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Editorial by Jo Mynard, Kanda University of International Studies, Japan

This is the 18th issue of SiSAL Journal and includes contributions from Australia, the USA, Iran, Turkey, the UK, Japan, and Ecuador.

The first article by **Nga Thanh Nguyen, Donna Tangen** and **Denise Beutel** is a study that explores how the concept of learner autonomy is understood and used in Vietnamese higher educational settings.

In the second article, **Jordan Dreyer** describes a study designed to investigate the effectiveness of using an online vocabulary study tool, Quizlet, in an urban high school language arts class in the USA.

The third article, by **Afshin Mohammadi,** reports on research which investigates learners' views and practices with regards to two facilities at an Iranian university

The article by **Tarik Uzun** describes a study designed to identify the learning styles of students who use the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) on a regular basis at a state university in Turkey.

In the first instalment of a new three-part column (edited by Katherine Thornton), **Michael Allhouse** describes the changes that have taken place at the SAC his institution in the UK, and how he responded to those changes.

Drawing on theories of motivation and self-regulation, **Mayumi Abe, Satomi Yoshimuta, Seigakuin,** and **Huw Davies** present a visual tool developed in Japan that can be used in advising and teaching.

In their short article, **Craig Manning, Brian R. Morrison**, and **Tara McIlroy** present three different perspectives on using Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in educational contexts within Japan.

Finally, **Janine Berger** describes a 'work in progress' whereby EFL students in Ecuador are encouraged to take their learning beyond the classroom by using game-like learning techniques.

We hope you enjoy this issue and maybe consider submitting a paper for our upcoming special issue on 'dialogue and advising and self-access learning' to be published in March, 2015. Details can be found on the website: http://sisaljournal.org/for-authors/dialogue-and-advising/

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Exploring the Concept of Learner Autonomy in Cross-Cultural Research

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Abstract

This research explores how the concept of learner autonomy is understood and used in Vietnamese higher educational settings. Data were collected through interviews in Vietnamese with four university lecturers in Hanoi, Vietnam and then reported in an English language thesis. The problems confronted by the lecturers were in understanding the concept of learner autonomy, the complexities of translation equivalence for the concept from one language to another, and the impact of culture in interpreting the concept of learner autonomy. The paper concludes with recommendations for educators to be sensitive to cultural and linguistic considerations when transferring concepts from one culture to another.

Key words: learner autonomy, cross-cultural research, higher education, Vietnamese context

While various concepts and models have been introduced (mainly by Western researchers) into Asian contexts for quite some time (Yang, 2012), many of these concepts may be not only messy in their original contexts, but may also be contradictory to Asian cultural contexts. A better understanding of how or even if, such concepts can be used in different cultures needs further exploration. This research focuses on exploring the concept of learner autonomy in Vietnamese higher education, addressing the questions: *How do Vietnamese lecturers understand the concept of learner autonomy?* and *How do Vietnamese lecturers incorporate the concept of learner autonomy in their pedagogy?* As we will argue in this paper, before lecturers can enact beliefs about any learning concept (e.g. learner autonomy), they must first understand that concept. Without such understanding any idea introduced is unlikely to be taken up by lecturers, particularly a concept foreign in language and culture. This paper reports on three

considerations: the complexities of the construct, the impact of cultural pedagogy, and translation equivalence of the construct of learner autonomy.

Literature Review

Complexities of the construct of learner autonomy

Learner autonomy has been described as a complicated construct and sometimes a multifaceted concept. Holec (1981) broadly defined learner autonomy as a learner's "ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3). Since then, the concept has been modified and developed to suit particular research paradigms. For example, researchers have defined learner autonomy as 'capacity' (Little, 1991) or 'right' (Benson, 1997) as a substitute for the word 'ability' in Holec's (1981) definition. Others use terms like: 'take control of' (Benson, 1997), 'take responsibility for' or 'be responsible for' (Dang, 2010), instead of 'take charge of' as with Holec's original definition. Dang (2010) suggests that these changes seem to be "a matter of linguistics only, and the semantic aspects of the construct remain unchanged" (p. 5). The authors of this paper, however, contend that different definitions of learner autonomy change the nature of what is meant by the concept and these changes define how learner autonomy is subsequently understood and applied at the classroom level, especially when it is a new concept in a new context like Vietnam.

The impact of cultural pedagogy

The authors begin by acknowledging the diversity of Asian cultures, traditions and histories as unique to their local environments. It would be an oversimplification to talk about Asian cultures or contexts without also acknowledging the diversity of Asian cultures, traditions and histories. However, it is important to acknowledge that "a core set of common claims which include: respect for authority; acceptance of hierarchy; an orderly society loyalty to family and nation" (Knight, 2007, p. 46) are generally common cultural features of Asian countries. While there is a growing appreciation for the diverse cultures, languages and beliefs found in the Asian region there is also recognition that there are some similarities that cultures in this area of the world share, and these might be shared differently to how such customs are enacted in Western countries. Vygotsky

(1978) suggests that every phenomenon has a history that changes in form and structure mediated through human-environment interaction. Education in Vietnam has been depicted as having traditional approach to teaching and learning. If concepts such as learner autonomy are taken into Vietnamese education by Western researchers, we must consider how the concept is introduced, by whom, and how it is constructed and deconstructed locally. According to Yang (2012), satisfactory discussion about incorporating concepts by Western researchers into Asian contexts is quite limited.

Pedagogy in Vietnam has begun to incorporate more concepts and practices used in other nations. However, it remains to be seen how these concepts mandated by the government are enacted in the classroom. For example, in Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training (Moet) is the only organisation that issues curricula for all educational systems. These top-down directives continue to be a strong feature in Vietnamese education and have guided the pedagogy of lecturers for many years. Generally, the content of learning, including objectives and activities/tasks that students undertake in class, is predetermined (Nguyen, 2010). Because of the bureaucratic constraints in the educational system, neither lecturers nor students are able to make pedagogical changes even if they are interested in doing so (Pham, 2006). By the same token it cannot be taken as a given that policies created by bureaucrats will be taken up as classroom practice. There is much recent research on resistance teachers put up when faced with change in various ways, such as curriculum change (Mutch, 2012) or professional development (Mohamed, 2008). Without a clear reason provided for change or support in helping teachers make changes, resistance can block the effective enactment of this change. The authors of the current paper suggest that introducing the concept of learner autonomy into policy without helping lecturers understand the concept and how to integrate it into their pedagogy might meet with resistance.

Traditional Asian culture in countries such as Vietnam influences lecturers' and students' beliefs that they have certain roles and responsibilities in the class and that they should follow the traditional way of teaching (Ho & Crookall, 1995) which, until recently, has not included learner autonomy. Pham (2008), for example, argued that many teaching institutions have failed to replace the traditional teacher-centred approach used at Vietnamese higher education institutions partly because Vietnamese lecturers are not

happy to transfer their roles from knowledge transmitters to learning facilitators. Recent approaches to teaching and learning, especially in English-as-a-foreign language (EFL) pedagogy, however, emphasise the role of learners as autonomous participants and place the lecturer as the facilitator in this process. This change in classroom dynamics is generally at odds and conflicts with Asian cultural practices (Dardjowidjojo, 2001). Little (1991) describes how lecturers in Asia believe the education system is "so all-powerful and inflexible that autonomous learning can never happen" (p. 40). It can be argued that this 'traditional' approach results in less negotiation or collaboration between lecturers and students and inhibits learner autonomy being incorporated as part of the classroom pedagogy.

Difficulties of translation equivalence of concepts

A critical concern about incorporating concepts into different cultures and contexts is translation equivalence. Sutrisno, Nguyen and Tangen (2013) describe the many complexities in translating a foreign-origin concept, such as learner autonomy, into a new language. While some sort of equivalence of understanding can be obtained, there are so many language and culture-specific factors in the process of translation that achieving absolute equivalence is likely unattainable (Baker, 2011). A word or a lexical item in the source language may have more than one equivalent in the target language and vice versa (Sutrisno et al., 2013). As indicated above, learner autonomy is a term that is not easy to define, and many different definitions of learner autonomy exist in the literature. The authors found that this situation was mirrored in the Vietnamese context where there were several different definitions of learner autonomy, as described below.

In educational documents in Vietnam, the phrase "tính tích cực, chủ động, năng lực tự học, tự nghiên cứu của người học" [Learners (characteristic of being) engaged and motivated in learning and capacity to learn on their own or without the support from the teacher] is used in a government document (Prime Minister, 2003, p. 7). "Ý thức tự giác trong học tập, năng lực tự học, tự nghiên cứu" [The characteristics and situation of being responsible for learning, the ability to learn on their own] is used in the law on education (Vietnamese Assembly, 2005, p. 12). It is important to note that in these two important educational documents, the terms with the word "tính" which refers to a learner's

characteristics of being responsible for their learning, are favoured. In addition, the words "tự học tập" [learning on one's own] and "tự nghiên cứu" [self-study] are common in these two documents. The equivalent term for *learner autonomy* in Vietnamese that is generally used is "chủ động của người học" which is translated as "the autonomy of the learner". However, this translated term is too general to understand because it does not identify what dimension of learner autonomy is being discussed, which is necessary in Vietnamese. It is important to note that while the various meanings of the Vietnamese translations of learner autonomy as described above are bound to result in different interpretations of the term, identifying the specific perspective of Vietnamese language users through their word usage is paramount to understanding how they interpret the term in policy documents and in teaching practices. The problem may become more complicated for educators in certain Asian contexts where information to explore or clarify concepts, such as learner autonomy, are not easily accessible due to the lack of support or lack of access to up-to-date literature or databases in the field.

In summary, difficulties with the definition of learner autonomy, which may come from the translation equivalence of the construct and the cultural factors was considered in this research to explore Vietnamese lecturers' understanding of learner autonomy, and subsequently how they applied that learning to their pedagogy.

Method for the Research

This paper is part of a larger PhD project completed by the first author. This paper reports on data from interviews with four participants, Thu, Ngan, Bich, and Ha who were English-as-a-foreign language (EFL) lecturers at four large universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. Semi-structured interviews and classroom observations of teaching were conducted individually with each of the four participants. Initial interviews were conducted prior to classroom observations to get background information about the teachers' understandings of learner autonomy. Follow-up in-depth interviews were conducted after each classroom observation as stimulated recall interviews (SRI) (Calderhead, 1981). Video stimulated recall (VSR) is a research technique in which research participants view a video sequence and are then invited to reflect on their thinking during the video recorded event (Calderhead, 1981; Lyle, 2003). In general, the

technique of stimulated recall gives participants a chance to view themselves in action in order to help recall their thoughts about what is happening on the screen. It is important to note that in order to enable the participants to express their views easily, the researcher invited them to choose the language they would like to use in the interviews. While all lecturers are teachers of English, all chose to be interviewed in Vietnamese. It has been suggested that the person doing the translation in cross-cultural research should be familiar with both the language and the culture of the participants (Liamputtong, 2010). Therefore, in the current study, the researcher was Vietnamese and also a lecturer in EFL in Vietnam, so she was familiar with the specific cultural context of the research. The data in this paper will focus on the teacher interviews.

All semi-structured interviews were transcribed and translated by the researcher (this process is presented in Sutrisno et al., 2013). Data were coded using a constant comparative method (Fram, 2013) which involves breaking down the text in the interview transcripts into themes, which were then refined to develop categories (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012). Lopez, Figueroa, Connor and Maliski (2008) suggested that it is imperative to transcribe qualitative interviews verbatim in the participants' language or source language, and then translate this script into the target language. Following this suggestion, the researcher transcribed all the interviews in Vietnamese by herself. Data presented in the paper was recorded verbatim as it was translated rather than going through another step of reworking the data into 'proper' English text. This decision attempts to present the most authentic voice of the participants as possible. In addition, during the interviews, the participants sometimes used English to express some phrases or terms as well as speaking in Vietnamese. Consequently, the transcripts contained a mixture of English and Vietnamese phrases. This led to the decision to translate all the interviews into the target language (English) before using NVIVO – data analysis software – because NVIVO cannot run in two different languages at the same time. In addition, according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), "interviewing is linguistic interaction, and the product of the interview is a language text. A linguistic analysis addresses the characteristic uses of language in an interview, the use of grammar and linguistic forms" (p. 6). In contrast, analysis of interview transcriptions focusing on meaning addresses the characteristic use of meaning inferred from the language.

Therefore, the investigator first translated the interviews fully from Vietnamese into English using the single translation procedure, including some parallel translation (Vietnamese-English and English-Vietnamese) (see Sutrisno et al. (2005) for more information about the translation process as it is presented in this article). It was complicated to obtain the corresponding words for the term *learner autonomy* in Vietnamese, as mentioned above. The term can be translated into Vietnamese in different ways, and each version reveals the translator's connotation and perspective, which would have had an influence on the interviewees' perspectives and understanding. Therefore, in order to achieve as close as possible equivalence for the research, the researcher decided to keep this key term in the target language during her interviews. Three major findings from the research are described below. These include: the complexities of the construct of learner autonomy, the impact of traditional Vietnamese pedagogy, and the difficulties of translation equivalence.

Findings from the Research

Complexities of the construct of learner autonomy

There was a lack of understanding by the participants about the concept of learner autonomy, which may have been due in part to the complexities of the construct. The data from the current research indicated that all four participants interpreted learner autonomy differently. The word "tính" in Vietnamese refers to the characteristics or personality of a person. This interpretation indicates that learner autonomy is innate rather than learnt. For example, Ha defined learner autonomy as "tính tự chủ, chủ động, tự giác học của người học" [learner's characteristic of being responsible for learner's own learning]. The word "sự" or "việc" refers to the behaviour/situation of the person. For example, Ngan said "sự chủ động của người học trong việc tự học là chưa có trong đối tượng này" [the behaviour of being responsible for their own learning is not for the current students]. Both terms were used by the four teachers in the current research at various times for various reasons. Bich defined learner autonomy as "tính chủ động tức là tự học, tự mầy mò để học" [learners' ability to study on their own without teachers' support]. Other important words associated with learner autonomy are "negotiation" or "collaboration" which can be used to indicate the social perspective of the term.

However, these words and phrases were not used by the four lecturers in the study. The most consistent interpretation of learner autonomy by participants in the current research was that of self-instruction, which means learning without a lecturer (Little, 1991) or learning without direct control of a lecturer (Dickinson, 1987). Clearly there is a need for an agreed understanding of what learner autonomy means if not in a global context, then certainly in the local context of Vietnam. The lack of agreement and understanding about the concept revealed in the current research suggests that there need to be some conversations in the Vietnamese higher education community about what is meant by the term 'learner autonomy' to clarify confusion.

The impact of traditional Vietnamese pedagogy

In the current research, participants appeared to be heavily swayed by traditional teaching practice and have yet to take up the practice of supporting the development of learner autonomy within their students. Mirroring Little's (1991) observation, participants in the current research described that the syllabus is so powerful that it determines everything a lecturer does in the classroom. This observation causes concern, as Little was writing about the culture of schooling in the 1990s. It would appear that not much has changed in Vietnamese teaching in the last thirty years, making the incorporation of concepts such as 'learner autonomy' problematic. In the current research, the participants stated that the strongest feature of curriculum hindering their fostering of learner autonomy was the role of centralised exams. All four lecturers described that the final-semester examinations determined the content of learning. In Vietnam, lecturers are assessed in terms of their learners' academic success, which is measured by learners' performance on exams; thus, learners' examination scores are indicators of lecturers' teaching quality (Pham, 2006). Understandably, then, lecturers have to teach to promote students' success in examinations. The participants in the current research indicated that success in mandatory testing was the supreme aim of every student and lecturer. In her final interview Thu stated:

> Everything is test-oriented. All lessons must be very practical, understandable. In addition, the lessons must be more difficult than the real test. … So, I have to give them enough proper topic-based tasks [such as more sentence-writing exercises or

> word-building exercises], not to let them to learn and construct themselves. (Thu, final interview)

The participants in this research indicated that learner autonomy was not prioritised as a particular pedagogy in their classes. Their focus was to assist students in achieving satisfactory results on exams, rather than assist them in becoming autonomous learners. They stated that they needed to control the students and the lesson by giving the students activities to do in the class. Indeed, the participants in the current research expressed great reluctance to hand over any of the learning process to their students because they did not feel that students were capable enough to take on autonomous learning. In addition, there was a feeling expressed that allowing students autonomy in their learning would take away time for more important activities, such as preparing for exams. Bich commented, "I didn't let my students prepare the activities because they couldn't do as I expected them to do and, as a result, we wouldn't meet the objectives of the lesson. Also, it would take more time".

Ngan and Thu, who both had some training on new approaches to teaching, including the concept of learner autonomy, believed that their current students would not become autonomous in their classrooms because the students did not have the capacity or motivation to become autonomous. None of the four lecturers felt responsible for facilitating the development of learner autonomy. Implementation was hampered by lecturers' lack of understanding of the concept of leaner autonomy; it would be difficult for them to apply a pedagogy they knew little about and, consequently, they found little relevance for it in their current teaching practices.

Difficulties of translation equivalence

Among the different translations of the concept 'learner autonomy' from English into Vietnamese found in Vietnamese educational documents, the word "tính", which refers to learners' characteristics of being responsible for their learning, is most favoured. In addition, the words "tự học tập" and "tự nghiên cứu" [self-study] are common in government documents. In Vietnamese, the word "tự" or "tự chủ" (self) refers to something you do on your own or by yourself. The word "chủ dộng" in Vietnamese refers to demonstrating initiative without others' support or help. It is simple to

understand that in the interviews, participant Ha described learner autonomy as "tính tự chủ, chủ động, tự giác học của người học" [a learner's characteristic of being responsible for their own learning]. The word "sự" or "việc" refers to the behaviour/situation of the person. For example, Ngan said "sự chủ động của người học trong việc tự học là chưa có trong đối tượng này" [the behaviour of being responsible for their own learning is not for the current students]. Both terms were used by the four lecturers in the current research at various times for various reasons. For example, Bich initially defined learner autonomy as "tính chủ động tức là tự học, tự mầy mò để học" [learners' ability to study on their own without lecturers' support] as an explanation for not including any support to foster students' autonomy in her class. In her final interview, when being asked about the role of the teacher in developing learner autonomy in her class, Bich provided her definition of learner autonomy as follows (but indicated that her current students were not autonomous because she could not find these behaviours in them):

> Cái sự tự chủ động học của sinh viên ấy, chị nghĩ là thứ nhất nó là khả năng tự học, tự học trên lớp cũng như là ở nhà. Thứ hai là chủ động trong những tình huống của giáo viên đưa ra hoặc là chủ động trong việc thay đổi các cách dạy của giáo viên luôn. [I think it is, first, learners' ability to study on their own in the class and at home. Second, they are active in all situations that teachers give them or even autonomous in changing the teaching methods of the teacher].

Researchers (Humphreys & Wyatt, 2014; Nguyen, 2014) have indicated that Vietnamese learners are influenced by the Confucian perspective in that there are "traditional beliefs of relational hierarchy in classrooms, where the roles of teachers and learners are rooted deeply in people's thinking" (Ho & Crookall, 1995, p. 237). In the classes reported on for the current research, students tended to be very passive and dependent upon their teachers for learning. In these classrooms, the students were not allowed to confront their teachers directly. This would be disrespectful and cause the teacher to lose face. Consequently, schools are formed in a structure where the authority is not shared; individuality and creativity are less encouraged (Harman & Nguyen, 2009). As a result of this system, learners tend not to be supported in developing learner autonomy during the educational process and so do not incorporate it into their pedagogy. It is probably one reason why all the interviewed teachers in the current research believed

that learner autonomy is related to 'self-study' or 'self-regulation' and not an area for them to develop in their own classrooms.

The difficulty in using a mutually agreed idea about learner autonomy may be due to its difficult translation from English into Vietnamese. As described above, there is no consensus on what the concept of learner autonomy means in English and so it is not surprising that when this concept is translated into Vietnamese, there exist further issues that need considering. These findings will be discussed further in the following section.

Discussion of Findings

It was found in the current research that lecturers did not foster learner autonomy in their class partly due to their lack of understanding about the concept and partly due to the very powerful impact of the traditional teaching environment on them. In addition, the lecturers expressed the belief that learner autonomy did not need to be incorporated into their teaching because they believed it was innate in some students and not others, and it could not be taught. The researchers suggest that while this finding cannot be generalized to all teaching/learning situations that incorporate concepts such as learner autonomy, it is recommended that further research into how Asian countries are grappling with the incorporation of foreign-origin concepts is warranted. It is important to note that although there has been substantial literature in learner autonomy in language education in the past four decades, it is still a new concept in Vietnam. It is argued by the current researchers that an agreed understanding of the term 'learner autonomy' should be provided in policy documents which then support lecturer understanding for following through in teaching practices. The researchers would also argue that this process should occur not only with the term learner autonomy itself, but with other foreign-origin terms used in Vietnamese education.

The data in the current study indicated that lecturers' understanding and fostering of learner autonomy in their contexts failed, even though the policy is mandated by the government and their educational institutions. The major reasons for this lack of inclusion of learner autonomy include that the lecturers were reluctant to change their practices and were concerned that if they did they would not meet expected learning targets for students to successfully pass their exams. One might suggest that the focus

here for these lecturers is on the process of teaching rather on the process of helping their students develop autonomous learning. The second area is the confusion about what is meant by the term 'learner autonomy'. Without a clear understanding of what learner autonomy means, lecturers were not provided with enough information or support on how to successfully implement it in their pedagogy. What may be inferred from these findings is that from policy to practice there exists a gap; policy makers can mandate a change, but it does not necessarily follow that lecturers will enact this change in their classrooms. This disconnection between policy and practice appeared to be due either to the lecturers' lack of awareness of the policy or that the policy was generally ignored or given low priority. For example, Bich and Ha acknowledged that they knew that there was a policy on incorporating learner autonomy but did not inquire further on what the policy meant or how to implement it into their teaching practices. Participants in the current research instead described that the pressure to implement the policy-directive concept of learner autonomy was either too difficult or impossible. To assist lecturers on how to implement mandated concepts such as learner autonomy, it is recommended that targeted workshops be provided to train lecturers in what the government means by the term and how it can be effectively applied to teaching practices.

