the ELT classroom” (p. 254). It would need to be proven if what the students have learned in the course provides a good basis for their future teaching performance or not; however, it cannot deny the value of what Murdoch describes above.

In order for the students to enhance their self-managed learning skills outside the classroom, the intensive course was held every other day and they were given a “home-study day” between the classes to focus on their assignments which required time and critical thinking procedures. They were also told that “home-study days” plus the weekend were extremely important to use wisely and effectively; otherwise, they would not be able to finish four credits in eleven days.

Those students were motivated to enroll in the teacher-training program and somehow they came along this far--they had finished about two thirds of the required credits. Therefore, one of the concerns was how to sustain their motivation. To do that, it was necessary to find out what kind of motivation, i.e. reasons they had when they started the program and if they had been changed. (Taking the teacher-training program at Japanese universities does not necessarily mean that the students are interested in becoming teachers.) According to their short essays, only a few out of the thirteen students decided to seek an English teaching position, but the rest of the students didn't have confidence in their English ability. Some of them said if it were possible they would like to, and the others said that they were interested in the teaching of English, but they could not decide to become an English teacher yet. However, something that was clear was that all of them showed their interest in the teaching of English. That was good enough to start the course, but I was concerned whether or not they would be able to keep their motivation through the course since this type of intensive course could easily become overwhelming and discouraging.

However, when we finished the half of the course, I noticed things were going well: the majority of the students appeared to be motivated, doing good jobs in their assignments and in the classroom. During a reflection session on the last day, most of them evaluated their work with satisfaction and a couple of the students expressed their feelings of fulfillment in tears, reflecting on what they had achieved and learned with their peers during the course. All of the students' work exceeded my expectation, that is, they were able to keep their motivation high enough to manage the demanding work in the intensive course.

When they handed in their position papers in April in the follow-up methodology course--a student-teaching preparation course concentrating on practicing simulation classes and developing teaching materials just before their student teaching, I discovered their accomplishments and con-

tinuing interest in the teaching of English in their papers. Therefore, I decided to conduct a survey to discover why and how those students were able to keep their motivation high and develop self-managed learning skills.

The following is a survey of those thirteen students conducted in April 1995. In order to be able to reach the truth of the matter as close as possible, the answers of the questionnaire were written in Japanese and translated in English in their own words. The intention of the survey was explained both orally and in a written form.

Student Awareness Survey (April, 1995)

A selection of the students' comments is listed below.

To my special students:

Being very impressed with the amount of time and effort you had put into the intensive methodology course in February, I decided to conduct this survey. To be honest with you, I thought only five out of the thirteen students would be capable of doing student teaching in terms of your English abilities when we started the course. However, I realized that I was wrong in this perspective in the middle of the course. All of you were trying your best: you seemed to have spent more time and effort on your preparations and assignments at home than I expected. As a result, you have experienced a very significant learning process, that is, getting actively involved in "learning how to learn", which I highly value. This was very rewarding to observe.

Reflecting on what you have accomplished in the course, I would like to learn why you were able to keep your motivation high and in fact many of you were more motivated during the course. Keep this in mind and answer the following questions.

Question 1: You may have felt your attitude changed--more preferable attitude toward learning in the teacher-training program since your decision was made. When was the most crucial time or what made you think you needed to study more seriously. (For example, the orientation of the program, required subjects, etc.)

Answers:

- When I visited Suginami High School.¹
- When I observed several English classes at Suginami High, I realized that I would have to face student teaching soon, which made me scared. I felt a big responsibility for my student teaching. I am not sure this was a kind of motivation or fear.
- When I took the English proficiency test² given last December, I felt I really needed to change my passive attitude toward learning because my English wasn't good enough to become an English teacher candidate.

¹ The students experienced a half-day school visit at the high school. This visit was designed to enhance their awareness and help them assume responsibility for their student teaching in the coming academic year.

² The test was to diagnose if the students had acquired high-school English proficiency.

- When I started analyzing what kind of English I learned in junior and senior high school.³ (This was given as a prerequisite assignment for this methodology course.)
- When I visited the Ministry of Education and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Office to find out requirements for the teacher-training program and how teachers are hired in Tokyo.
- When we started a four-day intensive orientation for student teaching just before this methodology course.
- When I was asked to write how seriously I wanted to become an English teacher.⁴

Question 2: From February 6 to February 24, you experienced two kinds of intensive programs: one was with 145 students who majored in home economics and the other one was with only thirteen English-major students. When did you feel you had to study more seriously? What made you motivated?

