A Case Study of Self-Access Language Learning and Learner Development

Eiichiro Tsutsui[1]

[1]Fundamental Education Center, The University of Kitakyushu

`e-tsutsui@kitakyu-u.ac.jp`

Abstract

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, we observe how EFL learners deal with independent learning by examining learner logs qualitatively and quantitatively. In so doing, we make use of written data available in the weekly journals and access logs on the learning management system. Second, we monitor learner development in terms of proficiency test scores and planning skills (i.e., goal setting) for two semesters. This study makes an attempt to profile both high- and low-achievers. It is of high interest to see how they are trying to make progress and advance to the next level.

Keywords

Independent Learning, Self-access, Proficiency test

Introduction

With the advent of learning management systems or other e-learning systems, it gets much easier for educational practitioners to have students work on outside-of-class activities and monitor their learning process and progress. This study examines how EFL learners deal with independent learning by keeping track of written logs seen in their journals and finds some efficient ways to facilitate their learning.

1 Participants and their data

Participants of this study were 221 adult learners of English in Japan. They took a TOEIC® test preparation course and reported their standardized test scores at the beginning of the study, at the end of the first semester, and at the end of the second semester. Their initial proficiency level was A2 of CEFR, which is one level down from the B (independent language user) level. In addition to in-class activities, they worked on e-learning (online test drills). After every weekly class, they were asked to keep a self-reflective journal.

2 Learner logs

Table 1: Eight aspects of learner perception seen in learner logs

Cluster No.	Interpretation	Words of each cluster
1	Goal setting	my, tentative, goal, point
2	Instrumental motivation	use, get, you, job, when, employment,
3	Difficulty with TOEIC reading	read, long, sentence
4	Self-regulation	company, that, ability, English, study, have, skill, like, good, take, want, everyday, also, understand, able, memorize
5	Difficulty with time management	problem, solve, time, many, so, learn, word, remember, hear, day, more
6	Importance of English	English, it, importance, important, I, think
7	Difficulty with vocabulary building	do, not, know
8	Difficulty with TOEIC listening	TOEIC, be, difficulty, listen

KH Coder (Higuchi, 2017) helped us to see eight different aspects in learner logs written by students taking a TOEIC® test preparation course. Table 1 shows eight clusters of words that can be found in their journals, and we can see how learners perceive their learning and maintain their motivation.

3 Goal setting and proficiency

The data in the learners' journals included their target scores. According to this information, we divided our students into four different groups. Here we defined each group.

Group 1: Their target scores were high, and they raised their scores.
Group 2: Their target scores were low, and they raised their scores.
Group 3: Their target scores were high, and they didn't raise their scores.
Group 4: Their target scores were low, and they didn't raise their scores.

Table 2: The difference between the target score and the initial score and the increase of the proficiency score

		Target Score - Initial Score	Score Increase
Group 1	M	163.9	72.1
	SD	29.5	53.1
	Max	240	180
	Min	135	5
	N	28	28
Group 2	M	71.1	60.5
	SD	40.2	43.7
	Max	130	240
	Min	-35	5
	N	101	101
Group 3	M	198.7	-30.0
	SD	117.3	24.6
	Max	595	0
	Min	135	-80
	N	15	15
Group 4	M	74.0	-46.1
	SD	36.6	38.1
	Max	130	0
	Min	-115	-145
	N	77	77

Against our initial speculation, our study results did not yield any conclusive evidence that a goal-setting capacity correlated with the steady increase in their scores, as shown in Table 2.

4 Self-access logs

LMS and other online activity logs produced a noteworthy result. As shown in Table 3, we found that students who raised their scores selectively chose their activities while low-achievers just completed the minimum amount of the content they were told to do.

Table 3: Access logs of learners in each group

	Self-access content		Total
	Obligatory	Selective	
Group 1	60.25%	39.75%	100%
Group 2	68.25%	31.75%	100%
Group 3	84.26%	15.74%	100%
Group 4	92.51%	7.49%	100%

5 Tentative findings

Our participants tend to raise their proficiency test scores after the experiment. Therefore, keeping a journal or performing online activities may play a positive role in learner development. Students who selectively choose their learning do better than passive learners who are told to complete the minimum content. It should be noted that educational practitioners have many learning options ready for learners (even basic-level learners).

References

Higuchi K. (2017). A Two-Step Approach to Quantitative Content Analysis: KH Coder Tutorial Using Anne of Green Gables (Part II). *Ritsumeikan Social Sciences Review*. 53(1): 137-147.