Conclusion

This research explored how Vietnamese lecturers understood and applied the concept of learner autonomy in their pedagogy. It is important to note that there are some limitations to the study. For example, this phase of the research focused on only four lecturers. In addition, these lecturers all worked in Hanoi. It would important for future research that more lecturers, as well as lecturers in more diverse areas of Vietnam, be included to gain a greater understanding of how the mandated policy directive of incorporating the concept of learner autonomy is being addressed in general education.

In this paper, we focused on some of the challenges university lecturers may face when interpreting a concept from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds into their local context. These included the complexities of the construct of learner autonomy, the impact of traditional Vietnamese pedagogy, the difficulties of translation equivalence, and the need for teacher support to incorporate learner autonomy into existing pedagogy.

For example, there exist various definitions of learner autonomy and attempts to apply learner autonomy in a particular context, especially research in Asian contexts (Benson, 2007). The misinterpretations of the construct appear to have negative influences on pedagogy (Esch, 1997; Little, 1991). More cross-cultural research is needed to understand how concepts can be transferred from one cultural context to another for effective use in both.

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The Effect of Computer-Based Self-Access Learning on Weekly Vocabulary Test Scores

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Abstract

This study sets out to clarify the effectiveness of using an online vocabulary study tool, Quizlet, in an urban high school language arts class. Previous similar studies have mostly dealt with English Language Learners in college settings (Chui, 2013), and were therefore not directed at the issue self-efficacy that is at the heart of the problem of urban high school students in America entering remedial writing programs (Rose, 1989). The study involves 95 students over the course of 14 weeks. Students were tested weekly and were asked to use the Quizlet program in their own free time. The result of this optional involvement was that many students did not participate in the treatment and therefore acted as an elective control group. The resultant data collected shows a strong correlation between the use of an online vocabulary review program and short-term vocabulary retention. The study also showed that students who paced themselves and spread out their study sessions outperformed those students who used the program only for last minute "cram sessions." The implications of the study are that students who take advantage of tools outside of the classroom are able to out perform their peers. The results are also in line with the call to include technology in the Basic Writing classroom not simply as a tool, but as a "form of discourse" (Jonaitis, 2012). Weekly vocabulary tests, combined with the daily online activity as reported by Quizlet, show that: 1) utilizing the review software improved the scores of most students, 2) those students who used Quizlet to review more than a single time (i.e., several days before the test) outperformed those who only used the product once, and 3) students who professed proficiency with the "notebook" system of vocabulary learning appeared not to need the treatment.

Keywords: vocabulary, online study, self-access, test

Literature Review

Much of the research focused on technology and vocabulary learning has been going on under the roof of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. As a reaction to a perceived lack of innovation within EFL during the 1990s, research into new vocabulary learning strategies has been going on in earnest, especially in Taiwan and China. Other new research-based learning strategies, which also employ technology as a means of tailoring the learning process to individual students include, 'bottom-up inductive learning' and 'self-regulated learning' (Guan, 2013; Mizumoto, 2012). In the Guan study, which focuses on Chinese University English vocabulary learning, researchers used an online 'corpus' of authentic English texts and then

invited students to independently download and analyze content in chunks in order to define new terms on their own. This procedure, called Data Driven Learning by the authors, is more popular in colleges and research university EFL programs than in Chinese high schools, but teachers are encouraged to use the technique at all levels to promote student computer-based SAL and increase self-efficacy. In the Mizumoto study, a group of 281 Japanese university EFL learners was asked to rate themselves on a three-level self-efficacy scale before taking a vocabulary test. Based on strong correlation between a high self-efficacy and the presence of valuable metacognitive learning strategies, Mizumoto concludes that self-efficacy enhancement is an important component in vocabulary learning and teaching (Mizumoto , 2012). Both the Guan and Mizumoto studies recommend the employment of tools that put the task of vocabulary acquisition in the learner's hands, called Data-Driven Learning in the former and "vocabulary learning strategies" in the latter. These methods were proven effective in increasing student self-efficacy and long-term vocabulary retention. In a 2012 study by Hirschel and Fritz, "Learning vocabulary – CALL program versus vocabulary," it was found that the use of traditional, notebook methods of learning vocabulary do not take advantage of these advances in memorization processes. This study was performed with 140 first-year Japanese university students divided into a control group using no intervention method, a group using the vocabulary notebook method, and a group using Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Analyzing the results of the study, which came out in favor of CALL for long-term results, the authors caution educators against the continued use of notebooks to learn vocabulary. Instead, they advise implementation of different CALL programs, placing special focus on learner motivation.

Games have been a growing interest of educators for years because they offer a learner-centered approach and increase student buy-in (Garris, Ahlers, & Driskell, 2002). More specifically, games lower the learner's affective filter, as shown by a recent seven-week study involving secondary school Malaysian students from a "semi-urban" setting (Letchumanan & Hoon, 2012). The affective filter, according to the authors of the study, is usually a factor in blocking any long term, post-assessment retention of knowledge in a "non-coercive" environment (Letchumanan & Hoon, 2012). It has also been proposed (Chiu, 2013) that this very same affective filter has been created, reinforced, and manipulated by repetitive testing. One effect of this

testing pedagogy is that all attempts to prove the efficacy of games in education have been disadvantaged. That is, vocabulary learning has been "exam-oriented" and "drill-based" for so long that the relative ease of playing games does not seem high-stakes enough for the average student (Chiu, 2013, p. 54). It should be noted, though, that the students in these studies are predominantly Asian post-secondary students, who might feel a great deal more pressure, or test-related stress than the American high school student.

Another study on the use of technology to help elementary school age children acquire the proper 'base-level' vocabulary helped to popularize the use of computer-response activities (Labbo, Love, & Ryan, 2002). The study involved 85 kindergarteners from the lowest SES demographic school in a district located in the southeastern United States who took part in what Labbo et al. called a "vocabulary flood" instructional cycle that included constant use of a computer to record and re-present student-created content (p. 582). The study showed that students who enter school with a smaller vocabulary need a great deal more exposure to new terms before they are acquired. Technology can play an important role at the earliest stages, but the greatest gains can be seen in older, high-school age students, who seem to have less difficultly navigating the technology (Chiu, 2013). The Chiu study employed a meta-analysis of five sources of data: Chinese Periodical Index, Dissertation and Thesis Abstract System of Taiwan, IEEE Xplore, ERIC and Google Scholar. These studies, which collectively represent 1684 students from all levels, were done in Taiwan, Turkey, Spain, Arabia, France, Japan, Hong Kong, Korea and China. The results show that high school and college students respond to computer-based learning more efficiently than elementary-age students, and Digital games-based learning (DGBL) seems to have a smaller effect size than digital learning without games. This, Chiu points out, maybe due to the fact that students have been consistently taught vocabulary—not to mention writing and reading—using a highly coercive, exam- and drill-focused pedagogy (called "tell-test" by Prensky (2001, p. 72)) *even to this day*. The need to introduce technology into the classroom is therefore most crucial where it has been receiving the littlest attention, sometimes even negative attention (Obringer, 2007).

The main push for all of this research into computer-based self-access vocabulary learning has come primarily from Asia, where most of the world's English

language learning is taking place. The solutions that have come out of these studies, that students need to be given more opportunities to learn independently and that the technology being created to facilitate this learning needs to find its way into students hands (Chiu, 2012; Letchumanan & Hoon, 2012; Mizumoto, 2012; Guan, 2013), have not yet been applied across the board within the American urban high school. One case in which computer-based learning was proven effective against traditional methodology was in a reading comprehension study involving 145 students from nine 10th grade literature classrooms in a large urban public high school of approximately 2,200 students located near Atlanta, Georgia (Cuevas, Russel, & Irving, 2012). In the study, Independent Silent Reading (ISR) done with a computer program was shown to be more effective than reading from a traditional textbook. The study's authors point to the particular difficulties of access to "conducive environments" faced by urban students that the use of technology can help to circumvent (p. 446). This outcome, according to the authors, emerged from the "pronounced increase in … motivation" shown by the students who used computer modules (p. 460). This lines up with the idea that use of computer-based SAL can help to motivate modern students (Howard, Ellis, & Rasmussen 2004).

The present study connects much of the research that has been done in Asia with computer-based learning that has been done in America. It also features a large enough sample size and a long enough period to produce valid data on the use of computer-based SAL in an urban high school. My research question is whether or not the use of computer-based SAL can work as an effective review for weekly vocabulary tests.

Methodology

Demographics

The study was performed at a selective-admittance high school in a low-performing urban school district from February to May, 2014. The students were from a low social-economic standing, with all students enrolled qualifying for 100% free lunch; 90% of the students are African American, 5% are Caucasian, 3% Hispanic, and 2% Asian/Pacific Islander. The 96 students taking part in the study were from three different classes: a 10th grade English Language Arts course, English 2 (E2); a 12th grade regular-level English Literature course, English 4 Block 1 (E4.1); and a 12th grade Advanced Placement English Literature course, English 4 Block 2 (E4.2).

Whereas the E2 class was representative of the school as a whole, the two 12th grade classes contained one Caucasian student each with the rest of the students being African American. The female to male ratio was close to 6:4. Two students were on Individual Education Plans for disabilities in reading and two were English Language Learners.

Instrument

The study involved the use of three instruments: a weekly vocabulary test, a post-treatment survey, and the Quizlet website. The weekly tests each included ten new terms. Students were given 30 minutes to complete the tests and were allowed to re-take tests at a 10% penalty. There were a total of 12 weekly tests for the study period (an example test is provided in Appendix A).

The survey consisted of a questionnaire that was filled out halfway through the study period, after the 9th weekly test. This questionnaire contained four short answer questions and three Likert scale questions which were developed for the study (see Appendix B). These survey questions were aimed at gaining constructive feedback from the students and took the form of a Quizlet product evaluation.

Quizlet is a website accessed internationally for vocabulary review of all subjects at all levels of education. Created in 2005 by a then high school student Andrew Sutherland to help him study French vocabulary, the website hosts and shares user-created virtual flashcard lists. A Teacher's Membership portal allows for the creation and tracking of Classes in which students can easily find all vocabulary lists for a particular subject.

Student activity on Quizlet was recorded using Quizlet's Teacher Information toolset. Vocabulary sets were added every Sunday, giving students a 5-day window in which to study for the Friday test. Details that the Quizlet instrument recorded include the number of times each of the 5 'games' was played, when the games were played during the week, and whether or not a student had 'mastered' the game by either answering every questions flawlessly (Flashcards, Speller, and Learn) or by reaching a certain target speed (Space Race, Matching). The instrument also reported whether a student had used a mobile device or a PC to access the program, and which words students were struggling with each week. This information was used to categorize Quizlet review activity into four levels: 0 (no review), 1 (minimal review), 2

(moderate review), and 3 (complete review). In addition, Quizlet review activity was divided out into three times: "E" for early (review during Monday or Tuesday), "M" for midweek (review during Wednesday and Thursday) and "L" for late (review on Friday morning, just before the test). If a student reviewed for five minutes just after receiving the vocabulary list on Monday, for example, she would have a "1E." If she reviewed again on Thursday and mastered all of the Quizlet activities she would have a "3M," and if she took a quick look at her phone just before the test she would be given a "1L;" for the whole week she would receive a total score of "5."

Procedure

The procedure of the study was divided into two parts. First, students were taught how to access Quizlet on their mobile devices and on a PC. Students were brought into the computer lab twice in order to make sure they had all signed up for Quizlet accounts. Students were then mildly incentivized with the offer of extra credit for using the treatment to study. The students were never forced to use Quizlet, but without an incentive the proportion of users and non-users would have been too unbalanced. In addition, it is the goal of this study to measure the effect of SAL, which does not involve compulsion.

The second part of the procedure comprised a series of 12 weekly vocabulary tests with terms taken from various SAT word lists and root words from Membean.com. Students were given these words every Monday and tested on them every Friday with no class time devoted to review. Instead, students were encouraged to study the words on Quizlet, where interactive flashcards containing definitions, variations, pictures, and example sentences had been added.

Planned analysis

The data collected was analyzed in three different ways. First, the scores of the vocabulary tests were compared to the students' use of Quizlet to show a correlation between use of computer-assisted vocabulary review and performance on weekly tests. Second, student responses to the questionnaire were first compared with evidence from Quizlet to show the relationship between treatment and the likelihood of future use. Finally, the study investigated the *timing* of students' use of the Quizlet review, i.e., whether a student reviewed only once or on multiple occasions and when

during the week the review was done (just after receiving the words, midweek, and/or just before the test) by comparing the aggregate test scores of these categories over time. This special attention to study habits, made possible by Quizlet's reporting of student activity, has enabled a much more nuanced understanding of high school students' use of computer-based SAL.

Data Analysis

First, the primary research question, whether or not Quizlet will work as an effective review for weekly vocabulary tests, can be shown by comparing the number of times each student reviewed with his or her average test score (see Figure 1). The sample was divided into the three classes that took part in the study. While the E4.2 group had a much higher average number of times reviewed, the correlation between review and test score was about the same as for the E2 group. On average, for every additional visit to the Quizlet site, students in the E4.2 and E2 group saw an increase of about 3 percentage points (3.1% and 2.6%, respectively) on their weekly tests. The E4.1 group had only a slightly positive correlation, with each site visit translating into only 0.8 additional percentage points.

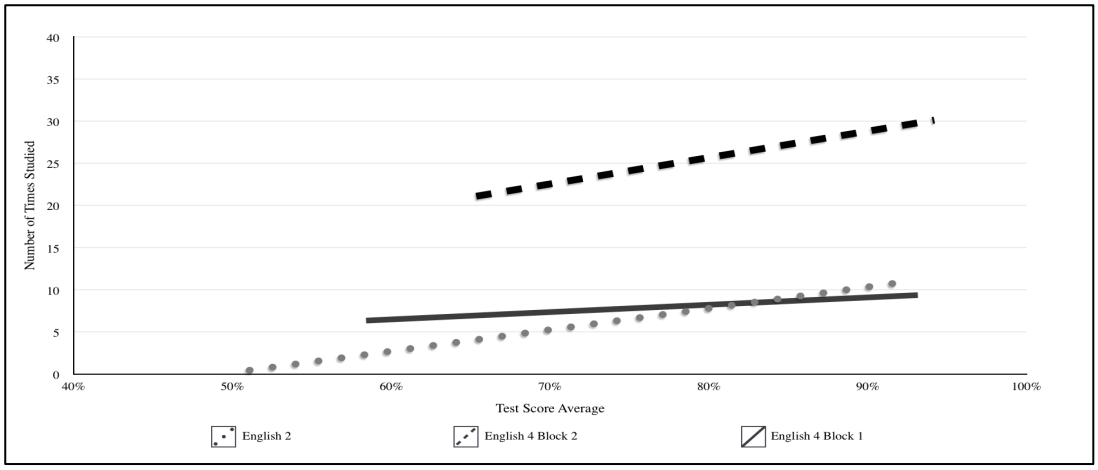

Figure 1. Computer-Based Self-Access Review Compared to Test Score

Test scores over time were looked at in two ways in order to show the effect of Quizlet review. First, students were divided into two groups, those students who accessed Quizlet at least 11 times during the period of study (40 "Quizlet students") and those students who accessed Quizlet less than 11 times (51 "Non-Quizlet students"). Then the array of the 12 score averages for these two groups were plotted together over time (see Figure 2).

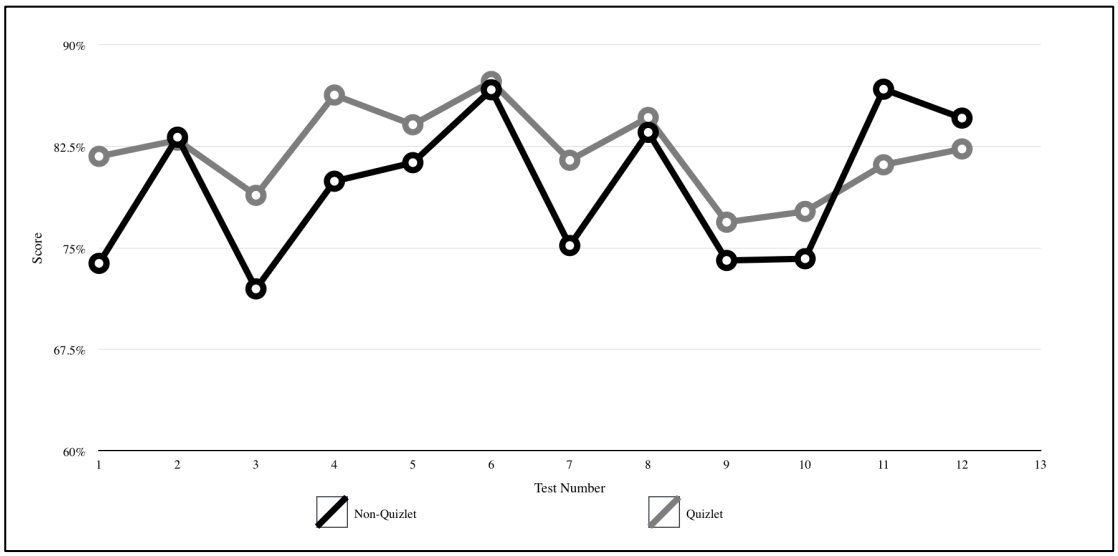

Figure 2. Average Test Score Over Time by Group

The plot lines show that, with two exceptions, the Quizlet students consistently out-performed the Non-Quizlet students. The combined average test score for Quizlet students over the entire course of the study was 82%, while the Non-Quizlet students had a combined average score of 79%. Students in the Quizlet group scored higher and had less score variance than students in the Non-Quizlet group. The next figure shows the times that each group spent on Quizlet during any given week (see Figure 3). Quizlet students are represented by the lighter bar graphs and Non-Quizlet students are represented by the darker bar graph.

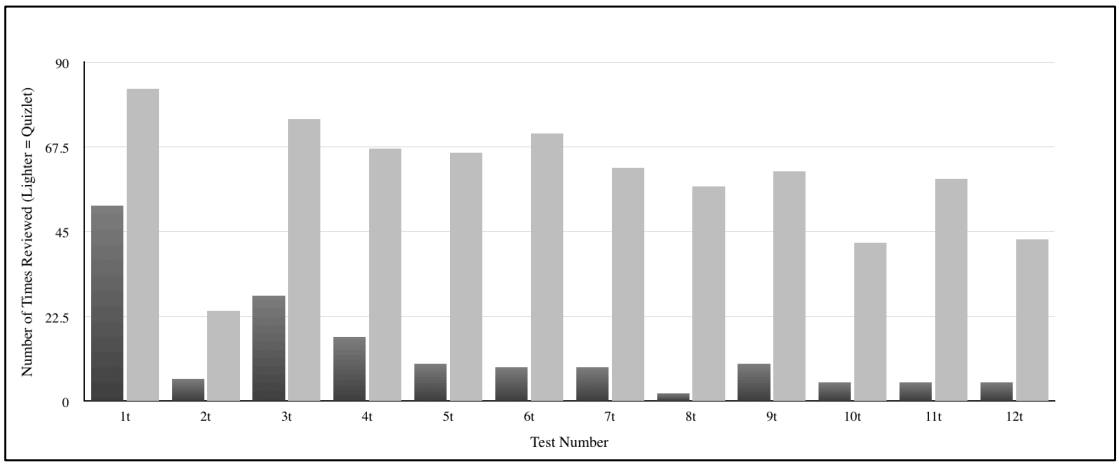

Figure 3. Amount of Review Over Time by Group

Whereas the Quizlet students continued to use Quizlet to review for a combined total of at least 40 times per week, the Non-Quizlet students only used the

site in large numbers during the first few weeks. Accordingly, there was very little correlation between the review time and the test scores of the Non-Quizlet group. This is best explained by the first two data points, tests 1 and 2, during which many students first tried out Quizlet (1t) and then decided not to use it (2t). This may also reflect an adjustment to the test format, although the test used was very similar to tests students had taken previously with traditional, teacher-led midweek vocabulary review. Judging by the consistently low amount of Quizlet use by the Non-Quizlet group, the dramatic rise and fall of their scores may instead be attributed to a weekly reaction to test scores from the previous week: if the group scored poorly on the previous test they tended to rally and achieve a higher score on the next week's test. This pattern can also be seen in a less pronounced way in the Quizlet groups, with the immense score variations of the Non-Quizlet group between weeks 6 to 7 and 10 to 11 echoed to a lesser degree in the Quizlet group. Even though the Quizlet group was able to score higher, this graph reveals several instances where number of times reviewed does not correlate with the average test score. Weeks 9 through 12, for example, show a steady increase in test scores for the Quizlet group, while the number of times reviewed went up and down at random. Still, since averaged test scores do show positive correlation with number of times reviewed, there are additional explanations for why some review was less effective (see Figure 1).

The times of each student's Quizlet review, as mentioned above, were collected and placed into data arrays, which were then divided into different groups. First, the overall effect of time of review can be shown by a comparison of all students' test scores and the time of the week they reviewed (see Figure 4). In general, early review and late review were positively correlative with higher test scores. Midweek review is the most positively correlative. The Non-Quizlet group, though, had a somewhat different outcome. For this group, both midweek and late review led to an increase in test scores while early review was negatively correlative with test scores. This can again be attributed to the first two data points from the earlier graphs, because most students tried Quizlet out on the first day of the study. In addition, of the 161 times the Non-Quizlet group accessed the website, only 14 were done early in the week (see Figure 2). In total, students accessed the website 887 times: 134 early, 376 midweek, and 377 late.

