How Teachers Motivate Students’ Learning Autonomy?

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1. Abstract
2. Introduction
   1. General Statement of the Problem
   2. Literature Review
   3. Assumptions
   4. Foreshadowed Problems
   5. Definition of terms
   6. Significance of Proposed Study
3. Design and Methodology
   1. Design
   2. Instrumentation/Data Collection
   3. Data Treatment Procedures
   4. Presentation Findings
   5. Limitations of the Design
4. Conclusion
5. Appendix
6. References

**ABSTRACT**

Students’ motivation and learning autonomy toward learning are essential in English learning. Language learning is a life-long process. Students should be aware of their learning and be motivated in order to learn the language even when they are not in the language classes. Motivation, practically in the second language classroom, is a challenge for most of the teachers.

The purpose of our study was to investigate how the environment will affect students’ autonomy and motivation when learning. Also, the goal of this study is to find out how language teachers motivate students’ learning autonomy so that students can learn from their own desires. We investigated English-as-second-language learners, and give them surveys to find out what issues during the learning are effect their motivation and learning autonomy the most.

**INTRODUCTION**

**General Statement of the Problem**

The traditional way of teaching in the class is teacher-centered. The students listen to teachers’ lectures and instructions, and the students learned what has been taught. Under this circumstance, following teachers’ lectures and instructions do not encourage students do study by themselves. Within the paradigm of constructivism, knowledge cannot be taught, but only learned. Autonomous learners learn knowledge independently; they take responsibility of their own learning; and they take an active approach to the learning task. Therefore, to gain learner’s autonomy and motivation are important for second language learning.

**Review of Related Literature**

To explain the definition of autonomy, one can use the terms from Little (1995), learner autonomy is “an acceptance of responsibility”, and it “has both socio-affective and cognitive implications: it entails at once a positive attitude to learning and the development of a capacity to reflect on the content and process of learning with a view to bringing them as far as possible under conscious control”(p.175). Teachers play a pivotal role in helping learners to become a self-access learner. In traditional language classrooms, teachers are the knowledge “givers” who pass down knowledge to learners, the receivers. In this situation, teachers are the center of learning process and have the authority to control the learning. However, in the paradigm of learner autonomy, the perspectives of a teacher’s focus shifts from the traditional role of the teacher, to a role in which they facilitate their student’s second language learning.

New roles of teachers include helpers, facilitators, advisors and guides (Yang, 1998). A teacher, as a guide and an advisor, should help students develop their awareness about their learning strategies and styles, so that students will try to take responsibility in their autonomous learning style. Furthermore, as a helper and a facilitator, teachers should work with students to improve their language level, so that students will have enough support from their teacher when they are trying to use their learner autonomy.

Self/identity refers to relatively enduring beliefs, values and identifications that are stored in

long-term memory (Roeser, Peck, & Nasir, 2006). Motivation can be defined as a desire and need to learn (Saville-Troike, 2009). According to Roeser, Peck and Nasir (2006), their Basic Level of Self (BLoS) Model defined what learners can do in a classroom for themselves. For example, what does a learner want (or not want) to do in the classroom? What kinds of goals are they going to achieve? What should students do to achieve the goals? By motivating learners, the teacher can build up their self-identity and self-confident towards learning (Gao, Zhao, Cheng, & Zhou, 2007). With positive attitudes, learners will have motivation to learn.

Helping student to develop autonomous learning is one of an important role for language teachers nowadays. Reid (1996) pointed out that “language teachers should provide a wealth of information to students in order to raise their awareness about learning styles and strategies, and finally, to work with students’ learning strengths” (p.3). Weden (1991) suggested that “teachers should take students’ interest and maturity levels into consideration when designing strategy assistance and deciding on the length of time spent on explicit strategy instruction”.

Motivation is the most important component of cognition, especially in learning a second or foreign language. Therefore, more and more motivation methods have been developed in the language classroom. Dornyei (2001) pointed out that among classroom related factors, such as materials, teachers and classroom atmosphere, teachers influence on learners’ motivation is widely recognized.

Teachers do influence learners’ motivation, and this influence constitutes a major part of

the overall picture of learners. According to Yang (1998), in order to let language learners to have meaningful experiences of their study, using classroom practice more often to help them extend the motivation on their learning. The appropriate classroom practices/events that teachers use can influence on learner motivation. In order to increase the teacher’s motivational impact on learners, more classroom-based activities are required during language education.

Dornyi (2001) and Ushioda (2003) both have mentioned that “teacher is a complex and key

figure who influences the motivational quality of learning, and plays a pivotal role in mediating the growth of motivation.” On the other hand, motivation changes over time and is a dynamic process; therefore, classroom experience will be one of the influential components for the language learners, which will affect their motivation on language learning. The research discovered that “teachers supported student autonomy and the amount of useful feedback they provided was positively related to student self-determination and enjoyment.”