Answers:

- When a Suginami High School teacher gave us a lecture on student teaching, he was very straightforward to tell us that we should be aware of what kind of responsibility we would have for the school and its pupils whom we would work with.
When I visited Suginami High, I felt I would be a “teacher” soon in student-teacher training. This made me seriously think about my responsibility as a student teacher. I realized that I had not thought about this kind of responsibility before.
- When I found out today’s junior and senior high school situations at the intensive orientation for student teaching and also when I listened to the lecturers who were very eager to tell us about the situations.
- Both having observed several English classes at Suginami High and studying and discussing the textbook in the methodology course with my motivated classmates, I got motivated.
- When I started asking myself what kind of problems Japan’s English education has--this was the time I was asked to analyze high-school English.
- When I was given the syllabus for the intensive methodology course, I found out that there was a lot of work to do. I thought I wouldn’t be able to pass this course if I didn’t study real-

³ Japanese university students in general blame their six-year English education at high school for their poor English proficiency. Therefore, it might be helpful if they can look at the curricula more objectively to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the English education. They were asked to analyze their high school textbooks and write findings in a report.

⁴ Since their purposes to get a teaching license were not necessarily to become an English teacher, I made them realize that whether they would decide to become an English teacher or not, they have to go through student teaching, which requires extraordinary time and effort from other people, i.e. teachers and pupils whom they would work with for two weeks. They needed to know that they should not waste those people’s time and energy, that is, they must clearly understand what kind of responsibility they have for those who are involved in obtaining of their teaching licenses.

ly hard.

- The day when we started the methodology course--my classmates looked very motivated, which threatened me but at the same time encouraged me.
- The methodology course gave us a great opportunity to listen to our classmates' sincere educational views and to discuss our ideas or opinions freely. Since it was a small class, we were able to get to know each other, which made us cooperate successfully. We also felt good stimuli from each other.
- The small class enabled us and the teacher to work closely, which gave me a very good stimulus and I gradually felt I wanted to be a winner in this class.

Question 3: It was obvious that you spent great amount of time on your studies at home. (a) Why do you think you were able to put so much time in studying at home? (The home-study days were provided for you to experience self-managed learning, one of the important qualities to become a teacher.) (b) How long did you study a day? (c) Were there any differences between this class and other classes in terms of preparation?

Answers: (a)

- This self-study activity wasn't painstaking because I was spending time on something "I" was interested in.
- The methodology class was held every other day, so I was able to prepare well and eventually found it very important to spend time on preparation and to review what I learned before.
- The class was very demanding, so I forced myself to study all day when I was home.
- The purpose of the course was clear: we couldn't be passive learners in this type of class. In other words, we needed to invest a lot of time in self-study.
- We had to present and share what we learned through our self-study in class. After that, my classmates and the teacher gave me their comments, which made me want to improve my performance. So, I studied more at home.
- By preparing and reading the textbook, I gained new knowledge about English education that I am very interested in. Also, getting stimulated by the class and the classmates, I was able to study at home imagining if I were an English teacher, I would like to conduct a class in this way and that way. This was very pleasant and kept me studying at home.
- If I wanted to explain one aspect of English grammar, for example, I needed so much time to find the way to explain, thinking about how high school students would understand my explanation; consequently, I needed a lot of time to prepare for the class.

Answers: (b)

- One out of the thirteen students said that she could not spend as much time as her classmates did due to some other priority during the period, but the rest of the students spent quite amount of time as follows.

When they had no class (self-study day)

1. all day …… 50%
2. 2/3 day …… 40%
3. half day …… 10%

After class

1. 6 hours or more …… 20%
2. about 6 hours …… 40%
3. about 5 hours …… 40%

Answers: (c)

- I spent much more time on preparation for this class than for other classes I had taken before.
- My attitude toward the course was much more sincere.
- This course was imperative for my future profession.
- I had to think hard to create something new out of nothing.
- I was able to see how my classmates studied--this wasn't possible in a big class. My classmates' impressive work encouraged me to put more hours in studying.

Question 4: Were you satisfied with your attitude toward the course and the amount of study? (Be objective. You may compare this aspect with your studying habits in other courses.)

Answers:	(overall attitude)	(the amount of work)
1. very satisfied	…… 8 students	5 students
2. satisfied	…… 2	4
3. needed to be improved	…… 1	3
4. no	…… 1	1
5. don't know	…… 1	0

Question 5: If you answered “Yes” in Question 4, what has brought the satisfaction?

Answers:

- I didn't think my teacher would check on me whether I studied or not at home. That wasn't important but I always thought how I should explain things in my simulation class so that my would-be pupils can easily understand what I am explaining. I think I studied for myself not for grades nor the teacher's check.
- The feedback on my presentations from my classmates and teacher was very helpful to improve my teaching skills. It wasn't always comfortable to listen to the feedback, but this opportunity also made my classmates understand me better, which was very satisfying and helped me get motivated.
- My attitude toward the last simulation class has brought me a great satisfaction because I tried very hard to think about all possible ways to make a good lesson.