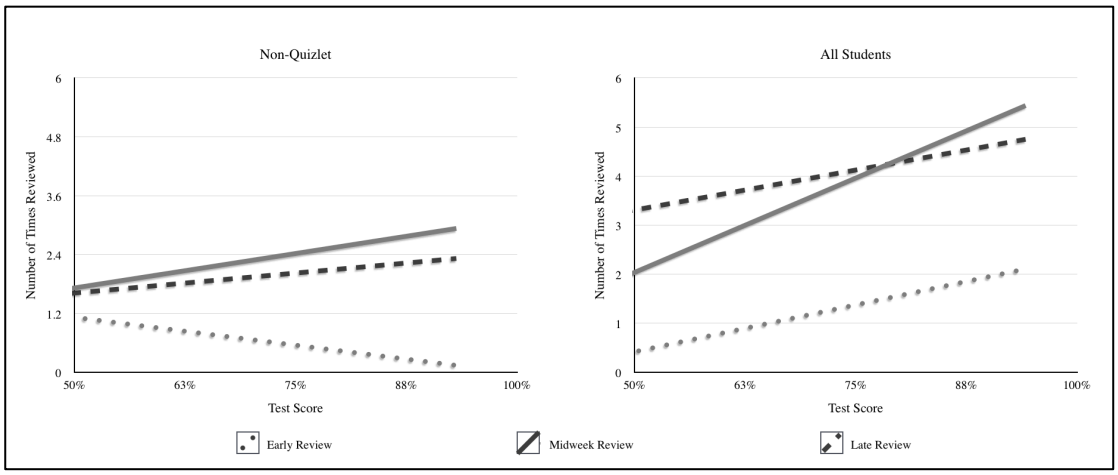

Figure 4. Effect of Review Time on Average Test Scores by Group

Some interesting conclusions can be drawn in regards to the study habits of different classes (see Figure 5). Each graph compares the average test scores of students with the number of times they reviewed during each different time of the week. Interestingly, while the sophomore class exhibited a positive correlation for all review times, both senior classes show a negative correlation between test scores and late review.

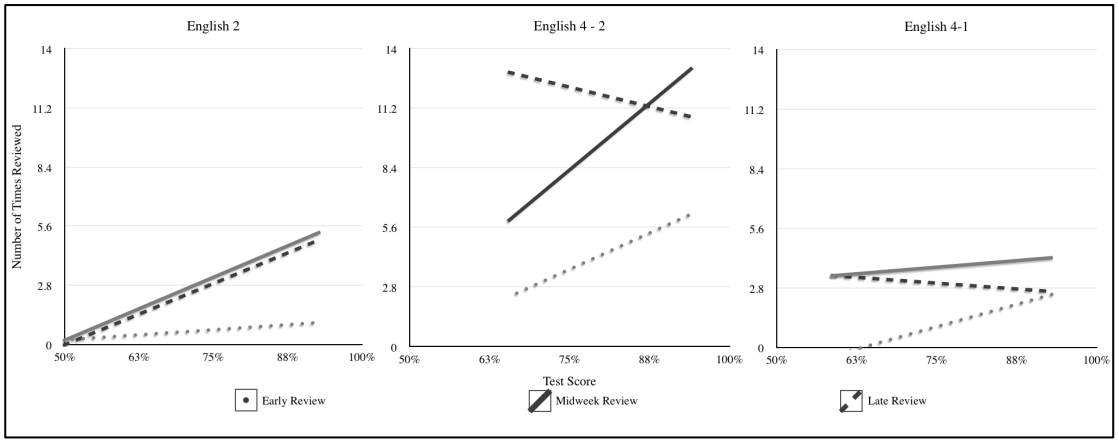

Figure 5. Effect of Review Time on Average Test Scores by Course

The final data source, the surveys, also led to some two different correlations. First, the relationship between students' use of Quizlet and the third survey question, concerning the ease of use on a scale from 0 for hard to 5 for easy, is shown in the graph on the right (see Figure 6). There is a slightly negative correlation between the number of times a student reviewed with Quizlet and that student's reported ease of use. Despite the fact that increased use led to slightly increased frustration, the graph

to the right shows a positive correlation between the number of times a student used Quizlet and the likelihood that student would use Quizlet in the future.

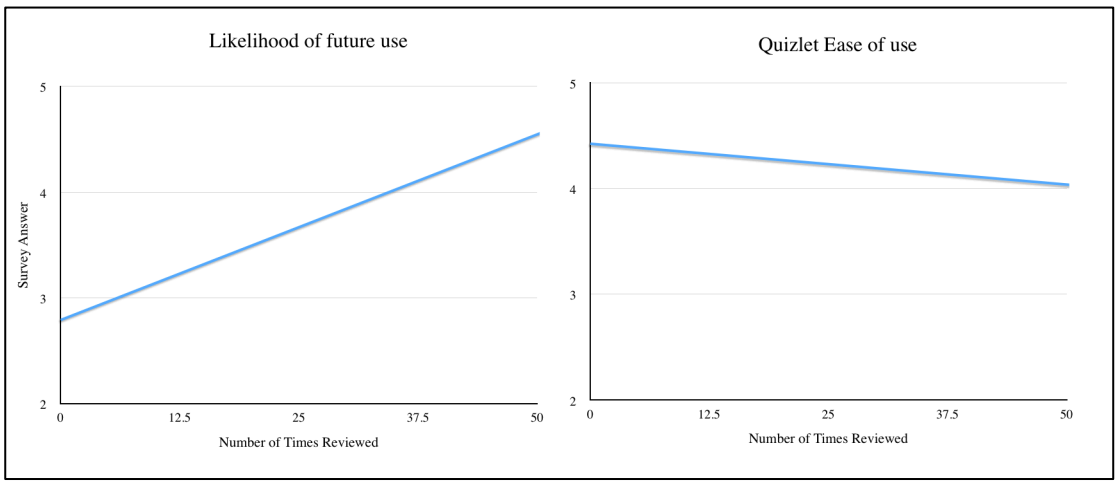

Figure 6. Survey Results compared with Times Reviewed

Written survey results revealed mixed reactions to the transition from teacher-led classroom review to self-access review. Of the 64 students who responded to the survey, 18 said they preferred to study vocabulary in class. These students favored "Wednesday reviews," "in-class reviews," and "Powerpoints!" The second group consisted of thirteen students who preferred the classic, notebook study method. The notebook group favored "writ[ing] the words over and over," "making my own flashcards," and "writing the words and definitions over again until I get it right." The third and largest group, with 23 of the 64 students, preferred using Quizlet over any other vocabulary review method. Students in the Quizlet group mentioned the use of pictures, the convenience, and the variety of games. The app's Scatter activity, which times how quickly the user can match words to their definitions, received the greatest amount of praise, followed by its Learn activity, which has learners typing in words after being shown the definition. Some students admitted only using the Quizlet app for "last minute" study. A final group including only seven students indicated that they preferred to use Quizlet, the notebook study method, and in-class reviews all at the same time. Generally students had a positive reaction to Quizlet. Even those who did not use the app or website admitted that it was because "I forgot," or "I don't study." Only two students criticized the program directly: one student deemed it "too technical" and another wrote the word "glitches." Six students asked for "more games" and one student suggested that Quizlet send out "study reminders." The

majority of the students, when asked how Quizlet might be improved, wrote "I don't know," "it's already a great app," or "if it ain't broke don't fix it."

Limitations

The uncontrollable limitations to this study include the fact that several of the weekly tests were off schedule due to snow days. While these did not seem to effect the variation between test scores for students who did and did not use Quizlet, it did damage the efficacy of the time of review study. Whenever a regular week of vocabulary was broken up by weather, I treated the first two days as "early" and the last two days as "late," so the "midweek" period of study was stretched out and exaggerated slightly, but students usually didn't study any more than normal, so the effect of the disruptions were minimal. In addition, the Ohio Graduation Test occurred during the fourth week of the study, so the cycle of weekly testing was interrupted. This had no noticeable effect on the test scores, but again the interruption may have slowed the pace of the study.

The nature of this study lends itself very well to larger sample sizes, so the fact that only 96 students were involved in the study was the first limitation that should be removed. Future versions of this computer-based self-access vocabulary review study should be done using larger and more diverse sample sizes. Because the Quizlet website reports such a large amount of data, collecting and comparing this data should be relatively simple, regardless of the sample size. Also, Quizlet is simple to use and requires very little intervention on the part of the teacher, effectively negating any variations based on location, socio-economic standing, and quality of teaching. The initial presentation of the words can be done by the teacher using Quizlet's flashcard feature or it can be completely self-access, with students opening the flashcards on their own during the beginning of the week or as they see fit.

Another limitation of the study was the low amount of voluntary participation. The study was designed so that students would be free to choose between using Quizlet and using their own review methods. Many students already comfortable with the notebook method tried Quizlet once and then went back to their old review method. Many other students elected not to review their vocabulary. This was due in part to the nature of the school these students were attending: homework was not a part of the English curriculum and weekly vocabulary reviews had been directed by

the teacher. The students in the sample were therefore unused to self-access learning in any form and were at a loss when given a list of words and told to "learn them." Of course, this is the very academic helplessness in urban schools that the study is targeting, so it was an expected limitation. Future studies in similar urban settings should therefore take into account students' general lack of study skills and set up a pre-study scaffolding to familiarize students with computer-based self-access study.

The final limitation of the study was that it was not fun. While this may seem like a minor quibble, it is in fact central to the success of self-access learning. The largest number of complaints recorded in the survey had to do with Quizlet's lack of "good games," and students' desire for the above-mentioned teacher-directed Wednesday reviews, which often involved games as well. Quizlet offers three activities that could be considered games, but these cannot replace in-class review games in terms of excitement. While the ultimate goal of the study is to see whether vocabulary might not be taken out of the classroom completely, part of this process should include making vocabulary fun or, as Freeman & Freeman say, turning students into *lexiphiles* (2004). One of the ways this might be done is by hosting weekly Space Race tournaments, during which students would be given a set time period to try and reach as high a score as possible in Quizlet's Space Race activity. Students might also be encouraged to research and create their own vocabulary lists, comment on and add to each other's lists, or find interesting Quizlet lists by searching on the site. These sorts of acclimation activities should help to smooth the transition between teacher-led vocabulary review and self-access vocabulary review.

Discussion and Conclusions

Based on the data collected, I have drawn three conclusions from my research question. First, the use of computer-based self-access vocabulary review is an effective strategy for learning vocabulary. This aligns with the findings of Guan (2013) and Mizumoto (2012). Although the sample size was too small to show significance, I am confident that, given a longer period of time, the use of Quizlet would continue to result in higher test scores. Teachers should therefore integrate either Quizlet or another similar vocabulary learning website into their curriculum. Making these kinds of tools available gives students a sense of control over their vocabulary studying. The games and challenges make learning and memorizing

vocabulary enjoyable, and the software monitors students' answers, so the website becomes a customizable instructional tool.

The second conclusion I was able to draw from this study concerns the time of the week that students chose to study their words. For a majority of students, midweek vocabulary review had the greatest impact on their weekly test scores. Only the sophomore English 2 students showed little improvement based on midweek study. Also, for the E4.2 group, who had spent by far the most time on the site, late review had a negative correlation with test scores; the more time students spent reviewing on the day of the test the worse their score. For all classes, review within the first 24 hours after having received the vocabulary list, while showing a positive correlation with test scores, was not frequent enough to draw any conclusions from. It should be noted that, before the study period, these three classes had been used to Wednesday vocabulary reviews, and students' predilection for midweek review may account for some of the correlation.

The final conclusion is that students who are introduced to Quizlet in high school are very likely to use it in college. According to the survey, most students will be using Quizlet in the future. More importantly, those students who used Quizlet the most are the likeliest to use Quizlet again. Teachers interested in preparing their students for college and university should include Quizlet in their curriculum for this reason.

Notes on the contributor

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Appendix A: Sample Test

QUIZ – Vocabulary Week 12 (#326-340) Name _____

Fill in the Chart

4pt each. Three for the word, one for spelling.

PHRASE / WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
1. son		
2.		depend
3.	step	
4.	Light in weight	
5. onym		

True or False

2pt each.

1. _____ cats are *furtive* and dogs are not.
2. _____ *atrophy* can by a noun and a verb.
3. _____ my son knows how to *drawl* flowers.
4. _____ *insurgent* has a more positive connotation than "rebel."
5. _____ whispering old men look *collusive*.

Fill in the Chart

*5pt each. Three for the word, one for spelling, one for variation. Variations are indicated by a *.*

1. Children always glance _____ around before telling a lie. *
2. The government hesitated sending in the military to fight off the _____, so the police had to protect the city on their own. *
3. Sometimes it's hard to understand someone who speaks with a _____.
4. Since he hasn't stepped outside all winter, my brother's muscles have definitely _____. *
5. Waste can be put thrown into the waste can is an example of two _____. *
6. Raj: "We are so _____ that we finish each other's—"

   Wolowitz: "—sentences."
7. The school tried to _____ a new _____ for sports equipment, but it didn't pass.
8. The nuclear submarine fleet was directed to take a _____ course in order to pull out of the Sea of China.
9. I have taken pictures of every street sign in Fairfax for my new book, "Old Directions: A _____ of Cleveland Street Signs."
10. Mother and her sisters always seem to be working in _____ in order to make father look stupid in front of grandma and grandpa

Appendix B: Survey

1. Rate you're your own use of Quizlet from HIGHLY INEFFECTIVE (0) to HIGHLY EFFECTIVE (5):

   (0) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

2. Explain why you gave yourself this rating.

   _____

   _____

3. Rate Quizlet's ease of use from VERY DIFFICULT (0) to VERY EASY TO USE (5):

   (0) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

4. Explain why you gave Quizlet this rating.

   _____

   _____

5. Explain your preferred method of VOCABULARY STUDY.

   _____

   _____

6. How might Quizlet be improved upon?

   _____

   _____

7. In the future, how likely are you to use Quizlet OR any other digital study aid for VOCABULARY STUDY (from VERY UNLIKELY (0) to VERY LIKELY (5))?

   (0) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

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Possibilities of Independent Learning in Two Self-access Facilities of an Iranian University

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Abstract

The roles that self-access centers play in language learners' development of autonomy considerably vary in accordance with the institutional features attributed to their structure and the services they offer. As part of a larger study which assessed 100 learners' readiness for autonomy, this paper reports on the status quo of two facilities at the humanities faculty of an Iranian university, based on English-as-Foreign-Language (EFL) learners' views and practices. Seven undergraduate EFL learners from various years of study were asked to describe the ways in which they exploit self-access services for language learning purposes and express their opinions vis-à-vis their functionality through semi-structured interviews. Findings reveal that most learners preferred *not* to attend the computer center, principally because, the Internet, as the most widely acknowledged service, had become available in other places around the university, such as in the dormitory. The reasons for this reluctance are highlighted, along with a presentation of some suggestions for upgrading learners' participation in self-access language learning in similar contexts.

Keywords: autonomy, self-access language learning, out-of-class learning, EFL.

Self-access language learning (SALL) has gradually grown into a mature area of research within the field of applied linguistics since the late 1970s. Nowadays, a self-access center (SAC) is an expected component of any language learning program seeking to develop autonomous learning. Parallel with the ideas that underlined the importance of helping learners to become more aware of their own role in language learning, the notion of self-access can pragmatically facilitate such individualized learning practices (Sheerin, 1997). However, various resources need to be in place in order to help students achieve their goals as autonomous learners. For instance, human resources are required because most learners need at least a period of guidance to adjust to the principles of self-directed learning in a SAC (Sinclair, 1996). In addition to this, investment in building a physical space and purchasing facilities are also needed. Moreover, managing institutions need to understand that creating a successful SAC relies a great deal on a number of factors: adequate staffing and effective management (Gardner & Miller, 1999; 2013),

organized support services including regular advisory and counselling sessions as well as strategy training (Mynard & Navarro, 2010; Dofs, 2007), careful material selection and/or development (Navarro Coy & Brady, 2003), and evaluation of SALL (Morrison, 2005). Arguably, these services are vital to the promotion of autonomy as an explicit goal of education in the form of self-access, because a mere provision of facilities is not equivalent to all learners' better acceptance of responsibilities for learning (Benson, 2001). Despite these, as Ahmadi (2012) speculates, the concept of autonomy is still new to most Iranian universities and indeed only few of them are providing SACs for their pupils.

Although SACs are often considered as self-study areas for language learning, study areas in libraries or other parts of an institute shared by both language and non-language students can also be regarded as a SAC. Such multiuse areas in universities are becoming more common and our previous concepts of a SAC have to be broadened. This is the context of the present article where two separate physical environments in the humanities faculty of the University of Kashan serve as computer center (CC) and self-study center (SSC). This pilot study aims to find out about the current issues of these two self-access facilities and delineate the quality and workability of the services they offer. In so doing, besides the enumeration of existing human and non-human resources, seven EFL learners were asked to describe their CC- and SSC-based practices and express their opinions about usefulness of the centers in providing opportunities for more independent learning. Prior to that, the physical and functional features of the investigated facilities are presented.

Computer Center (CC)

Physical space

The humanities faculty was relocated on-campus in 2009. The new faculty building accommodated an area as a computer/learning center, open from eight in the morning to five-thirty in the afternoon, Saturday to Wednesday. The physical space of the CC is divided into two separate areas, one for male and the other for female students. Each of these spaces is equipped with around 45 computers, ordered on five long tables, making a double five-row sitting place. There is the same number of work chairs as of computers, which roughly means that the CC is not designed to promote group learning or discussion and primarily concentrates on learner's individual use of computers for independent learning. The center offers internet service both

through the computers there and also through wireless access for students who want to connect by personal devices such as laptops or smart phones. An important issue is that the CC is not an English language self-access facility and students from various majors at humanities faculty (e.g. psychology, philosophy, behavioral sciences, etc.) can openly access the center to use computer- and internet-related services. Since more than 2000 students attend the humanities faculty for their education, it goes without saying that the CC is almost always packed with students working on their projects or simply surfing the web or even entertaining themselves by playing computer games.

Management

There is only one technical support person working at the CC. He mainly copes with the maintenance of the computer systems and is in charge of running the center on an every-day basis. He has a small room of his own within the CC environment, where he can monitor learners' activities and also aid them with difficulties they come up with while using certain off/on-line programs. Indeed, the students attending the CC (from all educational backgrounds) do not expect any pedagogical guidance from the manager pertinent to their specialized courses. They mainly attend the center to satisfy a learning need they have personally identified or sometimes for classroom-assigned activities, such as searching online for finding a piece of work for presentation before the class.

Resources

The main service offered through the CC is the Internet, however, some systems are often out of order or the internet connection is quite slow. Based on students' level, i.e. Bachelor, Master, Doctorate, they are allocated a certain amount of monthly internet quota. The various uses that they make of their quota depend a lot on their personalized ways of web surfing and online behavior. The other prominent resources at the CC (that gives it a little color of real self-access) are media files in the form of a collection of CDs, DVDs, and cassette tapes. CDs and DVDs can be accessed for use only within the center, but the tapes are also available for borrowing. The content of these discs noticeably vary with respect to the miscellaneous courses offered in the humanities faculty, however, a great deal of this material is provided to English language students for self-directed learning. Examples include e-book collections, audio-featured vocabulary books, listening materials in forms of audio-books (e.g. stories, famous novels,

historical narrations), songs (e.g. from Celine Dion and Chris de Burg), subtitled movies, lectures, discussions, and TOEFL/IELTS listening tests. There are also computer software such as the ones containing self-study grammar practice, reading texts from multiple disciplines, encyclopedias, and programs for practice of spoken language, such as 'Tell Me More'. There are no equipment such as recorders, CD, MP3 or DVD players accessible at the center and students are routinely supposed to purchase them on their own.

Self-Study Center (SSC)

The SSC environment is a quiet space for students to conduct their reading of both the materials presented at the center and their own materials. The main aim of the center is to provide encouragement to students to develop their reading abilities. Its physical space is constituted of the former language laboratory plus a large hall connecting to it through two corridors. There are more than 100 formal study chairs ordered around 25 study desks. Students can also utilize the wireless internet access via their personal devices. The materials at the SSC are mostly magazines, journals and periodicals in Persian, and to a lesser degree English, available for use only inside the SSC. Often they are scholarly and academic in nature, but there are also some materials on social, every-day life to foster free reading among students. There also are offered a variety of English newspapers such as 'Tehran Times' and 'Iran Daily' specifically for students of English language. The SSC is managed by an administrator whose main responsibility is to keep the center in order. He is a librarian by training and his field of expertise concerns book keeping and material resources selection.

Research Question

SALL can be used to expand the control over learning environment in ways that offer more freedom of choice and self-direction. Such language learning might maximally happen in centers with an explicit goal of learner development. However, the utopian SAC on the mission of fostering language learner's autonomy and armed with all the necessary facilities, staff, and advising services does not exist within the present study context. This has led many Iranian EFL learners to conceive of self-access as an optional learning *mode* beyond the classroom. To deepen understanding on whether the two mentioned facilities in the humanities faculty of the

University of Kashan are of useful service to learners for conducting more independent learning activities, the following question was posed: What are EFL learners' current practices in and ideas about learning in their institution self-access settings?

Methodology

A small group of seven students were interviewed on an individual basis to gather data concerning the learners' independent learning in out-of-class contexts. The interviewees were selected according to the richness and variation of their out-of-class learning activities reported in a questionnaire administered with 100 learners on campus and based on ease of access (Spratt, Humphreys, & Chan, 2002). Interview questions were basically focused on the details of the learners' autonomous learning activities beyond the classroom. CC/SSC-based learning were categorized as autonomous learning moves, because learners often attend the facilities out of personal learning needs and there are no institutional compulsions for SALL. Nonetheless, inquiries into learners' states of SALL were essential to a fuller understanding of learners' self-directed learning behaviors outside the class. The findings of the original study revealed that learners are more active in creating learning opportunities in their EFL institutional and social contexts outside the classroom than we routinely assume (Moini & Mohammadi, in press).

During the interviews, questions about the frequency, purpose and usefulness of learners' independent language learning that centrally took place in self-access settings were investigated. Learners were asked to provide examples of their learning experiences in CC/SSC, if any; and further reflect upon the items they had possibly learned in a self-access fashion. Learners rarely indicated that their teachers assigned them with work to be done in the CC to prepare for a lecture. Interviewees' ages ranged from 18 to 22 and they were two first- (M.T., M.F.), three second- (A.M., V.F., S.H.), one third- (R.A.) and one last-year (M.S.) students of English language majors. For ethical reasons, they are given acronyms. See Table 1.

Table 1: Background of the students

Participants	**A.M.**	**M.T.**	**V.F.**	**S.H.**	**M.F.**	**M.S.**	**R.A.**
Age	21	19	20	20	19	22	20
Year of Study	2	1	2	2	1	4	3
Major	Translation	Translation	Translation	Literature	Translation	Literature	Literature
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Female	Male	Female	Female

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the data suggested two patterns among learners' expressions about their present SALL practices. Firstly, there was reported an unwillingness to attend the CC because of its undesirable environment. Learners' accounts in this regard seem to be solidly informed by experimenting with learning within the CC. For instance, M.S. said:

> It's always very crowded . . . I don't go to CC . . . because we have Wi-Fi at the dormitory; I use my laptop in my room to connect to the Internet.

According to this account, as long as the CC only serves the Internet as its primary resource, EFL learners prefer to access the Internet in other places than such an overpopulated venue. The same problem was reported by R.A.:

> I don't go to CC . . . because it's too noisy and crowded. I use the Wi-Fi at dormitory.

M.T. who was passing the second semester of his university program indicated that for online activities he has shifted from going to the CC to staying at dormitory. Wi-Fi at dormitory is available for students only from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. because of the university's policy to prevent students from staying at dormitory for using the Internet along the day:

> I used to go to CC during the first semester but not now. We have got Wi-Fi at dorm [now]. I sometimes sleep during the day and stay up throughout the night [to use dormitory Wi-Fi Internet] . . . no need to go to CC anymore.

M.F. said:

> I would go to CC if only there is something urgent I have to do online [on-campus].

The second part of the results of the study consists of extracts that showed learners' actual activities in the CC, all of which, without exception, had to do with the Internet. Most activities here share a common focus on CC-mediated learning, rather than learning that is directly connected to the functions of the facility. M.T. stated that:

> If there's a [TV] program I want to watch or listen to, I would download it from the Internet. I downloaded nearly 6 gigabytes of documentaries and movies at CC last semester.

Given that learners possess a limited share of internet quota, M.T. said that he would also use the quota from those friends of his who usually have no interest in web surfing. Other similar types of CC-mediated learning include learners downloading songs, lyrics and movie subtitles. This is while R.A. went to the CC for working on topics either more particularly related to her classroom practices or more in line with her personal interests. She reported that:

> I try to visit some specific websites . . . like 'Helium.com' that contains materials about our major, which is [English] literature. I also like to read scientific texts online . . . or about art, which is my favorite. Or you have a profile in social networks, and someone introduces something and you see it and go to read [about it].

One of the more interesting perspectives was expressed by S.H. who said she would learn more if allowed to work on her own in the CC instead of class hours. Although the point of focal attention is directed to Internet-aided learning, the attitude she possesses in regard with SALL demonstrates the extreme importance of integration of formal classroom learning with learning in ways that proffer self-direction opportunities:

> When I read a novel but don't understand some parts, I would get a summary of it online to know the characters. Internet is useful. Even I prefer to talk to my teachers and not attend some of my useless classes wherein I don't learn much and instead go to the CC to do my own learning.

Learners talked neither negatively nor positively about the SSC. They generally believed the resources provided at the SSC were adequately diverse and met their expectations. Despite this, only one learner indicated an active attendance to the SSC for reading the materials there (English newspapers) and two learners described it as a 'nice' place for studying during the final

term examinations. This is far from the goals that have been initially set by the authorities, which have been to foster free-time reading among students rather than under-pressure studying for the tests.

Conclusions

The two facilities described in this paper (CC/SSC) were multiuse common computer/study areas for all majors of the Humanities faculty in the University of Kashan. Although there has been no formal assessment whether they are reaching their aims in terms of fostering independent learning among the faculty students, some of the EFL learners in this study reported attendance to the facilities merely for using the Internet. Nonetheless, some other learners demonstrated unwillingness to attend the CC basically because they could not conduct their independent learning in a crowded and noisy place. Instead, they reported a shift in using the Internet service in other places such as dormitory. None of the participants indicated proactive use of the material resources available at the facilities. The most significant reason for this lies upon the policies that university authorities have established. Despite encouraging direct access to the sparse learning materials, no clear agenda or long-term plan is defined for the CC/SSC to help learners take more responsibility for their learning. This is at odds, for example, with the well-accepted principle that institutional encouragement of learners to assume more control over their learning has to manifest itself also in training specialist managers, besides the money and space they invest in establishment of a SAC (Gardner & Miller, 1997). A dearth of provision of appropriate learner support programs on the institution side, supposedly, means that learners' occasional participation in self-access learning draws on their personal learning preferences and needs rather than a soundly set initiative for augmentation of SALL. In this sense, it could be argued this study identified the learners' self-access activities manifesting as well as contributing to their autonomy. This is in line with Ahmadi's (2012) findings that Iranian learners recognize themselves as most responsible for expansion of their learning beyond the language class.

The other goal of this study was to evaluate usefulness of the CC/SSC in providing learners with opportunities for more independent learning. It was hoped to gain such knowledge by examination of what learners actually do in self-access facilities (Sturtridge, 1997). Despite its limited scope of services, EFL learners still exploited the CC for boosting their English

language ability. However, the majority of the tasks described by learners pointed to the role of Internet in regulation of their learning and did not particularly demonstrate connections with the center itself. This might, inter alia, imply that learners have turned to using Internet as an appropriate and preferred resource for conducting self-directed learning instead of the other services at the facilities, particularly that they are not purpose built for SALL. An essential measure in this regard is providing a more efficient Internet service for students throughout the campus. Training learners on various aspects of online searching/researching might also widen their self-directed learning abilities. Moreover, it seems to me that, by merging both the CC and the SSC into a single self-access facility the university authorities can resolve the discomforting problems that were reported to exist within the CC environment.

Limitations

It is important to note that this study only included seven participants and their perceptions and practices do not represent the full range of EFL learners' self-access experiences in the examined institute. Further research with larger samples is needed for deeper understanding of how learners' cognitions are set with regard to SALL and what they actually need in order to improve their self-access learning activities. Similarly, practitioners are prompted to utilize consciousness-raising schemes to explore learners' feedback regarding more independent learning in an adequately guided self-access facility.

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Notes on the contributor

Afshin Mohammadi earned an MA in TEFL from University of Kashan, Iran. His main research interest is the contribution of out-of-class learning to language learner autonomy.

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Learning Styles of Independent Learning Centre Users

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Abstract

Learning style research has been a significant field within language teaching and learning. There have been very few attempts, however, to seek possible links between independent learning and learning style preferences. This paper aims to identify the learning styles of students who use the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) on a regular basis at a state university in Turkey (n=102). The findings of the learning style analysis revealed that, contrary to expectations, most of the regular users of the centre were synoptic learners, which implies that these learners might not necessarily have conscious control over their own learning processes. An in-depth analysis of learning styles and recommendations to improve the services offered in the centre are also included in the paper.

Keywords: Independent Learning Centre, learning styles, synoptic learners, ectenic learners

Background

Autonomy and independent learning have been two key concepts in teaching and learning settings for the last few decades. Benson (2011) notes that autonomy, or the capacity to take charge of one's own learning, could be seen as a natural product of self-directed learning, or learning in which the objectives, progress and evaluation of learning are determined by the learners themselves. Independent learning, on the other hand, is associated with a number of different terms such as 'self-regulated learning' all of which describe very similar themes including students having an understanding of their learning, being motivated to take responsibility of their learning and working with teachers to structure their learning environment (Meyer, Haywood, Sachdev, & Faraday, 2008). However, skills like setting learning goals, monitoring the progress, evaluating the learning gains and taking the responsibility of one's own learning might turn out to be challenging tasks for many language learners without support and guidance. Institutions can provide self-access centres (also commonly referred to as independent learning centres) to assist learners in reaching these goals. Dofs and Hobbs (2011) point out that by setting up self-access centres and/or incorporating self-study time into the curriculum, institutions can (1) provide self-study situations, (2) teach transferable skills for independent studies, (3) actively encourage learners to use their innate aptitude to learn, (4) create opportunities for learners to take accountability

for their own learning, and (5) let learners take control of their own learning as much as possible.

A self-access centre can be defined as a purpose-designed facility in which learning resources such as audio, video and computer workstations, audiotapes, videotapes and DVDs, computer software and print materials, access to the internet or satellite TV are made directly available to learners (Benson, 2011). Once inside the centre (or hooked up to a computer), learners will decide what work to do, find the right kind of material and activities and settle down to complete the learning task (Harmer, 2007).

In a learning area facility which aims to provide its users with different types of materials and promote independent learning, it seems significant for the administrators of self-access centres to gather data on their users' profiles and needs. They should seek ways to find out the basic individual characteristics of their visitors along with their needs in each particular centre.

Learning styles are one of those individual characteristics which could play a significant role in learning and teaching processes. A learning style is defined as the preference or predisposition of an individual to perceive and process information in a particular way or combination of ways (Sarasin, 1999). They can also be considered as convenient shortcuts for talking about patterns of what an individual is likely to prefer as a learner (Leaver, Ehrman, & Skekhtman, 2005). It appears that every learner has a learning style, consisting of a unique blend of instructional and environmental preferences, of information processing preferences, and of preferences related to personality; no one style which typifies good language learners has been identified yet (Nel, 2008).

The role of learning styles within the fields of language teaching and learning has been a matter of interest in literature. Rusli and Soegiarto (2001), for instance, maintain that the difference in cognitive learning styles needs to be taken into serious consideration as one of the factors toward a successful student's learning autonomously. The findings in their research revealed that cognitive learning style, namely field independent and field dependent does not have any effect on the achievements of students in History (subject matter); on the other hand, it has an effect on English (subject matter).

In another study carried out with non-English majors in a Chinese university, Wang (2007) found that participants varied in their preference for particular learning styles. According to the researcher, the varied and uneven distribution of learning styles among learners implies that it is important for teachers to be aware of the feature of learning style

preference among learners and to respond flexibly by employing a broad range of teaching strategies to better reach students of different learning preferences.

Similarly, according to Karthigeyan and Nirmala (2013), it would be useful for teachers to know the learning styles of their students so as to offer individualized instruction and for students to plan and make better use of their study time and learning strategies which can improve their academic performance.

Along with similar studies which regard learning style preferences as an important component in teaching and learning, it is also possible to find some others that challenge this perspective. According to Coffield, Moseley, Hall, & Ecclestone,(2004), learning styles are objected to by opponents for a number of reasons which can be summarized as follows:

a) Learning style preferences are measured with subjective judgments, which could affect the validity and reliability of the statistical analyses.

b) Test items in some of the instruments are ambiguous or problematic as they ignore the socio-economic, geographical and cultural contexts of learners.

c) Some of the leading tests have been commercialized.

d) No direct link has been established between variance in learning styles and achievement outcomes.

e) Some of the conclusions made after highly elaborate statistical treatments are relatively simple and sometimes exaggerated.

Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork (2008) also underline that there is no adequate evidence base to justify incorporating learning styles assessments into general educational practice. According to the researchers, given the lack of methodologically sound studies, it would be an error to conclude that all possible versions of learning styles have been tested and found wanting. Additionally, Kruse (2009) points out that students do not possess learning styles; rather every student has unique prior knowledge, experiences and developmental levels.

The role of learning styles in teaching and learning has recently been challenged within the literature; however, learning style preferences could still be helpful in determining learner profiles. With this study, it was aimed to reach the learning styles of regular users of the Independent Learning Centre and look into possible connections between independent learning and learning styles.

It is important to note that the centre where this research was conducted is called an Independent Learning Centre; however, the centre functions in the same way as Self-Access

Centres do. From this point on, the centre will be referred to as the Independent Learning Centre or the ILC.

Methodology

The research context and participants

Yıldırım Beyazıt University is a state university in Ankara, Turkey. 100% English-medium instruction is offered in most of its departments. In order to equip students with necessary skills in the English language, the School of Foreign Languages leads a CEFR-based curriculum in which students receive 20-25 hours of English classes per week depending on their level.

One facility based at the school is the Independent Learning Centre (ILC). Located in the School of Foreign Languages, the ILC aims to assist the students enrolled in the programme by offering computer-based learning materials, free internet access and a library section which contains books on language skills, grammar, vocabulary, exam preparation as well as readers and coursebooks printed by various publishers. The centre is equipped with 40 computers in two laboratories. Besides these, students can also study individually or in groups within the centre as some tables and chairs have also been placed inside. It serves students on weekdays between 09:30 and 16:30. Students are welcome to visit the centre voluntarily; their visits are not graded.

According to the results of the evaluation survey carried out with students in 2012-2013:

- The most common three reasons for visiting the centre were found to be ‘to do homework’, ‘to improve my English’ and ‘to prepare for exams’.
- The most useful materials for students were ‘listening materials’, ‘Internet links’ and ‘printed reference books (grammar, vocabulary, exam preparation etc.)’.
- The top three needs suggested by students were ‘more study space/computers’, ‘listening materials’ and ‘more guidance’ (Uzun, 2014).

The ILC today provides students with extracurricular speaking and movie club activities supported with integrated language practice as well as workshops which, in general, aim to offer additional language-based and study skill activities. It should be noted that such activities were not offered to students during 2012-2013 academic year, when the study was conducted.

Research questions

1. Do the findings regarding the learning styles of regular users of the ILC reveal any signs suggesting that they could be independent learners?
2. How can the services provided in the ILC be developed considering the learning styles of its users?

Participants

The study was carried out with 102 English preparatory class students (out of 144) who were studying English in different levels. These students were found to be regular users of the ILC. 52% of them were male and 42% female.

These students were supposed to finish their studies in English and take the proficiency test, which is held 4 times a year at school. Those who pass the test successfully complete the preparatory class and start taking departmental courses in their faculties.

Data collection

This study was conducted at the beginning of spring term in the 2012-2013 academic year. Data were collected with two instruments; Independent Learning Centre (ILC) Evaluation Survey and the Ehrman and Leaver (2002) Learning Style Questionnaire v. 2.0.

Independent Learning Centre (ILC) Evaluation Survey

The Independent Learning Centre (ILC) Evaluation Survey was developed in order to collect data about how the centre is used by students. It also functioned as a tool to determine the frequency of users visiting the centre. The survey was handed out in all the available classes and 715 students who were studying English in different levels in the School of Foreign Languages were asked to fill the questionnaire in during class time. The analyses of this first survey revealed that 144 students described themselves as regular users of the centre, placing themselves as visiting the centre between 1 or 2 times to more than 5 times a week. The detailed findings for this survey are presented in Uzun (2014).

Ehrman and Leaver (2002) Learning Style Questionnaire

The questionnaire developed by Ehrman, Leaver and Skekhtman (2002) is an instrument of the E&L Model of cognitive styles construct. The instrument is referred to as the E&L Questionnaire in the literature. It is comprised of 30 items each of which includes two sentences on two poles. Learners are asked to place their learning attitudes somewhere between two poles from 1 to 9. The balance point is represented with number 5 and as

students gets closer to each pole in their preferences, it means that they favour that item more and the opposite less.

The E&L Model consists of a superordinate construct, synopsis-ectasis and ten subscales (Ehrman & Leaver, 2003, p. 395). According to Ortega (2009), synopsis refers to the preference to rely on holistic, at-a-glance perception of information and synoptic learners usually thrive with subconscious learning approaches because they prefer learning intuitively; on the other hand, ectasis refers to the preference to rely on detail and systems while processing new information and ectenic learners thrive when they can exercise conscious control over their learning as they are methodical learners.

The 10 subscales suggested in the E&L Model are classified under two poles in Table 1:

Table 1. E&L (2002) Learning Style Subscales

ECTENIC LEARNING	***SYNOPTIC LEARNING***
Field Dependent	Field Independent
Fıeld Insensitive	Fıeld Sensitive
Levelling	Sharpening
Particular	Global
Reflective	Impulsive
Analytic	Synthetic
Digital	Analogue
Abstract	Concrete
Sequential	Random
Deductive	Inductive

According to Leaver et al. (2005), the E&L Model originated from dissatisfaction with existing approaches to cognitive scales, which were leading to misdiagnoses and confusion

about the meanings of terms. Ehrman and Leaver (2003) point out that they developed the questionnaire to make the theory operational and it was used at Foreign Services Institute in the USA as a tool offered to participants in the Learning Consultation Service.

Each subscale was analysed in detail within the works of the authors and they can be summarized as follows in terms of their reflections in foreign language learning:

Field Dependent and Field Independent

Field independence in foreign language is regarded as the ability to select something of importance or interest to focus while field dependence is considered as the absence of field independence (Leaver et al., 2005).

Field Insensitive and Field Sensitive

Field sensitive learners use the full language environment for comprehension and learning while, on the other hand, field insensitive learners pay attention to a particular language element being studied rather than focussing on the whole language environment (Leaver et al., 2005).

Levelling and Sharpening

As a learning style subscale, levelling-sharpening difference represents what learners pay attention to and how they store it in memory (Ehrman & Leaver, 2003). Levellers remove distinctions instinctively and they frequently see similarities; sharpeners, on the other hand, look for distinctions among items (Leaver et al., 2005).

Particular and Global

Global processing focusses on the 'big picture' and processes "top down" whereas particular processing attend to discrete items and details and process "bottom up" (Ehrman & Leaver, 2003).

Reflective and Impulsive

Impulsive learners think and respond nearly simultaneously, which means that they tend to complete their work more quickly but often with less accuracy; reflective learners, however, think, then respond, which in turn results in their accuracy in their work but their slowness sometimes means that work is incomplete (Leaver et al., 2005).

Analytic and Synthetic

Synthetic learners like to use pieces to build new wholes while analytic learners like to disassemble wholes into parts (Ehrman & Leaver, 2003).

Digital and Analogue

Digital learners take a more surface approach than analogue learners dealing with what they can see or hear directly; analogue learners, on the other hand, gravitate to the use of

metaphors, analogies and conceptual links among units and their meanings (Leaver et al., 2005).

Abstract and Concrete

While abstract learners show a preference for grammar rules, systems, discussion of abstract topics and attention to accuracy, concrete learners prefer sensory contact with what is being learned, a relationship with direct experience, and experiential learning (Ehrman & Leaver, 2003).

Sequential and Random

Sequential learners generally prefer to receive materials that have been organized in some fashion as in syllabuses, lesson plans or programmed tutorials; on the other hand, random learners generally prefer to develop their own approach to language learning and organize assignments in their own way, often without an apparent order (Leaver et al., 2005).

Deductive and Inductive

Inductive learners form hypotheses and test them; deductive learners, however, prefer to study the rules, and then practice applying them to examples (Ehrman & Leaver, 2003).

The E&L Model (2002) was adopted for this research for a number of reasons. First of all, it was considered that a learning style questionnaire which solely focusses on language learning would be a more appropriate option; therefore, some alternatives which aim to find more general learning style preferences were discarded. The second reason for selecting this particular model among the remaining options was that it contains items that can be connected to independent learning including the main distinction in the model, synopsis and ectasis. This factor played a significant role as the learning style analysis would be carried out with the regular users of the ILC and it was aimed to seek possible connections between independent learning tendencies and learning styles. Another important reason for the selection of this particular model and its instrument was that it was in use as an instrument for the Learning Consultation Service at Foreign Services Institute. Rather than a model which basically remains more like a theoretical framework, a questionnaire which is used in a real environment was regarded as a more practical choice.

Once this questionnaire was selected, Betty Lou Leaver, one of the owners of this model and the questionnaire, was contacted via e-mail and permission was granted to use the instrument for this research.

Considering the challenges while collecting the data, it should be noted that reaching the students one by one and asking them to participate in the research was time-consuming.

As students were in different classes having their English lessons at different times of the day, the implementation process lasted longer than expected since it took time to find each and every student separately. Some students were reached during their visits to the ILC. Another challenge was about the style of the questionnaire. It was observed that some students were puzzled about how to mark their answers on the sheets. The bi-polar fashion adopted in the questionnaire seemed different and a bit confusing at first; nevertheless, they were able to complete the questionnaire easily with further support provided by the researcher.

The Turkish translation of the E&L (2002) Learning Style Questionnaire was used for the learning style analysis within this study. The questionnaire was translated into Turkish by the researcher and subjected to Back Translation with the help of two different translators, who were experienced in translation. The Turkish forms were compared with one done by a third translator and one master copy was reached. The draft was then given to the fourth translator who was an English Language Instructor and a native speaker of English and Turkish. After his confirmation, the text was sent to a faculty member in the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at the same university for a final check in terms of use of Turkish and returned with approval. The text was handed out to the students once these procedures were completed.

The E&L Questionnaire was then completed by 102 students out of 144. A raffle was held after the research was over and some gifts were presented to some of the participants later on. No feedback of confusion or a lack of understanding was reported while the questionnaire was being answered.

Students were given the chance to ask for individual feedback on their learning styles. Individual learning style analyses were done upon request and results were sent to each participant by e-mail. The feedback document was also included some introductory and explanatory information about how to interpret the results.

Data analysis

A learning style analysis will normally provide teachers or researchers with data for each individual separately. However, in this study, students' answers to the learning style questionnaire were analysed in a collective manner in order to find out more about the overall learning preferences and tendencies of the regular users of the Independent Learning Centre (n=102). Both the overall learning tendencies and each subscale were also studied separately and comparatively.

Data collected through the learning style questionnaire were analysed descriptively. Ehrman et al. (2002) provide a scoring key to interpret the results. For instance, totals from questions 1, 11, 21 have to be added; students with a score of 1-15 are labelled as field dependent (ectenic pole) and 16-30 as field independent (synoptic pole). This scoring system goes in the same pattern in which the scores of 2-12-22, 3-13-23 and others refer to a single learning style. When the analyses were completed, each student had 10 labels for subscales and the dominance of the learning styles in either pole determined the overall tendencies of the participants as either synopsis or ectasis. Students with 5 learning styles in each pole were considered as 'balanced'.

This study was mainly based on descriptive analyses; however, chi-square tests were also applied to find out whether it was possible to reach possible correlations between some of the learning styles or scales which could somehow be related.

Results and Discussion

Overall Learning Tendencies

As shown in Table 2, analyses for the overall learning preferences revealed that most of the users were synoptic learners. Participants were found to be the learners who tend to rely on their intuitions and subconscious processing most commonly, as explained by Leaver et al. (2005).