- My English is not as good as my classmates', so I tried to improve other skills to become a good student teacher. I'm satisfied with my guts.
- I got a lot of stimulation from my classmates, so I had no choice but tried to work hard.
- This course was not how other people evaluated me but I was the one to do that; therefore, I worked very hard, which gave me a great satisfaction. Also, the course was student-centered and student autonomy was very much encouraged so I was able to learn myself.
- I felt I accomplished something important for myself. Even though it was a short time, I spent most of my time in studying. This was very satisfying.
- My serious attitude toward learning and the amount of time I spent on my preparation.

Question 6: Please write anything helpful to the purpose of this survey.

Comments:

- I've realized that I used to study for grades and entrance examinations, but I have finally learned that we study for ourselves. I should not forget this.
- This small class brought us several positive effects: group cooperation and a comfortable learning environment.
- My dream, becoming an English teacher, helped me study very positively.
- Our discussion, presentation and feedback sessions gave me confidence and enjoyment.
- Through learning how to become an English teacher, I have become more interested in education. I'm very glad I challenged myself in this program.
- All classes should make students get motivated to study.
- In this course, I couldn't stop studying. I found it strange.
- I've learned that the teacher has a very important role to encourage students to become confident individuals. Also it is vital for the teacher and students to have a good relationship to accomplish the goal.

Observations/Reflections

The students' comments explain well what they have experienced and how they have become more responsible learners. I should, however, like to add my observations and reflections.

1. *Impressive amount of studying hours at home*

This was more than I expected. As mentioned in the students' comments, most of them devoted themselves to long hours of studying at home. One of the reasons for this is that their goals were very clear, ie. they had to learn teaching techniques and pass the course to be able to start two-week student teaching between the end of May and the beginning of October this year, 1995. In other words, their goals were not too far distance. According to the research surveyed by Brundage and MacKeracher (1980), adult learners are less interested in learning for learning's sake than in learn-

ing to achieve some immediate or not-too-far-distant life goals. Since they were eager to complete the program to be eligible candidates for high school English teachers, they knew they could not waste any time but needed to prepare themselves well for their student teaching.

Another reason might be moderate competitiveness among the students. Fortunately, the class was small and all of them had the same goal so that they were able to easily see how their peers studied and performed in the classroom. In the questionnaire, they voiced that they felt and observed their classmates working hard, so they did not want to get behind them. They stimulated each other, which helped them become mature learners together.

2. *In-depth learning*

Another impressive learning behavior I observed was their elaborate and creative presentations for different class activities by which they got involved in a deeper learning mode. One of the activities most of the students gave their special effort to was preparing simulation classes. They were asked to conduct a half-hour simulation class twice during the period. Their presentations spoke for themselves—they tried to use all they had: creativity, personality and talents in music, art, etc.

According to their comments, many of them thought through how they should present the lesson and explain some aspects of English to their peers, which called for reviewing their English in depth. They were concerned about how well they could present it. This process required time and critical thinking, which was, in fact, a deeper learning process. In the light of in-depth learning, a student said, “Even if I understand what I’m going to explain, that doesn’t mean my would-be pupils understand it, so I spent a lot of time finding different ways to explain it clearly and easily.”

Another example of in-depth learning was a listening test that one student made, focusing on several prepositions which she always had trouble with. She selected well-known and popular movie scripts among young people and made short cloze exercises to fill the blanks with those prepositions. At the end there was a listening comprehension part which she asked her native-speaking friend of English to read a passage three times at different speeds. She also added her explanation: how she should explain some of the grammatical aspects of the test in details so that she ended up with four to five pages. This assignment was just an experiment to make a short quiz, so I never expected such elaborate work. Planning, collecting materials and organizing them, she must have gone through a deeper learning process, without question.

3. *Sustained and increased motivation*

It is true that motivation is not easily measured, but Gardner (1985) defines motivation as follows. “When we state that an individual is motivated, we infer this on the basis of two classes of observations. First, the individual displays some goal-directed activity, and second that person expends some effort.... In short, motivation involves four aspects, a goal, effortful behaviour, a desire to attain the goal and favourable attitudes toward the activity in question” (p. 50). If this definition is adopted to measure those students’ motivation, they were motivated to begin with and sustained

and increased their motivation. There are several reasons to account for this.

First and foremost, they were really sold on the idea that they needed to be equipped with teaching skills; otherwise, they would be the ones to suffer in their student teaching. In other words, they knew they would not be able to survive in the totally new experience without acquiring teaching skills.

They were also told from time to time by different teachers in the program that teachers at those designated high schools have to spend enormous time and energy on their student teachers. What this meant became very clear to them when they visited Suginami High School. At the school, they were very candidly told that they should not bother to be there if they were not seriously thinking about becoming teachers. This statement was very effective to make them realize that they had to put all their energy into their preparation for student teaching. Many students mentioned this visit was a real awakening event for them to study harder.