Table 2. Overall Learning Tendencies

Type of Learning	Number of Students	%
Synoptic	66	64.7
Ectenic	13	12.8
Balanced	23	22.5

Learning styles of regular users of the centre

Dominant learning styles of the regular users (n=102) were found to be; Field Dependent, Field Sensitive, Sharpening, Global, Reflective, Synthetic, Analogue, Concrete, Sequential and Inductive. The overall results are given in Table 3:

Table 3. Results of the Learning Style Analysis

Dominant Style	**Learning Styles**	**n**	**%**
Field Dependent	Field Dependent	63	61.8
	Field Independent	39	38.2
Field Sensitive	Field Sensitive	71	69.6
	Field Insensitive	31	30.4
Sharpening	Levelling	40	39.2
	Sharpening	62	60.8
Global	Global	66	64.7
	Particular	36	35.3
Reflective	Impulsive	44	43.1
	Reflective	58	56.9
Synthetic	Synthetic	68	66.7
	Analytic	34	33.3
Analogue	Analogue	68	66.7
	Digital	34	33.3
Concrete	Concrete	84	82.4
	Abstract	18	17.6
Sequential	Random	44	43.1
	Sequential	58	56.9
Inductive	Inductive	76	74.5
	Deductive	26	25.5

It is clear in Table 3 that some of the subscales received particular density. Dominant learning styles as well as the results of the correlational analyses will be handled in different sections below.

Field dependence and field sensitivity

Field dependence and field sensitivity seem to be two dominant learning styles among regular users of the centre. However, these two related subscales needed to be subjected to a correlational analysis as Ehrman and Leaver (2003) underlined four possible types (as cited from Ehrman, 1996, 1997) of learners as to how they make use of context in learning (See Table 4).

Table 4. Ehrman (1996; 1997) Types of Field Independence and Field Sensitivity

Types	**Possible Styles**	**Explanation**
Type 1	Field independent and field sensitive	Can learn from material in and out of context
Type 2	Field independent and field insensitive	Comfortable with out-of-context material
Type 3	Field dependent and field sensitive	Comfortable with in-context material
Type 4	Field dependent and field insensitive	Has difficulties with both kinds of material

A chi-square test was employed to find out about the correlations of two subscales in all four possibilities mentioned in Table 4; in this way, the aim was to better understand the role of context in learning for the users of the centre. The analysis implied similar results with the significance of field dependence and field sensitivity and it can be found in Table 5:

Table 5. Field Independence and Field Sensitivity

			Field Sensitive	Field Insensitive	Overall
	Field Dependent	n	47	16	63
		%	74.6%	25.4%	100.0%
	Field Independent	n	24	15	39
		%	61.5%	38.5%	100.0%
Overall		n	71	31	102
		%	69.6%	30.4%	100.0%

Chi-square value=1.375 p=0.241

According to the results of the chi-square test employed, no meaningful relationship was discovered between the first and the second subscale. However, it is clear that the highest correlation exists between field dependent and field sensitive learners (Type 3), which means that these users tend to make use of context for their learning. It is also possible to maintain that learners who can deal with out-of-context studies are also common considering the number of students who are both field independent and field sensitive (Type 1).

Synoptic Sharpeners

According to Leaver et al. (2005), sharpeners generally notice and remember subtle differences of form and meaning which characterize native-like language depending on the level of language aptitude or previous learning experiences. Thus, it can be assumed that sharpeners will be successful in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary studies as they could make use of contrastive analyses while working on these language areas. Additionally, these learners can also be good at studying individually in a more learning-oriented environment.

Regarding their experiences in Foreign Services Institute in the US, Ehrman and Leaver (2003) point out that synoptic sharpeners can reach higher levels of language proficiency in a much easier way. The two main constructs synopsis and ectasis, and the

learning style subscales levelling and sharpening were analysed in correlation with one another. The results are can be found in Table 6:

Table 6. Correlations Among Synoptic-Ectenic Learning and Levelling-Sharpening Learning Styles

						Overall
			Ectenic	Synoptic	Balanced	
	Levelling	N	8	18	14	40
		%	20.0%	45.0%	35.0%	100.0%
	Sharpening	N	5	48	9	62
		%	8.1%	77.4%	14.5%	100.0%
Overall		N	13	66	23	102
		%	12.7 %	64.7%	22.5%	100.0%

Chi-square value=11.191 p=0.004

The results obtained from chi-square test indicate that there is a meaningful relationship between general synoptic-ectenic learning tendencies and levelling-sharpening learning style subscale ($p<0.05$). 77.4% (48 students) of sharpeners were found to be on the synoptic pole. These results imply that the number of synoptic sharpeners who are expected to be successful in learning English is high.

Reflective Learners

The results were found to be quite close in the impulsive-reflective subscale, which basically focusses on the speed of processing a response to a stimulus, or a speed and accuracy of language studies, as mentioned by Ehrman and Leaver (2003) and Leaver et al. (2005). More participants, though by a narrow margin, were reflective learners who are relatively slow, but at the same time who tend to consider accuracy important. If these learners overcome their problem with speed, they might be more successful in their studies, particularly in receptive skills as well as grammar and vocabulary. Besides this, they might

find it hard to improve their productive and communicative language skills if they focus on accuracy too much in their production.

Synthetic and inductive learners

Synthesizers assemble something new (knowledge, models, stories, etc.) from known information; they do this by using the given pieces to build new wholes such as making up new words, using typical roots and prefixes or rewriting a paragraph from a different point of view, using the sentences given as models (Leaver et al., 2005). On the other hand, inductive learners form hypotheses and then test them; they may rarely seek teacher support (Leaver et al., 2005). These learners could be considered similar in the way that they both prefer moving from parts to the whole.

Seeing that synthetic and inductive learners are high in number, it was necessary to analyse correlations between each other. As can be seen below in Table 7, the ILC users adopting synthetic and inductive learning styles at the same time constitute an 80% majority. Although the analysis did not reveal a meaningful relationship, the density of these users seemed worth considering.

Table 7. Correlations among Synthetic-Analytic and Inductive-Deductive Learning Styles

					Overall
			Inductive	Deductive	
	Synthetic	n	55	13	68
		%	80.9%	19.1%	100.0%
	Analytic	n	21	13	34
		%	61.8%	38.2%	100.0%
Overall		n	76	26	102
		%	74.5%	25.5%	1000%

Chi-square value=3.413 p=0.065

Analogue learners

The findings obtained in this study clearly show that analogue learners are dominant among the regular users of the centre. As pointed out by Leaver et al. (2005), analogue learners tend to prefer using learning material in meaningful contexts. This tendency seems to be consistent with common tendencies of field dependence and field sensitivity and imply that they are generally good at studying in-context resources.

Concrete learners

In this research, the highest number of students was found to have the concrete learning style. 84 students (82.4%) seemed to adopt the concrete learning style. Concrete learners are defined by Leaver et al. (2005) as those who are more hands-on and experiential learners with their preference to use real materials and examples for learning. Therefore, most of the users of the centre seem to favour the productive side of learning rather than dealing with more conceptual and abstract points.

Conclusions

Learning style analyses were conducted with the regular users of an Independent Learning Centre in Turkish Higher Education context to find out more about the learning profiles of this specific target group. The aim was mainly to see whether the regular users of the centre showed any tendencies for independent learning by tapping into their learning style preferences.

The results of the study indicated, contrary to initial expectations, that most of the regular users were not necessarily the learners who had conscious control over their learning. Although they showed some potential to lead independent studies successfully, regarding them as naturally autonomous or independent learners only because they use the Independent Learning Centre would not be a valid proposition. This result brought about the necessity to train the learners as individuals who can take the responsibility for their own learning.

Building upon the findings of this study, the coordinators of the school have been currently working on an ILC-based learning advisory service and a learner training programme. Some initial steps have been taken in order to create an awareness among students. One of them is to provide ILC Workshops that are generally held inside the centre. The workshops so far have been based on learning strategies and various skills in learning. Additionally, a bi-monthly newsletter will be made available from the new academic year

onwards. As well as the news about the activities taking place in the centre, students will be provided with texts that will address issues like study skills, learning strategies, ways to increase motivation and decrease the level of anxiety, useful tips for skills development and so on. The newsletter is also expected to be an addition to the study skills presentations, which are brought to all the classrooms by their teachers every week regardless of the levels of the students. All of these steps will form the elements of a more comprehensive and systematic learner training programme in the near future.

Another result that could be drawn from the analyses carried out is related to users' learning attitudes which revealed inferences about positive learning behaviour. For instance, synoptic sharpeners, who were found to be dominant, tend to reach the required professional levels of language proficiency with greater success than other students as suggested by Ehrman and Leaver (2003).

The density of synthetic and inductive students was also considered significant. If adopted together, these two learning styles could refer to learners who are more interested in searching for knowledge and going from pieces to the whole. These tendencies in learning can also be regarded as favourable for independent learning and the ILC context. However, these learners might need more printed, computer and internet-based resources. In order to support them, ILC Worksheets on grammar, vocabulary and reading have been prepared and will be ready for use from the 2014-2015 academic year onwards. The general disposition not to seek a teacher in learning could be considered another positive behaviour in the Independent Learning Centre context. With more guidance for learning strategies and further steps, these learners could become more autonomous learners.

The number of concrete learners indicates that most of them are interested in creativity and experimentation in language learning. This perspective can aid the activities to be prepared within the ILC; however, these activities could be more beneficial if they are designed in a way to promote concrete language use in communicative and real-life contexts. ILC Speaking Club activities have been initiated at the centre to enable the users of the ILC to practice English within communicative contexts. At the ILC, native instructors of English lead speaking activities in which they focus primarily on real-life language use and the ways to support students' speaking skills.

One other point that learning style analysis put forth was that context seemed to play a significant role in learning for a large number of students. Context needs to be taken into consideration while preparing learning materials and decorating the physical environment.

More context-based learning materials in four language skills need to be incorporated to the printed and computer-based materials archives.

It should be noted that the learning style tendencies were discovered among the regular users of Yıldırım Beyazıt University Independent Learning Centre in Turkey. These results can not only be used as an aid for future steps to be taken for the services offered by this centre, but they can also shed light on the efforts paid by similar learning centres established with the purpose of fostering independent learning.

Notes on the contributor

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Introduction

Katherine Thornton (Column Editor), Otemon Gakuin University, Osaka, Japan

Welcome to the new SiSAL column, which will be a case study of one SAC, Room 101 at the University of Bradford, UK, by Michael Allhouse. In this three-part column, Michael explains how he and his colleagues have responded to the changing face of foreign languages provision at the university, and the growth of the Internet as a source for language learning materials. Like many SACs which were opening in the 1980s or 1990s, Room 101 was originally promoted as a place to access traditional learning materials in physical form. By reinventing Room 101 as a social learning space, Michael has capitalised on the dynamism of the users of the space to make the centre an attractive place for students from all over the world, and user numbers have grown accordingly. As many self-access centres struggle with similar issues and are constantly under pressure to keep relevant to their users, this column may offer food for thought for practitioners in other contexts.

In this first installment, Michael first describes the changes that have taken place at his institution, the different options he explored, and how he reinvented Room 101 as a social learning space. The second two installments will describe research conducted into student usage and perceptions of the new Room 101, and a wider survey of UK SAC practitioners respectively. I hope you enjoy reading about this very interesting SAC and how it has responded to the changes in the higher education context.

Room 101: The Social SAC

Michael Allhouse, University of Bradford, UK

Abstract

This column looks at the SAC at the University of Bradford (UoB), which is commonly known as Room 101. The column looks at how Room 101 has reacted to the problem of reduced usage as a result of the cancellation of foreign language courses at the UoB, social media making online communication between learners easier, and the availability of online resources which have reduced the perceived importance of SAC resources (such as books and CDs).

Room 101 has adopted a materials-light, people-focussed approach which has led to increased usage. Other solutions were tried and are detailed in this instalment, with examples from the literature. Room 101's approach has centred on facilitated social learning opportunities and a friendly, student-led atmosphere, with many students working in the Centre. This instalment is the first of three; the following instalments will look at research conducted into student and staff thoughts on the current state of SACs in UK Higher Education.

Keywords: social learning, people-focussed, learner training, resource-light, push-pull approach

The Self-Access Centre (SAC) at the University of Bradford (UoB), in Yorkshire, UK, is known as Room 101 (the room's number is one hundred and one). Room 101 has been on an interesting journey over the last decade. It was part of the Language Centre until three years ago when its management was moved to the Students' Union, the University of Bradford Union (UBU), although it still works very closely with the Language Centre. Over the last 10 years, Room 101 has adapted its approach, becoming more of a social learning space (a space where students learn from each other in person – in our case mostly through social interaction in the form of speaking and listening practice, sometimes in structured environments, sometimes unstructured). This has led to Room 101 becoming very popular with students and winning awards such as the Vice Chancellor's Award for Distinguished Teaching Support 2014.

This column (this instalment and the two following) will look at how Room 101 arrived at its social learning provision, how successful it has been, and whether any recommendations can be made for other institutions.

This instalment will examine how and why Room 101 has moved its provision away from a resource-based focus, towards a more people-based social learning approach, looking at the reasons for this change and other provisions that were tried. The second instalment will go into more detail about our social learning interventions and look at a survey conducted in 2013 of Room 101 users, which attempted to measure what users most value about Room 101. Finally, the third instalment will look at a survey the author conducted of other SAC managers which looks at how recent technological developments and changes in language provision have had an impact across the sector and how SAC managers have responded.

I was inspired to begin researching and writing about SACs after visiting three

UK universities in the summer of 2013, where SACs had recently been closed, substantially scaled back, or integrated into the library. This brought threats of closure which had hung over Room 101 into perspective and caused me to reflect on the current status of SACs in UK HE.

Background to Room 101 and Problems of Usage Decline

I have worked in Room 101 for the last 18 years, and seen it change considerably. Up until 2006 the UoB Language Centre offered foreign language degrees and postgraduate qualifications, which have now ceased. The Language Centre now offers English access courses (pre-sessional courses and an international foundation programme) and EAP support for existing international students. When foreign language courses were first discontinued, usage of Room 101 declined, bringing concerns about closure.

At the same time that the provision of foreign language degrees was declining at the UoB, online language learning resources were increasingly providing a perceived alternative to physical SAC resources. The availability of online English practice material, and the increasing affordability of personal computers meant that students now had other options for access to English practice resources. In focus groups, students told me that access to language learning resources over the internet made physical resources seem less attractive to them. Indeed, this was my experience, as year-on-year I observed students seem less and less interested in using physical resources such as books, CDs, and DVDs. This was also observed by researchers such as Reinders (2012).

Cotterall and Reinders (2001), looking at the SAC at the English Language Institute at Victoria University of Wellington, found that students were sometimes reluctant to use the SAC, with other priorities often getting in the way. Mynard (2012) also gives examples of SACs struggling to attract students to self-access and being used as homework rooms for language students. This was the trend I was increasingly observing in Room 101. By 2006 usage of Room 101 was in serious decline (see below), and I began to look for other ways to engage students in language learning, or for other ways to help international students in UK HE.

Some Potential Solutions

Looking for new ways to make Room 101 relevant, I looked at a number of potential solutions to its decline in usage:

- A move away from physical resources
- A people-focused, social learning approach
- Making Room 101 more student-led by encouraging student volunteers
- Closer links with the Language Centre curriculum
- Learner training

A move away from physical resources

Over the last ten years I had found that when Room 101 focused on the provision of physical resources, students failed to engage with us and usage declined. Indeed in 1999, when language courses were at their peak, usage was as high as 60 students on average per day. By 2006, when foreign language classes had ceased, usage was down to as few as 10 students on average per day. International students told me in focus groups that the reasons they did not come to the SAC to do self-study were partly due to time constraints and partly due to provision available on the internet. Doyle and Parrish (2012) conducted a study which asked students in several universities in Japan how they liked to learn English outside of class. They found that students did not mention books, electronic, online or multimedia resources, or SACs, but instead spoke about practicing speaking. This reflects my own experience, and in focus groups students told me that whilst they feel they can use online resources at home whenever they like, they prefer speaking with others in person, in informal and semi-structured settings, particularly with native speakers.

Taking this feedback on board, I began to design learning interventions which would give students practice speaking and listening in a social, fun way. This took the shape of a debating club, IELTS speaking practice, a film club, art club, presentation skills practice and other similar activities, run by myself and home student volunteers.

I also started to look at creating a community of students, through internationally-themed social events and a generally friendly tone. I began to feel that physical learning materials were no longer a strong draw to the Centre and in fact made Room 101 look out of date. However, whilst I no longer focused on language resources, I did leave some of the more up-to-date books and CDs on the shelves,

seeing them as setting the tone of the Centre as a language learning space.

Room 101 has a large number of computers which students use to do work or use social networking sites. The computers and printing facilities are a popular draw for us and allow us to engage with students and draw them into our activities and events. Indeed many shyer students come to use the computers, but listen in to activities going on nearby before eventually joining in.

A people focussed, social learning approach

I began to move Room 101's provision towards a more people-focussed approach (what we in UBU have come to term social learning, meaning students learning from each other or support staff like myself, in person, and in informal settings). I read about the World Plaza, the SAC at the Seto Campus of Nanzan University, Japan, which had relatively few physical resources but many social spaces where learners could interact with each other. I attempted to move Room 101 in a similar direction. Croker and Ashurova (2012), writing about the World Plaza, found that the key to creating long-term motivation to attend a SAC lies in nurturing the establishment of social bonds between learners, and making language learning fun. Croker and Ashurova (2012) found that students were more interested in relaxing and enjoying conversation in English with their peers than 'studying' it. The World Plaza approach assumed that people were the primary learning resource. This was a realization I had also come to. I had come to understand that the best resource Room 101 had was the home students and staff that frequented the centre, as students desperately wanted to practice speaking with native speakers. By designing fun, semi-structured ways to promote communication, I could help international students to mix with the home students and staff, developing their English and forging social bonds.

In 2012, Hayo Reinders, in the article "The End of Self-Access?", suggested that SACs are in danger of dying out, due in part to technological developments, and in part to a lack of reflection on pedagogic practice (Reinders, 2012). Reinders asserts that so many new ways of connecting with information and learners outside of the classroom have emerged via the internet that the need for a physical space for self-access has to be questioned. He suggests that online social networks are gradually replacing the networks of learners in SACs. Social media mean that not only can students access language learning resources online, rather than going to a physical centre, but they can also connect with multiple communities of target language

speakers online.

Whilst some have challenged Reinders' ideas (Mynard, 2012), if Reinders is correct and students do prefer using the Internet to socialise, then SACs need to respond in some way. The question however does remain as to whether all students prefer using the internet for language learning in terms of both resources and socialising. In Room 101 I have witnessed over the last 10 years that, whilst our resources are less used, with students (rightly or wrongly) seeing the internet as providing an alternative, when it comes to social interaction, a physical centre is still very appealing. Indeed, increasingly I have found that many international students actively seek out opportunities to socialise and practice their English in-person with home students or students outside of their ethnic group.

Making Room 101 more student-led by encouraging student volunteers

Another approach I attempted was to make Room 101 more student-led. Heigham (2011) reports on the SAC at Sugiyama Jogakuen University in Japan, which is run entirely by students and has daily discussion groups, frequent events such as workshops or cultural celebrations, and only a few physical learning resources. The student workers in the SAC were six student leaders who took care of the centre, two student grammar tutors, and up to twenty volunteers who hosted discussion groups. Heigham found that the use of student workers increased attendance at the SAC and the centre was promoted as a place where students could talk to and learn from their peers. Kodate (2012), also from a SAC in a Japanese university, found evidence that the presence of student workers helped student users to lower their psychological barriers to entering the SAC. Both of these findings correspond to what I had observed in Room 101.

In Room 101 we have built up our volunteer programme over the years so that by 2013/14 we had approximately 40 volunteers working in different capacities. In Room 101, students volunteer as counter assistants (answering enquiries and performing simple admin tasks), foreign language student-teachers (teaching their language to groups of students), English language assistants (helping run English language social learning sessions), and Writing Mentors (students specially trained to get other students to reflect on uses of English in their essays). Our student volunteers are often international students looking for opportunities to gain employability skills or for opportunities to socialise and interact in English. We also attract home students

with an interest in becoming English teachers, or with an interest in other cultures.

Figure 1 below shows the term time weekly timetable of student-organised events in Room 101. It shows that student volunteers organise an exciting and varied programme of language learning.

Room 101 Activities

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9AM					
10AM				URDU CLASS	BIG BREAKFAST 10.30
11AM				THAI LANGUAGE AND CULTURE	
12	BENGALI CLASS ADVANCED CHINESE GROUP	 ADVANCED CHINESE GROUP	LUNCHTIME ART CLUB ADVANCED CHINESE GROUP	MYSTERY CHINESE ADVANCED CHINESE GROUP	IELTS SPEAKING PRACTICE ADVANCED CHINESE GROUP
1PM	RUSSIAN CLASS		FRENCH CLASS	BULGARIAN	
2PM	TURKISH CLASS		KOREAN CLASS		ARABIC CLASS
3PM			JAPANESE	INTERMEDIATE CHINESE	
4PM			BEGINNERS CHINESE CLASS ENGLISH CLUB		
5PM	SPANISH CLASS		ENGLISH CLUB	ROMANIAN CLASS	

Figure 1. Room 101 Student-led Activities Semester 1, 2013/14

In Room 101 we have found that student volunteers themselves are often an important draw for other students. Our student volunteers bring their friends to the centre and demonstrate to other students that this is a friendly, exciting space.

There are questions which have to be asked about the student-led approach, such as considerations around the training of Heigham's grammar tutors or Room 101's Writing Mentors, which cannot be as thorough as teacher training. Heigham (2011) asserted that despite possible shortcomings, her SAC is a dynamic place where students are taking independent control over the development of their own learning (Heigham, 2011), and this has also been our experience.

Closer links with the Language Centre curriculum

One approach I wanted to try to attract usage was to work more closely with the Language Centre curriculum. This is a strategy closely linked to SACs yet is something I had struggled with in Room 101.

The World Plaza scaffolded students' first SAC encounters by providing a

direct connection with classroom learning, in a 'push-pull' strategy (Croker & Ashurova, 2012). Teachers 'pushed' students to visit the World Plaza by giving them speaking 'homework' to be done there. Learners practiced these push activities in class before doing them later in the World Plaza. Activities such as discussing life histories or travel preferences were conducted. The World Plaza sessions were then fed back into classroom activities.

To 'pull' students, the SAC had regular chat times, lunchtime discussion clubs, movie clubs and guest speakers. This push-pull strategy encouraged students to interact with each other rather than with materials; however, it required close coordination with language teachers (Croker & Ashurova, 2012).

Over time I made approaches to the Language Centre to try to work more closely with them, but for a variety of reasons (mostly due to my own pressures) this proved to be difficult. Recently I've made renewed efforts, which has led to much more successful collaboration. For example, Room 101 has helped with Language Centre self-access sessions, devising a social learning circuit training model which sees students interact socially in four different facilitated ways which are then also provided as longer activities outside of the sessions. For example, we run a short debate as one of the circuit training activities, then signpost our debate club as an extra self-access activity. We have also devised activities like the Room 101 Challenge, a self-access competition with Student Union tickets as a prize, and have started linking our day-trips into the Language Centre curriculum. All of these push-pull approaches have been successful, with Language Centre students now using the Centre much more.

Learner training

As SAC Manager, I had been running learner training sessions in Room 101 on demand, but by 2006 had witnessed that demand decline to very little. In an article which looked at learner training, Klassen, Detaramani, Lui, Patri, and Wu (1998) looked at a SAC in a university in Hong Kong and found that after learner training inductions, although students recognised the benefits of the SAC, many said they would use it in future only "if time permits." In fact, Klassen et al. found that very few of the students attended follow-up self-access sessions, with students justifying their non-attendance by claiming that they had time clashes or that they were too busy. The

SAC staff admitted that it was usually the case that work pressure and personal obligations prevented students from actually pursuing independent learning (Klassen et al., 1998). This was also my experience and I have struggled for years to engage students in a meaningful way with learner training and independent learning using physical resources.

Fukuda and Yoshida (2013), Gillies (2010), and Davis (2013) also found that students struggled to engage with learner training and to find the time to use SACs for self-study. However, many institutions have witnessed huge benefits from learner training programmes which led to effective SAC resource usage (Del Rocío Domínguez Gaona, 2007; Gardner, 2001). Room 101 may look at returning to learner training in future, perhaps pointing students to online resources, and recognising that whilst students might come to the SAC for independent learner training, much of their independent learning may not take place in the SAC.

Room 101 – The Social SAC

Having tried a number of solutions to declining SAC use, the approach which worked in Room 101 was a materials-light, student-led, social learning approach. This has taken the form of a combination of peer-to-peer support (student-led language classes and writing mentors schemes), informal English speaking sessions (like debating and discussion clubs, IELTS speaking test practice sessions, and English speaking games), computer access, social occasions, and an international community space. Room 101 mainly functions as an informal social space for international students to meet students from other countries.

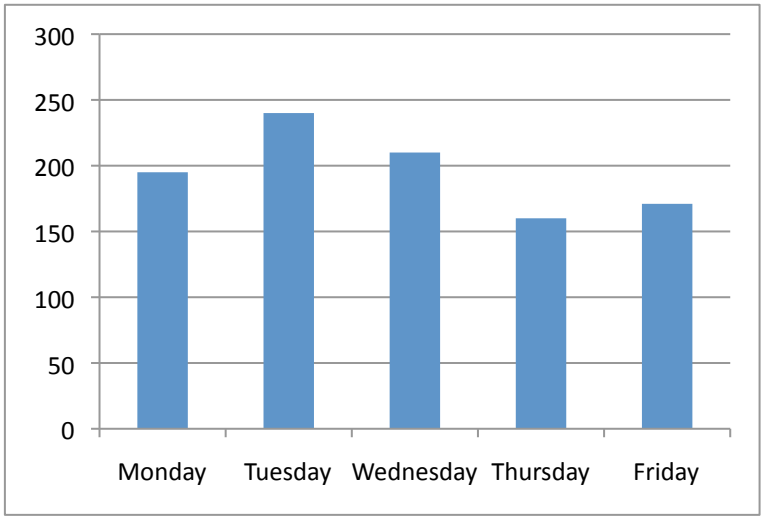

Figure 2. Room 101 Usage in Week of 18-22 February 2013

Since we adopted this social learning approach, usage has steadily increased, as can be seen from a measure of our usage in one week in 2013 (see Figure 2 above). The usage is very healthy when compared to the 10 students per day we were attracting in 2006, or even to the 60 students we attracted when foreign language degrees were at their peak. Indeed, due to the small size of the room, it would be difficult for Room 101 to meet any greater demand than this.

The social interventions in Room 101 improve students' language ability (usually English), or somehow enhance the experience of being at university in other ways (such as international awareness, employability, independent learning, and academic achievement). For example, students teach their own languages in the Centre, gaining employability and teaching skills. Writing Mentors help students reflect on their grammar, improving academic achievement. Debating Club helps students understand different perspectives on complex issues, improving international awareness.

International students see Room 101 as their home on campus (as will be demonstrated in the next instalment of this column), and an international community has formed around it. The new focus of Room 101 has led to its management being transferred to the Students' Union, to make better use of the SU's activities and friendship networks. This transfer has been very successful, with many international students now playing a much more active role in the life of the Union and the Union's links further helping to acculturate international students.

Conclusion

This instalment has looked at Room 101's journey over the last 10 years, seeing how a decline in language teaching and the availability of resources on the internet have impacted on Room 101's resource usage. Reinders' (2012) warnings about online social networks do not seem to have impacted on Room 101 too much, as we have found that students greatly enjoy socialising and learning with each other in person in the SAC. The student-led approach and links with the ULC curriculum have also attracted students to joining in the Centre's social learning activities, and to volunteering there.

The example of Room 101's changing focus raises questions for the wider

SAC community. If SAC resource usage is in decline, then perhaps SACs could try social learning activities like the World Plaza and Room 101. This would be a form of independent learning and important speaking and listening practice.

The question of whether there really is a decline in usage of traditional SAC services across the sector, or whether Room 101's case is unusual, has to be asked. The wider context of SACs will be looked at in more detail in instalment three of this column when we look at a survey of SAC managers across UK HE institutions which examines how, or if, their provision has changed in recent years.

Even though our social learning approach was developed primarily as a result of engaging directly with student feedback, it was not until 2013 that we conducted our first in-depth and direct research into student reaction to the new approach. The next instalment of this column will give more details of Room 101's social learning model, as well as looking at this research.

Notes on the contributor

Michael Allhouse has worked in Room 101 for almost 18 years, longer than Winston Smith, Paul Merton, Frank Skinner and O'Brien put together. He was recently awarded International Student Advisor of the Year 2014 by UKCISA / NUS. He works for the Students' Union at the University of Bradford and is designing other social learning spaces for specific groups of students.

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"Now maybe I feel like trying": Engaging Learners Using a Visual Tool

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Abstract

For every learning advisor and language teacher, a fundamental goal is to foster learners' motivation and self-regulation for successful L2 learning. This paper presents a visual tool that can be used in advising and teaching to realize this purpose. With the tool, learners can review their own L2 learning and ability, and create an inventory of their learning strategies, which helps them find their weaknesses, goals and develop their approach.

The tool, the *Strategy Tree for Language Learners*, consists of the image of a tree, water and the sun. The trunk and leaves of the tree represent learners' linguistic knowledge and skills, the roots learners' affective strategies, water cognitive strategies, and the sun sociocultural-interactive strategies. The notions of these three types of strategies are based on the concepts presented by Oxford (2011).

By drawing their own L2 Strategy Tree, learners can perceive their learning situations objectively and notice which step they should take next. In practice at a Japanese university, it was observed that learners developed learning strategies and their motivation increased. The Strategy Tree is a useful tool to encourage learners to feel confident and responsible and help them to self-regulate.

Keywords: language learning, learning strategies, self-regulation, motivation, advising tool

The Strategy Tree for Language Learners was created when the authors met at an academic meeting and shared their experiences from their own learning, advising, and teaching. It did not take long for them to realize and agree that the concepts of the Strategic Self-Regulation (S²R) model of language learning presented in Oxford (2011) could explain some of those cases and also could be utilized in their future practice. Those ideas were soon integrated into one visual image, which finally became the Strategy Tree for Language Learners, which is introduced in this paper.

Self-regulation has attracted teachers' and researchers' attention recently in second language education as well as in general education. Although there have been various arguments about definitions about the effectiveness of self-regulation and learning strategies (Gu, 2012; Ranalli, 2012), the Strategic Self-Regulation (S²R) model covering the three

important dimensions of language learning, cognitive, affective, and sociocultural-interactive (Oxford, 2011), can be a convenient tool in practice. The Strategy Tree for Language Learners was created drawing on the S²R model with the purpose of applying it as an instructional tool to advising and teaching. Learners need to know what to learn and how to learn to proceed with learning effectively, and the Strategy Tree can help them see the whole picture of language learning, raise their awareness of learning strategies, and consequently develop self-regulation to proceed with their learning autonomously, which were described as metacognitive, meta-affective, and meta-SI (i.e., sociocultural-interactive) strategies in Oxford (2011).

This paper consists of two sections; the description of the Strategy Tree, and an example of the model application in practice. In the first section, we describe the entire image and components of the model. In the second section, we introduce case studies from when one of the authors applied the model in her teaching context at a Japanese university. The Strategy Tree enables learners to reflect on how learning has taken place and on the development of their English proficiency. It also raises awareness about self-regulation and helps to train learners to develop strategies and ultimately become more successful English users. We hope that the Strategy Tree will be helpful for many learners, advisors, and teachers who are engaged in second language education.

Entire Image and Components of the Strategy Tree

The Strategy Tree for Language Learners consists of a trunk, leaves, roots, water, and the sun (see Figure 1). The trunk and leaves represent linguistic knowledge and skills, while the roots, water, and the sun represent learning strategies that foster the growth of the trunk and leaves. For many learners, the ultimate goal of second language learning is to develop the four language skills (the leaves) based on the linguistic knowledge (the trunk), for better communication in the target language. Adopting appropriate learning strategies can accelerate learning, as stable roots, sufficient water, and plentiful sunshine can nurture the sound growth of a tree. In this model, the roots, the water, and the sun represent affective, cognitive, and sociocultural-interactive learning strategies respectively, and all of those strategies help improve linguistic ability. The next section will explain the components of the model in turn.

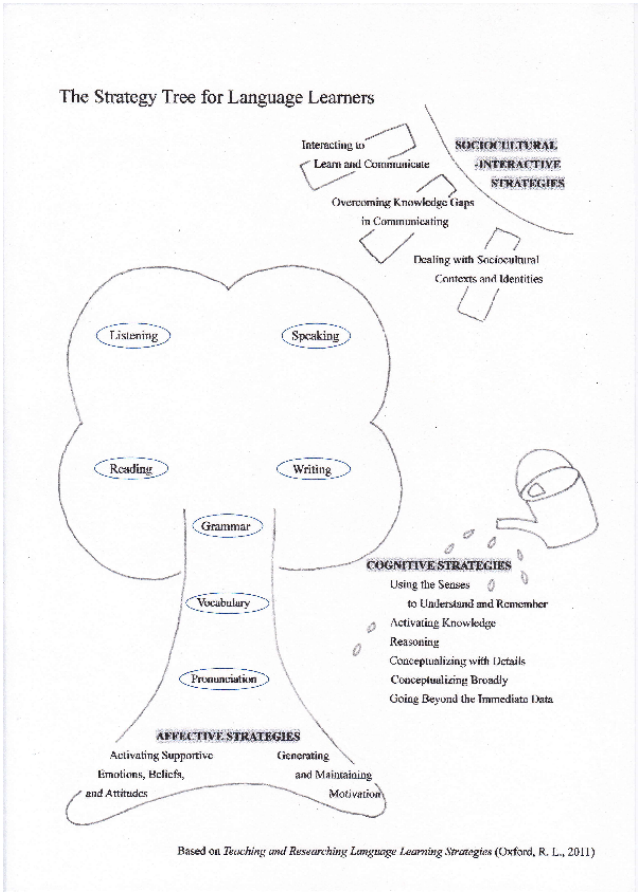

Figure 1. The Strategy Tree for Language Learners

Trunk and leaves: linguistic knowledge and skills

When using a language, linguistic knowledge is continually accessed and transformed into receptive or productive communication skills in order to communicate with others (Levelt, 1989). In the Strategy Tree, the trunk represents the learner's linguistic knowledge of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, and the leaves represent his/her proficiency in four skills; listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The size of the Tree represents the current level of the learner, and the shape of the Tree varies in accordance to the balance of the learner's skills. For example, when the learner has a large amount of linguistic knowledge such as vocabulary and grammar but has not practiced enough to use the knowledge in speaking and listening fluently, the trunk is drawn thick but the upper part of the leaves is drawn small. When the learner is proficient in oral communication but not so proficient in written language, the upper part of the leaves (i.e., listening and speaking) is large while the lower side (i.e., reading and writing) is small. Oral skills are intentionally situated at the top while written skills are at the bottom In addition, receptive skills are on the left while productive skills are on the right expecting that learners can see the relationships

between the skills easily. In order to improve proficiency in the target language in a balanced way, or to discover learner needs, it is helpful for the learner to consider which part of the Tree requires focus, and any methods that will encourage the area to bloom.

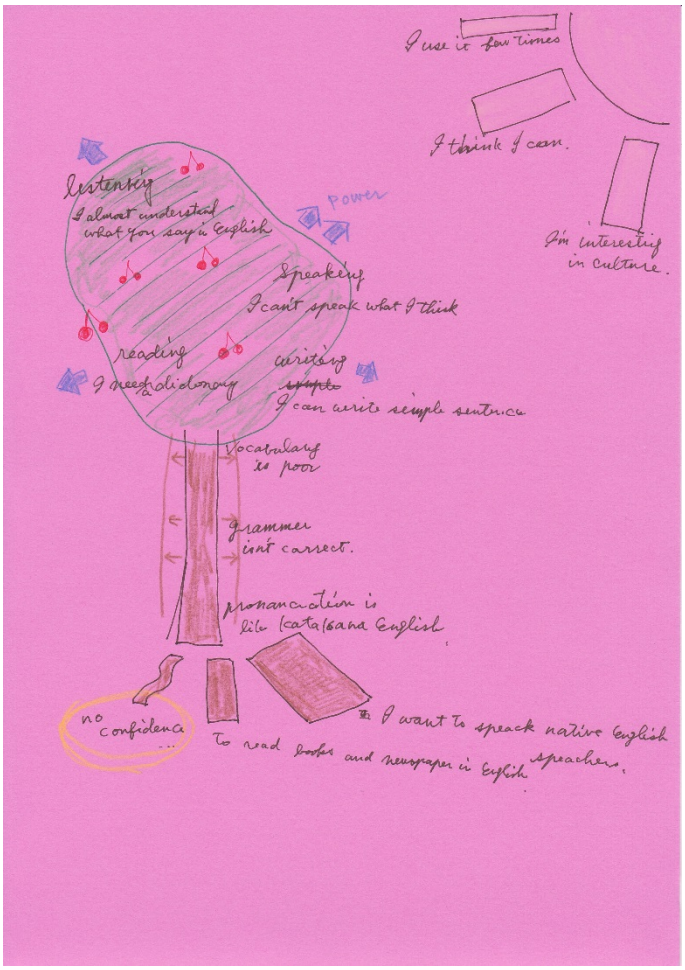

Figure 2. A Tree drawn by one of Davies' elementary students, with arrows showing desired areas to be improved.

One of the authors has used the image of the trunk and leaves in her face-to-face language learning advising sessions with various Japanese learners of English for many years, aiming to have learners overview their own linguistic ability and help them make a learning plan. The whole picture of the Strategy Tree was developed from this.

Roots: Affective strategies

Many studies have shown that affective factors greatly influence the effectiveness of learning. Oxford (2011), also emphasizing the importance of the role of affect, presented two affective learning strategies; "Activating Supportive Emotions, Beliefs, and Attitudes" and

"Generating and Maintaining Motivation". The first affective strategy forms the fundamental base of the learners' mind. These factors have a powerful influence on learners' overall learning, and can be modified by educational intervention as well (e.g., Yeager & Dweck, 2012). For the second affective strategy regarding motivation, it is crucial to understand that motivation is dynamic and changes through the course of learning (see Heckhausen & Gollwitzer (1987) for the Rubicon model of action phases, and see Dörnyei & Ottö (1998) for a process model of L2 motivation) so that both generating initial motivation and maintaining the motivation are equally of great significance. Because the affective dimension is the basis of human behaviors including language learning, it is situated as the "roots" of the Strategy Tree. Reflecting on their own affective situations, learners can improve their meta-affective strategies which manage affective learning strategies (Oxford, 2011).

Water: Cognitive strategies

Oxford (2011) explained *cognition* as "the mental process or faculty of knowing, including aspects such as awareness, perception, reasoning, and certain kinds of judgments" (p. 46). Drawing on theories such as schema theory, information-processing theory, activity theory, and cognitive load theory, she proposed six cognitive strategies; "Using the Senses to Understand and Remember," "Activating Knowledge," Reasoning," "Conceptualizing with Details," "Conceptualizing Broadly," and "Going Beyond the Immediate Data". In second language acquisition, learners should notice linguistic information, intake it, integrate it to their schemata (Gass & Selinker, 2008), and automatize it by practice (Dekeyser, 1996). Acquisition is also the process of placing new information in the limited capacity of working memory, and then transferring it to the storage of long-term memory as a part of their interlanguage. Those six cognitive learning strategies can facilitate the smooth operation of such a complex process, and make learning more effective and efficient. In this model, they are situated as "water" because it facilitates the growth of the tree. The idea of the water could help the learners think about what strategies are best to accelerate their learning, which would lead to promotion of their metacognitive strategies (Oxford, 2011).

Sun: Sociocultural-interactive strategies

As sociocultural-interactive strategies, Oxford (2011) presented the following three strategies; "Interacting to Learn and Communicate," "Overcoming Knowledge Gaps in Communicating," and "Dealing with Sociocultural Contexts and Identities". The first strategy is based on the pedagogical implication that linguistic knowledge and skills should be learnt

through meaningful communicative activities (e.g., Ellis, 2005). Oxford also refers to Vygotskyian approaches, stating that learning occurs through interaction with others in sociocultural contexts. The second strategy refers to communication strategies such as paraphrasing, borrowing, and avoidance (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). Because learners encounter numerous communication gaps and breakdowns in the process of building their interlanguage, the ability to use communication strategies is necessary both to maintain the ongoing conversation and as the result, to keep learning through interaction. The last strategy concerns the learners' accommodation with the background culture of the target language, which includes both understanding and acculturating the culture, and negotiating their identities when experiencing "the unequal relations of power" (Oxford, 2011, p. 94) in the community. Those sociocultural-interactive learning strategies are situated as the sun in the Strategy Tree, because they shed light on the whole tree and greatly promote the growth of the leaves (i.e., four skills). Seeing how the sun affects the growth of the tree, learners would realize the importance of sociocultural-interactive strategies, which would lead to the improvement of the meta-SI strategies which can manage the learners' sociocultural-interactive strategies (Oxford, 2011).

Simplified version of the model for learners

The primary purpose of the model is to use it as a tool in order to have learners reflect on their language learning and foster their self-regulation. For this purpose, the model should be easy enough for them to understand. Although we cited the expressions representing the strategies directly from Oxford (2011) in our original model (see Figure 1), those expressions might be a little difficult for learners who are not familiar with the concepts. Therefore, we recommend to create a simpler version for learners using easier words (see Figure 2), which can be used in advising sessions and/or classroom teaching and directly shown to the learners, as introduced in the sections below. Learners can draw their own original picture referring to the model, or draw on a template on which only the terms are prewritten (see Figure 3). Through this activity, learners can reflect on their current situations and be aware of the possibility of using a variety of learning strategies. The Strategy Tree can help both advisors/teachers and learners see the whole picture of language learning and make a better-balanced learning plan which also suits individual learners' needs.

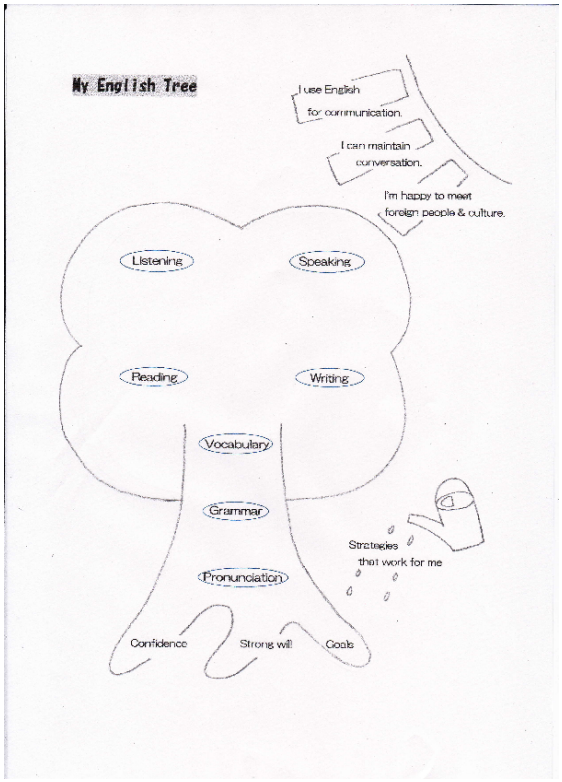

Figure 3. A Simplified Version of the Strategy Tree

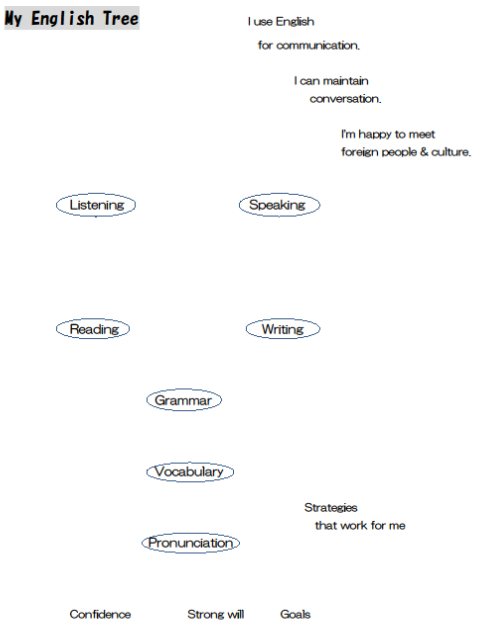

Figure 4: A Template of the Strategy Tree

Utilization of the Strategy Tree

Although the Strategy Tree discussed earlier was originally developed for the purpose of face-to-face advising so that learning plans and materials might be individually customized, it might be beneficial in any situation to raise awareness and excite the motivation of an individual learner. It was also utilized as an attempt to enhance learner motivation in some English classrooms of a Japanese university, where students have varying levels of motivation. That means the Strategy Tree was introduced in a way different from in an advising session.