Another reason lies in the small-class dynamics which enabled them to observe each other closely and develop group cooperation. Many students in the course expressed how helpful and encouraging it was to have worked in the small group. They really appreciated and learned from their peer feedback. By giving and receiving feedback, they have learned how to respect and support their peers. The group dynamics of giving and receiving feedback played a significant role in their motivation. Their classmates became great inspirations for them.

If they had attended a lecture with one hundred students, they might not have been able to experience such cooperative and supportive class dynamics, which made them very productive. Evans and Dion's (1991) studies addressing the relationship between group cohesion and group performance discovered a significant positive relationship between the two variables, indicating that cohesive groups, on average, tend to be more productive than noncohesive groups.

The students also mentioned that the small class enabled them to see the teacher's enthusiasm and care more vividly than in a big class; therefore, they felt that they should not disappoint the teacher but respond well. They also received more close attention from the teacher than in a big class, which they appreciated and became more actively involved in their learning.

4. Responsibilities of the teacher and students

It is a well-known fact that teachers cannot teach learners everything they need to know in class. Particularly, this methodology course was very short, which limited what we could accomplish. Therefore, I tried several experiments to enhance the students' self-managed learning skills.

One of the welcome results derived from my candid attitude toward the students and the course. My intention was to emphasize the fact that they had a big responsibility to use their all energy in the intensive course, not only for themselves, but also for me. In the first orientation held one month before the course, I told them that I decided to teach this group for two reasons. One is that I was very impressed by the fact that they were still trying to finish the program and would spend their spring break for two intensive courses. The other reason was that unless someone would teach this

methodology course before April, they would not be able to do student teaching scheduled in the first semester. Therefore, I decided to spend “my study time” to take this responsibility. I told them that most colleagues of mine were doing their research work this time of the year. Also I added that this was totally my volunteer work so I would not get paid even though they paid some extra money for the program. I made it very clear that they should not waste my time and effort. This straightforward talk was surprisingly well taken and effective. Many of them stated in the questionnaire that they felt responsible to work hard, not to waste my energy.

Another good example that the students felt great responsibility for their own learning was the visit at Suginami High School. Many of them realized that they had tremendous responsibility for their student teaching which would affect some other people for good or bad. When they were told in a candid manner that they should not be student teaching if they were not truly interested in becoming an English teacher, they were really shaken and awakened. They understood that taking care of one student teacher for two weeks is quite a burden on any high school.

The above examples display that students need to be sometimes told that their learning attitudes affect others. Being learners, they are also responsible for other people who are involved in their learning. Having paid tuition does not mean they can do just what they want in their learning. Many Japanese students seem to think that teachers are ones to always give, but they need to understand teachers are not always “givers”, but they also deserve to get something back from their students, i.e. good work. A candid talk from time to time seems to be an effective way to awaken learner responsibility.

Implications

This study has demonstrated several factors which are of key importance in empowering learners to become more actively involved in their own learning. The following several implications are based on findings drawn from the results of the study.

1. Having a clear and immediate goal helps adult learners to enhance autonomy.
2. Teachers can lead learner autonomy initiatives. To do that, they ought to know where students' motivation comes from so that they can design motivating classroom activities and assignments which help students promote autonomy.
3. Classroom dynamics play an essential role in active learning. The small-sized class provides a cooperative environment which helps learners sustain their motivation. A feeling of being supported in their difficulties with learning is a key to successful learning.
4. The good relationship between the learner and the teacher promotes learner autonomy.
5. Being able to focus on and give time to one's own studies seems to bring satisfaction. If learners are fulfilled by their studies, this also fosters their motivation. In this sense, motivation would be a consequence, rather than a cause of success.
6. Giving and receiving feedback from both peers and the teacher seems to develop critical

thinking and deeper learning. Furthermore, this activity would encourage individual learners to cooperate to work toward their goals.

Conclusion

In this paper, learner autonomy is considered as a desirable goal. Then, why is it desirable? Cotterall (1995) defines that “autonomy is considered desirable for philosophical, pedagogical, and practical reasons. The philosophical rationale behind autonomy is the belief that learners have the right to make choices with regard to their learning. Furthermore, many writers (see Knowles: 1975) have pointed out the importance of preparing learners for a rapidly changing future, in which independence in learning will be vital for effective functioning in society. Helping learners become more independent in their learning is one way of maximizing their life choices” (p. 219).

One of the main goals of the course was to have the students realize the importance of self-managed learning and help them become autonomous learners. If they want to become teachers, this quality is vital for their future profession. During the course, the students’ awareness was raised and they have become quite autonomous: their long studying hours, elaborate preparations and creative presentations speak for themselves. This demonstrates that learner autonomy is a teachable learning behavior which could be successfully acquired through various kinds of learning activities, both inside and outside the classroom.

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