Learner profile

The target learners study at a university in Greater Tokyo, which one of the authors is working at. Their majors include European-American culture, child studies, human welfare, local community policy, political science and economics, and Japanese culture. The majority of the students were aged from 18 to 22, but there were a few adult students. In terms of nationality, ten percent of the student population was of international background, mainly from other Asian countries. The English proficiency level varied. The top layer ranked at the pre-first level of STEP test so they were intermediate, and the bottom layer was at the fourth or fifth level and were beginner learners of English. Their proficiency level had been checked by a placement test before the semester started and they had been subsequently placed into English classes.

How the Strategy Tree was used

Three stages were followed when using the tree in university classes.

・Step 1: Consciousness raising questionnaire

On the first day of the semester, handouts (Appendix A and B) were distributed to the learners. Appendix A, “Consciousness Raising Activity: English Tree”, contains a set of questions that helped learners to reflect on their current English proficiency from each aspect of the three dimensions that Oxford (2011) suggested. Students were free to use the Japanese version as well depending on their proficiency. Learners individually reflected on each component and dimension of their English proficiency and English learning by answering the questions on the handout as preparation to draw the Strategy Tree. Students were reminded that the results of objective evaluations that they had received need not be used in this self-analysis. Although their needs were subconsciously affected by any experiences related

to learning English, including test scores, what they perceived as being English learning, and what they realized they needed to work on, it was intended that their analysis was rooted solely in their interests to foster sustainable learner autonomy through Strategy Tree use.

・Step 2: Drawing the Strategy Tree

Following the pre-questionnaire, the learner produced his/her own Trees, using a sample (see Figure 5) as a guide for expressing each component and dimension according to the development level that they recognized. Learners were encouraged to write down additional information under each heading. After drawing, the learners explained their Strategy Trees to peers, the teacher, and the class.

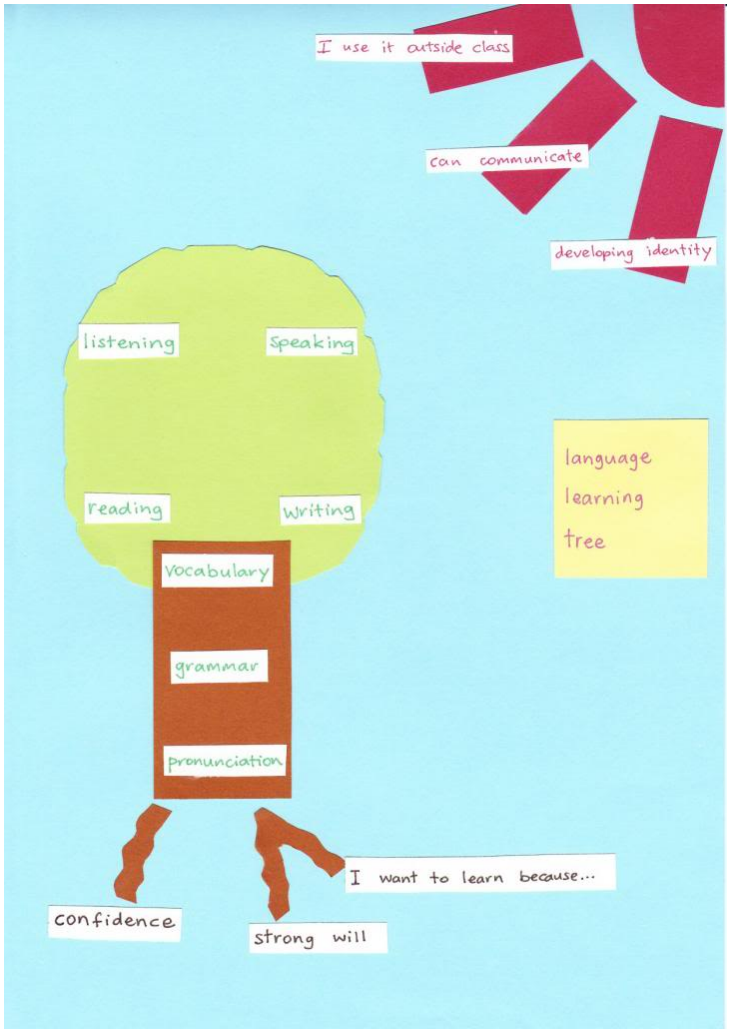

Figure 5. Sample Strategy Tree

・Step 3: Post-questionnaire

Finally, the post questionnaire (Appendix B) was provided for the learners to jot

down and clarify what they felt about language learning in the whole process of reflecting on themselves and drawing and sharing the Trees. The learners were encouraged to describe whatever comments, feelings, ideas and learning strategies they come up with during the activity. It was discovered that in completing the post-questionnaire, they realized they had drawn the Strategy Trees with absorbed interest and they received new findings about their attitudes in learning English as shown in their feedback on the post questionnaires (see examples below).

Examples

Two representations of the Strategy Tree and comments from other students will be discussed in this section.

・Case Study 1

One of the target representations was made by a Japanese female student, Hanako (a pseudonym). Her English proficiency ranked at the intermediate level. She had passed the pre-first grade of STEP Test and she was one of the successful learners. Despite her high proficiency in English, she seemed to have low self-esteem.

In her pre-questionnaire, she evaluated her reading, writing, and vocabulary as level two and listening, speaking, grammar, and pronunciation as level one. Thus her Strategy Tree seemed top-heavy and off balance because she recognized her listening and speaking areas were less developed.

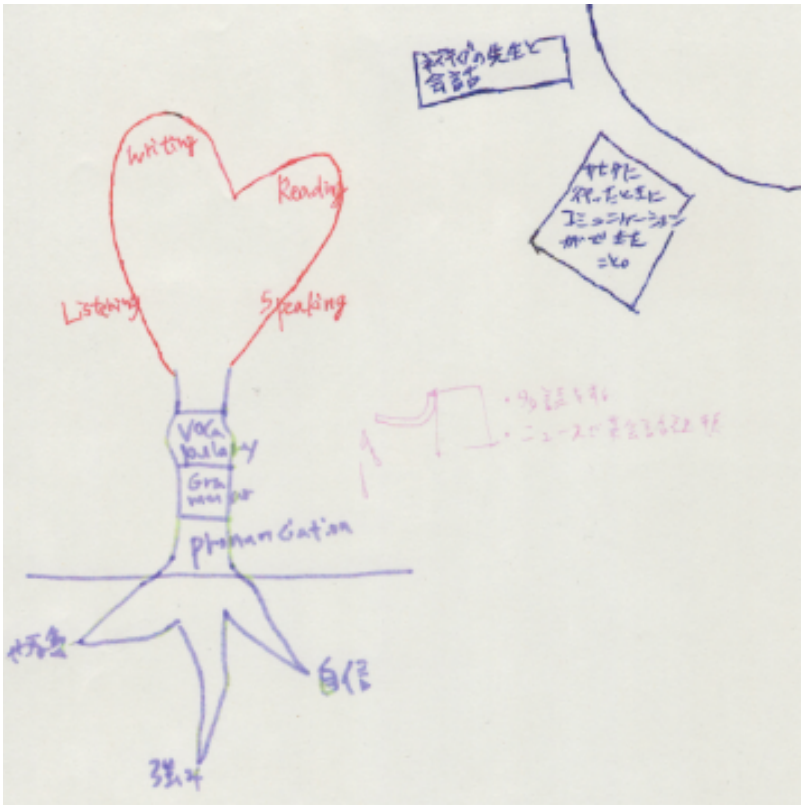

Figure 6. Hanako's English Tree

It was observed that this participant, Hanako, had a good command of the tools available for intermediate learners. For "water," which accelerated language learning, she noted two learning tips that she had used and recognized to be effective, extensive reading and language programs on NHK (or a Japanese national TV channel, also known as Japan Broadcasting Corporation, which broadcasts a variety of language programs). She watched a particular program focusing on English news targeting at intermediate learners. Learning English through news was challenging for most of the students and was not mentioned in others' Trees. Hanako, who was a successful learner, seemed to be able to choose from a variety of learning tips at different levels.

In the post-questionnaire, she commented that drawing the Tree motivated her slightly. Although this comment did not seem positive, since she was shy and her self-esteem was comparatively low, this meant that there was some improvement in her motivation. She wanted to make all four skills the target area from now on but she would like to place an emphasis on speaking. In her comment, she realized that there were so many other things that she could and should do to develop her language skills and she "wanted to continue learning English using exams as an indication of her development without falling into idleness halfway." It was observed that the Tree helped her grasp a holistic view of her language

abilities and also that she built better awareness to learn English at the starting point of the semester.

Case Study 2

Taro (a pseudonym) had beginner-level English proficiency, and it did not seem that he had been academically successful in learning English. His mindset appeared to be presented in this faint rendering of his Strategy Tree.

Figure 7. Taro's Strategy Tree

In the pre-questionnaire, he rated all the components of his linguistic skills and knowledge at level one except for vocabulary, which was rated level two. He stated that he did not have a particularly strong motivation. He did not use English in his social life (the Sun). He claimed to use no learning techniques (Water). His Tree looked like a matchstick with a few fibrous roots under the ground.

In the post-questionnaire, however, Taro confessed that hitherto he had never

reflected on his language learning and found that this activity elevated his motivation moderately. From then on, he hoped to develop the skills with more emphasis on vocabulary because he realized that he was better in vocabulary that any other skill. He commented, "I knew that I was vaguely aware that I did not have English skills, but I realize that I have not tried to study English. Now maybe I feel like trying." This attitude revealed that he became inspired through the process of drawing his Strategy Tree.

Comments from other students

In addition to these two examples, there were noticeable changes occurring during the process of reflecting on English learning among approximately thirty students who drew the Strategy Trees. Generally the students began understanding the use of the Strategy Tree while they were drawing and it seemed that they enjoyed this activity and found it highly worthwhile. According to the questionnaire implemented after drawing the Trees, the majority of the learners presented favorable comments, some of which are presented below;

- I wasn't sure if I could keep up in class but now I know I have to pull myself together.
- Now I'd like to talk with a foreigner. I want to express my own opinion, share laughter, and sing together at a karaoke.
- I realize grammar is my weakness. So I'd like to use FOREST (a grammar drill) to overcome. I want to be able to speak English. I'm going to use English on a daily basis.
- While I was drawing the Tree, I realized myself I wanted to learn English skills so that I could study abroad. But I'm not confident enough. I'd like to have confidence in learning English.
- From now on I want to learn skills of all different components and dimensions. Now I know I'm highly motivated though I don't know what to do and how to do.

As the learner above reflected that 'From now on I want to learn skills of all different components and dimensions'; for language advisors and teachers, it is important that use of the Strategy Tree is followed up with strategy training on multidimensional perspectives and ongoing support. It was noticeable that the whole process increased the potential for developing self-regulation, and it was also essential that learners were made aware of how they could improve their learning practices. Drawing a Strategy Tree contributed to learners' visually perceivable development of language skills and

metacognitive skills. It could urge learners to reflect on their learning status, progress and goals. Therefore the Strategy Tree in a birds-eye view was successful in refreshing and uncovering learners' motivation from the angles unnoticed heretofore.

Conclusion

The Strategy Tree is a practical visual tool, which helps students to set learning goals and harnesses critical self-reflection. It can give students a voice, and facilitate student-advisor or student-teacher interaction when advising (Yamaguchi et al., 2012). This makes students partners in the learning process, ensuring learning programs fit individual learner needs (Clark, 2012). By helping students visualize the whole picture of their learning, the Strategy Tree raises learner awareness of possible strategies that may help them achieve their goals and might increase their motivation as well.

It is believed that using a wider range of strategies leads to greater proficiency (Yamaguchi et al., 2012), and therefore, any tool that can encourage students to broaden their language learning strategy use is beneficial to language learning advisors and teachers. Although this paper introduced only one example of the model application, a variety of other ways of application can be considered. We hope that the Strategy Tree might become a handy tool for all advisors and teachers who hope to foster learners' meta-strategies and self-regulation, which consequently could lead to their more successful language learning.

Notes on the contributors

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Appendix A

Pre-questionnaire

Consciousness Raising Activity “English Tree”

月　　日　　曜日　学籍番号（　　）Name（　　）

I Cognitive dimension: branch and trunk　枝葉と幹

How do you evaluate your own English proficiency? 自分の英語力についてどれくらいだと認識していますか？　　Good理想　　← average普通　→微妙not good

Branch枝葉	1	Listening	5	4	3	2	1
	2	Speaking	5	4	3	2	1
	3	Reading	5	4	3	2	1
	4	Writing	5	4	3	2	1
Trunk幹	5	Vocabulary	5	4	3	2	1
	6	Grammar	5	4	3	2	1
	7	Pronunciation	5	4	3	2	1

II Affective dimension: root 根

How much motivation do you have? 英語学習のやる気はどれくらいあると思いますか。

How much strength do you think you have? e.g. I have a good memory. 英語学習において自分の強みだと思えることはどれくらいあると思いますか。例えば、、、「記憶力は結構いい」

How much confidence do you have in learning English? 英語学習において自信はどれくらいありますか。

III Sociocognitive-interactive dimension: the Sun 太陽

Do you communicate people in English? 人とのかかわりで英語を使っていますか？

In-class / Out of classroom 授業の内・外

What is/was good about using English when talking to others?他の人とのかかわりで英語を使ってよかったことは？

IV Meta-cognitive dimension: Water & Fertilizer 水と肥料

What tips do you use to improve your English ability? 英語力を伸ばすのに役立つテクニックでどんなことをして・知っていますか？

Appendix B

Post-questionnaire

1	自分の英語力についてかんがえたことはありますか？ Have you had a chance to think about English proficiency you have?	ある Yes			ない No
2	自分の英語学習方法について考えたことがありますか？ Have you had a chance to think about how to improve your English?	ある Yes			ない No
3	英語学習方法についてアドバイスをもらったことはありますか？ Have you received any advice of how to study English?	ある Yes			ない No
4	３が「ある」の方へ、どなたからですか？If yes, from whom?				
5	このような英語力・英語学習を振り返る経験ははじめてですか？ Is it your first time to reflect on your English learning?	ある Yes			ない No
6	自分なりに振り返ることが、英語学習に役だつと思いますか？ Do you think it is beneficial to reflect on your English learning?	ある Yes			ない No
7	Treeを描いてみて英語を勉強するやる気はどれくらい上がりましたか？ How much motivation have you increased through the process of drawing you Tree?	大変 Very much so	多少 A little	あまり Not very much	全然 Not at all
8	これからは特にどの分野の力を伸ばしたいですか？ What area(s) do you want to improve from now on?				
9	何でもいいので自由に感想を書いてください。 Please feel free to respond with any comments.				

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MOOCs in Language Education and Professional Teacher Development: Possibilities and Potential

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Abstract

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) developed from the traditions of distance and self-access learning, and are growing in popularity. As a new and exciting area of education, the potential of MOOCs to transform education by allowing free access to courses for anyone with the access to technology and the internet has potential for teachers and learners to benefit from the courses offered. In this short article, three different perspectives on using MOOCs in educational contexts within Japan are discussed. The first describes a collaborative project in which one of the authors participated in a MOOC alongside a group of language learners. In the next, individual students pursuing self-directed language learning chose MOOCs to meet their various goals of knowledge and skill development as they prepared to study abroad. Finally, this article considers the role of MOOCs in professional teacher development through the reflections from a teacher participant. All three discussions relate their ideas to the themes of possibility and potential, while considering practical issues for language learners and educators.

Keywords: MOOC, distance education, self-directed learning

The development of online distance learning via Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) is an area of increasing interest for educators and learners. This recent innovation may even have a considerable impact on society in general, as "education and social equity are closely connected to issues of technology access, use, and mastery" (Warschauer, 2011, p. 21). This shift in education has come about through an increase in access to technology and from a will to increase access to education. The potential of MOOCs to transform education has arrived through a combination of perceived necessity and the increased access to technology (Friedman, 2012, Koller, 2012). The creation of MOOC platforms such as Coursera, Udacity, EdX and FutureLearn have enabled mass participation. For example, as of July 25, 2014, Coursera.org

reported hosting 571 courses, with 22,232,448 total participants from 190 different countries (coursera, 2014). The most popular course, in Social Psychology from Wesleyan University in the US had over 250,000 participants in one cycle of teaching (Walters, 2014). MOOCs can therefore potentially have a greater impact on more students in one cycle of classes than the same professor teaching an entire career could hope to achieve.

In many ways MOOCs can be considered as distance learning with added peer support and social networking. The integration of online forums offer possibilities for the emergence of learning communities to share experiences and common interests, or communities of practice (Wenger, 1991) where more knowledgeable participants help others develop skills and knowledge. This added interactivity provides potential assessment of learning through dialoguing (Sampson, 2003) and goes some way to make up for the lack of teacher-student interaction, partially addressing Kirkup and Jones' (1996) assertion for distance education that, "Students need dialogue with their teachers and with other students in order to consolidate and check on their own learning" (p. 278).

Other offline learning interactions may occur where the MOOC material is online, and distant, but support is provided locally from other students, a teacher, or another professional educator. There may be a role for using MOOCs for flipped learning whereby students develop their knowledge around a topic using MOOC content outside the classroom then come together in class to share their understanding and views, with the teacher facilitating the interactions, maintaining an appropriate group dynamic and introducing further issues and content as appropriate. Fisher (2012) discusses this using a single MOOC but it is also possible to incorporating content from various MOOCs as recommended by Bruff, Fisher, McEwen, and Smith (2013). The key variables for success are still being identified. For example, Lu's (2010) research into computer-aided self-access learning found that for his learners, appropriate and timely student guidance was crucial to success, especially at the outset of the course.

In this article, three perspectives are examined to identify potential pitfalls and successful approaches for developing communities of practice using MOOCs. Whether as an active student-participant, learning advisor or teacher, MOOCs open up exciting possibility and potential.

Using MOOCs for Preparing to Study Abroad

Craig Manning

Overview

In February 2013, a student at the University of Shimane earned the required TOEFL score necessary to study abroad at a state university in the United States. Before receiving this successful result, he had been solely focused on studying for the TOEFL test. Having fulfilled the language proficiency test requirement, he wanted to prepare to study abroad beginning in September 2013. He approached one of the authors, a language teacher at the University of Shimane, and expressed anxiety about his ability to pass an American lecture-style course and wanted to know how to best prepare.

To determine if the student was prepared to study abroad, a diagnostic test was needed. However, it can sometimes be challenging to locate a suitable test, as Hughes (2003) points out, "The lack of good diagnostic tests is unfortunate. They could be extremely useful for individualised instruction or self-instruction" (p. 16). Fortunately, MOOCs have become easily accessible in recent years. Authentic lectures from a variety of countries can be freely accessed. This author suggested using a MOOC as a task-based diagnostic test, as it would bring attention to areas a student needs to develop, effectively determining what the student needs to learn (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). By passing or failing an American lecture course, the student should gain a reasonable measurement of his current ability to earn credit while studying abroad.

Although participating in an online lecture series is an unusual choice for a diagnostic test and would require an extensive amount of time to complete, several benefits were apparent to offset the time commitment. First, the online quizzes and essays check for comprehension and would give the student more feedback than simply watching a presentation, such as those found on TEDtalks. In addition to helping this student the become aware of his own strengths and weaknesses, participating in a MOOC would also enable him to set goals, make a learning plan, and use his time more effectively to prepare to study abroad. As the MOOC progressed over several weeks, it would allow chances for the student to adjust his plan and develop new learning strategies. This experience would serve as a diagnostic test and a practical training exercise.

Helping this student prepare to study abroad was an additional undertaking on top of a full teaching load, with further committee and research responsibilities. Committing extensive amounts of time to help one student was not a desirable situation. Therefore, the author asked the

student to invite others preparing to study abroad to form a voluntary cohort. The cohort was also open to students who had previously studied abroad and wanted to maintain their English abilities. Seven students joined the group; six students preparing to study abroad and one who had just returned. They called themselves the "Lecture Ready" circle and established the following goals for the group,

- To measure our English abilities against what they need to be to study abroad successfully.
- To prepare for lectures aimed at native English speakers by taking authentic lectures.
- To develop learning strategies to enhance our understanding of the material.
- To learn about interesting and useful topics not offered at our University.
- To maintain our English abilities after returning from studying abroad.

The students chose an upcoming MOOC from Coursera.org titled "Inspiring Leadership through Emotional Intelligence". It was a 6-week course, which recommended five to six hours of study time per week for native English speakers. In addition to studying online, the students set up face-to-face weekly study sessions to share progress and seek help. The author also signed up for the course, but encouraged students to help each other before asking for support.

Observations

One of the immediate difficulties students encountered was the reading assignments. Given that Japanese secondary schools emphasize reading comprehension, this was unexpected. The students attempted to read the lecture notes, the required reading, and the recommended reading. This took a long time, especially since the recommended reading included in-depth background information, such as influential research articles from academic journals. As a result of this experience, students learned to prioritize their reading. They spent more time working to comprehend the lecture notes, a shorter amount of time skimming the required reading, and skipped the recommended reading completely. They also noticed that key points were often summarized in the chapter conclusions. They started reading those first.

The online course format was another initial challenge for students because it was new to them. Some of the courses at the University of Shimane have websites, but they are organized

differently. The student that studied abroad previously was more familiar with the format. He explored the course site more quickly and gave the other students a tutorial on how to navigate the site.

During the weekly face-to-face study sessions, the students were able to compare notes and review the key points. This cooperative study strategy identified misunderstandings and provided chances for peer support. All of the students had some difficulty understanding specialized academic vocabulary, but were able to understand the overall meaning of the lectures when viewed at regular speed. This was surprising for the students and the teacher, as understanding the lectures would have been an assumed weakness prior to this diagnostic activity.

The biggest challenge encountered by students, however, was the time requirement. For them, it took more than five to six hours per week. With full course loads, homework, and part-time jobs in the evenings, it was too much to keep up with. After three weeks, five students had to stop to focus on more urgent responsibilities. The other two lost motivation when their friends quit. Nevertheless, in three weeks, the students were able to identify some of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as develop a few new learning strategies prior to studying abroad. It is worth briefly noting here that Coursera.org offers other courses that require less time, as little as one hour per week for native speakers, but none were offered at that time.

Follow-up interviews

In March 2014, about seven months into the students' year abroad, this author toured the various American campuses accepting University of Simane students. During the tour, he asked students who had participated in the Lecture Ready circle prior to studying abroad if the MOOC experience was worth repeating. Of the five students interviewed, two recommended that the MOOC activity continue in the future. They said becoming familiar with the website format was very useful because it was almost identical to their courses in the US. Some of their lectures are even delivered live over the Internet, instead of in person to accommodate more students in one class. They also said that the reading strategies and cooperative learning strategies were very useful as well. They sought out study groups for each class and even made themselves available as tutors for American students learning Japanese.

The other three students said that it was an interesting experience, but that their time

would have been used more effectively studying for the TOEFL test. At that time, these three students were enrolled in a preparatory ESL program, attempting to improve their TOEFL score and gain admittance to regular university courses.

Conclusion

Although none of the students completed the MOOC before going abroad, the three-week experience was a useful diagnostic test to identify the students' strengths and weaknesses. It also provided opportunities to develop effective coping strategies before studying abroad. From follow-up interviews, it seems that perhaps the perceived value of practicing with MOOCs heavily depends on whether the student has earned the mandatory language proficiency test score. When the students return in August 2014, it will be interesting to see if any of them start up the Lecture Ready circle again to maintain their English abilities.

Potential of MOOCs for Self-directed Language Learning

Brian R. Morrison

Context

Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) specializes in language teaching and learning. The cross-department English Language Institute classes are delivered in English, and outside the classroom the self-access centre (SAC) offers resources and pedagogic support for students' self-directed language learning goals. This support includes opportunities for students to take structured self-directed language learning (SDLL) courses (for more details see Noguchi & McCarthy, (2010) and Morrison (2011)).

In 2013 MOOCs were chosen for the first time as resources for SDLL at KUIS. While the number of students was limited (three), their experiences provide an insight into how to offer appropriate support for future MOOC-using students. The students gave permission for this author to analyse learning logs or agreed to an interview in order to support this small on-going action research project, which aims to investigate the viability and sustainability of MOOCs as a self-access learning resource in the context of this university.

These three students had a common objective, to study overseas, and had all initially spent months on SDLL to increase their IELTS scores; however, they were learning

independently of each other as their SDLL support occurred at different times in the academic year. Once they had achieved their IELTS requirements, they all returned seeking ideas for further developing their English that would enable them to cope more effectively with their future academic lives. It was at this stage that each student was told about MOOCs during an advising session and shown how to search for courses by her Learning Advisor (LA). All three subsequently accessed these courses to develop specific aspects of their knowledge and skills they identified as requiring development.

In contexts such as this, MOOCs can be used for their intended purpose - to develop knowledge - as well as providing opportunities to practice the skills required for overseas participation at tertiary level. For example, MOOCs provide access to English language lectures, a format lacking in Communicative Language Teaching and a classroom format rare enough at KUIS for the three students in this study never to have experienced; nevertheless, these are a common medium of content delivery on undergraduate courses in English-medium universities. Through MOOCs, students therefore have a chance to extend their knowledge in English prior to embarking on their overseas studies as well as developing the strategies and skills to cope with knowledge/language input. The pedagogic support and resources to facilitate this could come from the teacher and peers as outlined in the previous section at the University of Shimane, or through a SAC as described here. The experiences of the first three students to use MOOCs gives an indication of the possible support and resources that could facilitate MOOC use.

Student A

Student A originally booked a 1-to-1 session with an LA to make and implement learning plans which would develop her reading and listening skills for IELTS. She had three sessions over the semester. Having achieved her desired score and raising her IELTS 6.0 to 6.5, she returned the following semester seeking ideas to develop her skills for listening and note taking, which she perceived were inadequate for coping with academic life overseas.

She enrolled on a self-directed learning module (SDLM) and with her LA created a learning plan and study schedule to complete over eight weeks. She chose an introductory course to business finance - a topic related to her study abroad choice. At the time, the LA and student were only aware of the Coursera.org platform for MOOCs, which has courses with specific start dates. She had to wait a month to start the course and in the meantime use TED to practise

listening and note taking. It was clear in her weekly reflections that she found this frustrating and was keen to move onto the course.

> "Searching every week for [relevant] TED lectures is tiresome. I'm really interested in "Introduction to Finance" because then I can feel I become a member of foreign college student. Also, I will have [MOOC] assignments to try hard about."

She then took the course for four weeks but interestingly after two weeks of her original choice, she enrolled on another course, and a week later another. She wrote in her reflections that:

> "I decided to change because I would like to get a lot of kinds of knowledge … it's nice to watch many kinds of genres with a variety of words and see how lectures are [commonly] structured … I tried to understand very well and got knowledge about each topic more deeply than before."

Student B

Student B had six advising sessions over two semesters to raise her IELTS 5.0 to 6.0. She returned seeking ideas to develop both her listening and note taking skills and her knowledge of her chosen subject. Like Student A, she took an 8-week SDLM with the goal of increasing her listening and note taking skills with academic lectures. She initially chose a course on Financial Accounting via mooc-list.com, which had no specific start date. In spite of spending four hours in Week 1 of the course, she was unable to complete the coursework:

> "I listened to lectures again and again and tried to take note while I listen. But I couldn't do that as I do in Japan because the speed of talking was very fast so I didn't have time to see the slideshow … subtitle of the lecture was very helpful and I could understand the content a little when there was subtitle."

In Week 2, she modified her plan to research new vocabulary prior to watching rather than after the lecture. She found this time consuming but more effective:

> "Although I couldn't understand the content deeply, I could listen to Week 2 lectures better than Week 1 … I couldn't spend more time on the module because I had many things to do for my other classes."

The following week, she changed her learning material to Lecture Ready (Sarosy & Sherak, 2006), a language learner course book for listening and note taking using graded material and staged learning. She was able to complete two lecture exercises each week in half the time she had to set aside for the MOOC lectures and continued using this material for the rest of the module. At the end she summarised her experience:

> "Although I'm not satisfied with my study, I think this module was really effective for me. This module motivated me to prepare for my studying abroad and I could know my weak point and learn ideas for note taking."

Student C

Student C reserved seven advising sessions and used SDLL and SAC support to raising her IELTS score from 4.5 to 6.0 over two semesters. At the end of the second semester, she approached her LA for ideas to strengthen her preparedness for overseas study during the 10-week break between semesters. She was particularly keen to develop her subject knowledge for her overseas course and her vocabulary for this using receptive skills. She took a MOOC on Communication Studies, a subject she had studied previously in Japanese with an open start date and no deadlines.

After the summer break, she took part in a semi-structured interview. Although she had planned to follow the whole MOOC course over the vacation, she had only done three lessons. Nevertheless, she said her experience had been positive and she would recommend it to other students in her position. She felt that the listening had done more to reinforce lexis previously learned in the classroom than to teach her new vocabulary.

> "I have to do [extensive] listening but listening to the same thing many times is boring. With a MOOC, I can listen to many things about the same topic so it was the best way [for me]."

Considerations, Challenges and Support

Using MOOCs for language learning and skills development goes beyond the original aims of these resources. While the small student sample does not allow for generalisations, their experiences provide an insight into the support language educators may need to consider for MOOCs to be more widely used with this demographic. The initial support offered by teachers or SACs could include learner training in listening to lectures and note taking using graded lecture material or lecture strategy worksheets to prepare students to use or scaffold authentic material while providing learner training in EAP strategies.

When students are ready to choose a MOOC, consideration could be given to:

- Fixed start dates vs. start anytime
- Self-paced vs. weekly workload
- Introductory course vs. assumed prior knowledge

Other support students could look for before choosing includes glossaries, lecture transcripts, subtitles and pre-reading texts. Raising awareness of these options can help students make more informed choices when selecting a MOOC.

When students are prepared and have chosen a course, ongoing support as the MOOC progresses should be considered. The support could come through peers if students can be encouraged to work together on a course, through a teacher who participates and guides discussion groups, or through SAC educators who guide students to reflect on and modify their learning to suit the situation. Online tools such as academic word list highlighters, vocabulary frequency checkers and mindmapping tools can be introduced when appropriate. Through preparation, informed choice and support, at least at the beginning of the course, MOOCs have the potential to develop the knowledge, skills and language of language learners.

Potential of MOOCs for Professional Teacher Development

Tara McIlroy

Context

In 2013, during two teaching semesters at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) the author signed up for participation in several MOOCs as a form of teacher

professional development (PD). Some typical examples of PD for teachers are a) in-house teacher training b) workshops and meetings c) small group projects and d) professional teaching portfolios. PD is sometimes compulsory while sometimes is opt-in. Many teachers would argue that opt-in PD which meets institutional and personal goals while being flexible enough to cater to the busy teaching schedule is the ideal model for PD. MOOC participation is voluntary and opt-in, and, importantly allows participants to "negotiate the extent and nature of their participation" (McAuley, Stewart, Siemens, & Cormier, 2010, p. 5) while potentially providing added peer support and opportunities for social networking.

General education MOOCs

In the first semester of 2013, the author investigated and signed up for several general courses from Coursera.org. At this time the author had curiosity for participation in MOOCs in general. The first was titled "Critical thinking in global challenges" which aimed to be cross-curricular. Although this MOOC contained general content related to education it seemed at times to have only limited application to the author's specific educational setting. For this course the certificate of completion was not attempted, and because of limited enthusiasm with the course materials the course was not completed. Finding suitable topics appears to be an important step in successful PD using MOOCs. A second general education course was "E-learning and digital cultures" which investigated a number of options for integrating technology in different educational settings. The final project was a digital artefact, which could be created using a range of media. This was resulted in some impressive contributions from hundreds of participants. Each course had an online forum, as well as opportunities to meet up with other MOOC participants locally if desired. Participation, even minimal participation, in a MOOC can be seen as being a "legitimate peripheral participant" (Wenger, 1991). The options for participation in this course had a flexible, creative structure but still required submission of peer-assessed work through regular deadlines. The author interacted with course materials and participated in forums without submitting final assignments, thereby learning from peers on the course as well as from course lectures. The main reason for non-completion of some assessed tasks was time constraints. Another reason was a feeling of being curious about the course content, while at the same time feeling limited drive to complete the course fully. This challenge is one of the most significant for any teacher participating in PD outside of regular working

hours. As this participation was optional it was challenging to build up momentum to complete assignments and so a certificate of accomplishment was not achieved for this course.

Specialist literature MOOCs

In the second half of the academic year the author attempted MOOC participation to a greater degree. Motivated by three clear aims the author sought to 1) find out more about education and literature 2) glean ideas for course organisation and readings and 3) use this motivation to integrate technology into curriculum design. Experience on the previous semester's MOOCs resulted in a move towards more highly content-specific MOOCs, in this case literature courses. In this semester the author completed two literature courses gaining certificates of accomplishment for both. First was "The Fiction of Relationship", a 10 week course with essay submissions and peer feedback, which required reading a novel per week. This course included a creative writing as an option to vary from the regular essay format. Additional material was provided via videos of on-campus student groups participating in small group discussions on the topics. This course felt very close to the experience of being at university, studying literature, and focusing on a new book each week while exploring a shared theme. In addition, the familiarity of the course design helped understanding of the course goals and expectations. One positive result of taking this course was the integration of the creative assessment format into a KUIS language curriculum in 2014. A second literature course, with equally fast-paced content was "Fantasy and science fiction: The human mind, our modern world". This course was highly successful in making connections between the readings and the world outside the text. The goals of the course were aligned well with the author's own goals for literature education. The selection of texts was wide-ranging and challenging, while the pace of discussion worked in tandem with the theme. Many participants expressed their desire to attempt other MOOCs with similar content, or expressed gratitude to the professor at the end of the course via online forums. The added interactivity of the peer-reviewed assignment feedback was encouraging and motivating. Submitting work for deadlines, reading peer-feedback on essays and being graded by anonymous participants can be challenging, though achievement of course objectives was satisfying. The potential for motivation and encouraging greater task completion through online learning seemed most possible with this engaging MOOC.

Outcomes

Through participating in MOOCs, teachers can find opportunities for PD which are aligned with their own teaching and learning goals. Fresh ideas for classes and tasks can be integrated into learning programmes after learning from MOOCs not only from the course content but also from the networking and discussions in peer support. Potentially, a MOOC on creativity could be useful to teachers and institutions focused on developing programmes of learning, for example. Teachers can also feel more connected to others outside their institutions through participation in MOOCs. For instance, in the "E-learning and digital cultures" MOOC, over 42,000 people participated in the class Google Hangout. This not only gives an insight into the market for MOOCs but also suggests the potential for collaboration and cooperation with colleagues overseas. Curriculum designers, lead teachers and education managers could investigate the growing influence of MOOCs as distance learning opportunities for PD continue to evolve. Potentially teachers could participate in MOOCs to learn from the vast wealth of educational contexts represented by these global participants.

Final Comments

MOOCs in education represent a new stage in distance learning and self-directed learning. For students and educators alike potential for independent study brings new opportunities. As described above, in contexts where students are preparing to study overseas, MOOCs can be a resource for this preparation through class work. MOOCs can also be offered as an option for self-access language learning outside the classroom through teachers and self-access centres. Although there are a great variety of MOOCs around, the advantages for using these as preparation for studying in another language include:

- Preparing for study abroad, which is not based on language exams.
- Learning with authentic materials such as lectures and academic texts.
- Developing knowledge, including introductory courses.
- Language support through subtitled video & written materials.
- Supporting knowledge development through participant forums.
- Connecting with a larger educational community outside the workplace.

For English language learners keen to study an English-medium course, MOOCs offer authentic material and have potential as a preparatory resource for overseas study. Educators wishing to continue their own professional education outside the classroom can use MOOCs in a flexible way which fits their work commitments.

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Game-Based Methods to Encourage EFL Learners to Transition to Autonomous Learning

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This paper describes a work in progress in which we aim to encourage EFL students to take their learning beyond the classroom in order to experience English in different ways. Inspired by what is being done at the Quest to Learn middle and high school in New York City and ChicagoQuest (Institute of Play, 2014b) our idea involves conducting an action research project in order to find out if game-like learning techniques, modified and adapted to the needs of university-aged EFL learners in Ecuador will help to increase motivation and independent learning for our students.

Game-Like Learning

The Institute of Play's Quest to Learn curriculum design pack (Institute of Play, 2014a) defines the seven principles of game-like learning thus (bullets added by the author):

- "everyone is a participant
- challenge is constant;
- learning happens by doing;
- feedback is immediate and ongoing;
- failure is reframed as iteration;
- everything is interconnected;
- and it kind of feels like play"

We believe that if students are taught EFL according to these principles, the leap to truly autonomous learning can begin to take place.

The Project

Our idea involves redesigning English class into what we are calling 'quests' and 'missions' which we hope will help the students to become more autonomous learners by encouraging them to take English out of the classroom and into the local community and the online world. Although the students are expected to use class time to complete the work, much of this work is meant to be done independently or with

peers, in the classroom if they wish, or in the computer lab, the café, on the campus green, or even outside the university. The role of the teacher is to encourage, guide and provide on-the-spot help and tutoring as and when needed during independent work; during group activities and games, the teacher then serves as facilitator.

The 'quests' are scaffolding tasks designed to help students improve their reading, writing, speaking and listening abilities, and with them, their grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Having been greatly inspired by recent trends in game-based learning (e.g. Salen & Zimmerman, 2004; Steinkuehler, Squire, & Barab, 2014; Thomas & Seely Brown, 2011) we have included both online games as well as pair and group games designed or adapted by our lead researcher to increase motivation and active participation on the part of the learners. We have also included many activities, both online and off, which may be done independently or with peers.

The 'missions' and 'quests' for each unit follow a theme around an issue of social and global importance. Though we are loosely matching our topics to those found in the NorthStar reading and writing series (Miller & Cohen, 2009) which we are currently using as a textbook, we are modifying them to be somewhat "edgier" and more controversial to appeal to our students' interests. The 'mission', then, is a final, creative, communicative assignment meant to encourage the students to delve more deeply into the subject.

The Students and Teachers

We are a group of nine teachers who work at Universidad de los Hemisferios, a small university in Quito, Ecuador with approximately 180 EFL learners ranging from the A1 to the B2 level Common European Framework (Council of Europe, 2011). Our students are mostly middle to upper-middle class, Spanish-speaking Ecuadorians between the ages of 17 and 25. Most have been educated in private schools and have studied English since primary or even pre-school. The classes were usually teacher-led lessons, and Ecuadorian culture is not generally oriented toward independent learning. For this reason, our project is meant as a bridge between 'traditional' classes and autonomous study.

Our lowest level is called 'nivelación' which serves to bring students up to the A1 level; these students are not included in our research project. The rest of our students are from the A1-B2 levels and are divided into six groups: Intermediate I, Intermediate II, Intermediate III, Advanced I, Advanced II and Advanced III.

Each level lasts one semester for a duration of 64 hours divided into four hours weekly. These hours may be taken during the week (Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday) from 11-12 or on Saturdays from 9-1. Students are encouraged to work independently, at their own pace, alone or in small groups on their quests and missions, except for agreed-upon times when the teacher brings the class together for the speaking games, group tutorials and other activities.

The Research Question

Our research question is: "Will the game-like framework of quests and missions motivate EFL students to learn more autonomously?" Since motivation is quite difficult to measure we have been gathering data on how the students feel about the course using journals, surveys, and individual and group interviews. Our questions have focused on what motivates students to learn, as opposed to what makes them feel bored or stressed.

Overall responses from students seem to indicate that although they have difficulty managing their time without a great deal of guidance, they do enjoy having the freedom to work where, when and with whom they choose. Many also report enjoying the different quests and missions because they find the topics and the tasks both interesting and challenging. An earlier version of this project gave the students more independence to choose their assignments but the students seemed uncomfortable with that level of freedom. They did mention enjoying the fact that they are assessed by means of the quests and missions instead of regular exams.

Teachers are saying that they enjoy having the freedom to move among the students rather than being front and center. However, echoing the students' complaint regarding time-management, the teachers too are claiming that the students do not manage their time effectively and often hand everything in at the last minute.

In the spirit of action research, we have been analyzing this data and modifying our 'quests and missions' method accordingly. The speaking and the listening quests, for example, are now being done as a whole class; while the other assignments are being given draft deadlines.

In addition, in response to what we feel are vital 21st century skills, we are beginning to include more use of technology, from the use of group Facebook pages to the creation of multimedia stories. Students have also reported enjoying the "games" aspect of the method, and so we are including more online and offline games.

Examples of Quests and Missions

Intermediate I

Theme: Gender relations (relates to NorthStar 3, unit 4)

Introductory Game: Students make a list of complements and insults that lovers say to each other. They then work in pairs to go through each sentence and score it as a negative or positive comment using a -3,-2,-1,0,+1,+2,+3 rubric. Afterward, they add up their score and discuss if their results were different. (Example sentence: "You look fat in that outfit". Female students may think that is a -3, while males may give it a -1 or a 0.)

Listening quest: Students watch a video of Kramer's views on marriage from the television show Seinfeld (David & Ackerman, 1995) and list Kramer's arguments against marriage. Then divide the class by gender and have them write a woman's version.

Reading quest: Students take the "healthy relationship quiz" (Interface: Children and Family Services, 2014). If they are not currently in a relationship, they can think about a friend or family member who is. Then they write a journal entry about what they learned.

Writing quest: Students write a contrast paragraph comparing abusive and healthy relationships. They post their essays on Facebook once they have been corrected, and comment on ideas they disagree with in their classmates' essays.

Mission: Play "Toxic Love": Students prepare and conduct a survey on what is considered normal, as opposed to abusive behavior in a relationship. They then hold a game show similar to Family Feud to see if their classmates reach the same answers. (Example: "Is it normal for a man to hit his girlfriend?" If the contestant says "no", the host announces "95% of students at this university agree with you so you get 95 points!")

Advanced II

Theme: Addiction (relates to NorthStar 5, unit 1)

Introductory game: Students will keep an alternate reality journal for several days in which they will imagine that, although they appear to be normal students, they have an addiction that no-one knows about. They will share their journals once they have been corrected. (Example: "Today I had trouble waking up because I had a

hangover. I spent 10 minutes brushing my teeth before I came to class so I wouldn't smell of alcohol.")

Listening and reading quests: Students will post songs about addiction on the class Facebook page, along with the lyrics and their own summary of the song. Then they read each other's posts and find links to interviews with the bands mentioned and post them in the comments section along with their own summary of the interview.

Research and speaking quests: Students will give creative presentations on different kinds of addictions.

Writing quest: Students will write a fictional autobiographical narrative in the style of an Alcoholics Anonymous "confession". They will read it to classmates who will role play the speaker's friends and family.

Mission: Students will watch a "choose your path" video, (for example see NIDA for Teens, 2014) and then make their own.

Conclusions

Both teacher and student responses to the project over the past year have been encouraging, and we are enjoying the process of developing the project as a team. We feel that our 'quests and missions' method can serve as a useful transition from teacher-led classrooms to more independent, student-oriented learning.

Notes on the contributor

Janine Berger, originally from Canada, has taught English in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, and currently teaches EFL and trains EFL teachers at Universidad de los Hemisferios in Ecuador. She is enrolled in a Masters of Educational Research at the University of London and her current research is focused on game-like learning.

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