**Research Questions**

In this research, we would like to know how the environments affect students’ learning autonomy and motivation when learning according to the personalities of teachers, teaching styles of teachers, teaching materials and learning environments.

**Definitions of Terms**

Autonomy is a capacity and willingness to take control of one’s learning. In addition, some researchers have argued that the development of autonomy is beneficial to learning. In other words, learner autonomy also means that learners study by themselves, take responsibility for their own learning, and decide their own learning processes. Learner autonomy also means the skills that can be learned and applied in self-directed learning, and an natural capacity that is suppressed by institutional education (Thanasoulas, 2007). Motivation can be defined as a desire and a need to learn (Saville-Troike, 2006). It is a way for students to achieve their learning academically.

**DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

**Participants**

There were 35 students participated to take the surveys at American Culture and Language Program (ACLP) in California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The majority of participants were Koreans, 32 Koreans and 3 Chinese. The mean age was 20.5 (from 19 year-old to 22 year-old students). Most of students were native speakers of Korean and had studied English through formal instruction at university in Korea. Three Chinese Students had studied English at high school in China. Students are all in level five from ACLP. The students study in ACLP for one quarter (about 3 months) and their English proficiency are between lower-intermediate to advanced.

**Data Collection Procedure**

The data were collected by the survey. The survey was designed to see how the environments affect students’ self-autonomy and motivation. We divided three parts to get the information from students. The first part of questionnaire asked frequency of using English besides in the class. Thus we had a scale for first part questions range from 0 to 5. The second part of questionnaire was provided with preferences. We would like to know how personalities of teachers, teaching styles of teachers, teaching materials, classmates, and learning environments would affect students’ autonomy and motivation. The last part of our survey questions was open-ended questions. We asked students why they prefer one of the learning environments (group setting vs. traditional setting) and what kinds of learning styles help them learn English effectively.

The research group members went to ACLP in CSUSB during their break time, and gave out the survey to students. Briefly introduced what the survey was about and then the students took 5-10 minutes to finish it. We collected all the survey papers right after they finished it, and analyzed the survey together.

**Presentation of Findings**

On the survey, we had a scale for first two questions range from 0 to 5. We asked students how often they practice English after English class. The average was high at mean=3.37. The second part of the survey had five questions about students’ preferences of the personality of the teachers, the teaching style of the teachers, teaching materials, classmates, learning environment and learning styles.

For the personality of the teachers, 77% of the students prefer the teachers who are easy to communicate with and the students feel more comfortable expressing themselves in the class. Only 23% of the students prefer the teachers who are strict in the classroom. For the teaching style of the teachers, 63% of the students prefer the teachers who give a lot of activities (worksheets) in the classroom. Only 37% of the students prefer lectures-only in the classroom.

For the teaching material, 89% of the students prefer that the teachers bring a lot of real-life situation materials in the class. Only 11% of the students prefer the teachers use textbook only in the class. For the classmates, 71% of the students prefer to work with hard-working classmates. But 29% of the students prefer to work with lazy classmates. For learning environment, 77% of the students prefer to sit in groups in the class because they can interact with their classmates or group members. Only 23% of the students prefer the traditional sitting in the classroom because it is easier to focus on lectures and the students are more familiar with the setting. For learning style, most of the students like to watch movies, practice speaking to each other, listen English songs, discuss with their classmates and so forth through real-life situation material settings.

The result of survey

**Limitations of Design**

When we were designing the survey, we put “English Proficiency” on it, because we would like to know how the students’ English proficiency were. But in the survey, the students wrote ‘so-so’ or ‘very bad’ or ‘3’ in the English proficiency part. We concluded that English proficiency was confusing for the students, they were not able to understand what it meant by “English Proficiency”. To be able to make the survey more comprehensible, we should put – lower-intermediate, intermediate, advanced on the survey to make it more understandable for the students.

Furthermore, in order to make the survey more understandable, we need to make the grammar easier to understand. We noticed that the answers of some questions on the survey did not make sense. We concluded that the reason of not getting the information that we needed was because some of the word-use in the survey were too difficult or vague for students to understand, therefore, it seems like they did not know how to answer the questions. We need to choose the vocabulary words that are more comprehensible for the survey takers to understand. To conclude, we need to make the grammar and the word-uses easier to understand for the students to do the survey. Also in our research, we think it is better to include participants from different countries rather than just Korean and Chinese students to see the varieties of culture differences. We should interview not only the students, but also the teachers to see teachers’ views of how to motivate the students. Moreover, in our survey, we need to have more open-ended questions or interviews to see more possible reasons of learning motivations.

**CONCLUSION**

Learning a language is a life-long process. Learners do not accept learning responsibility easily, so that teachers may have to switch the authority little by little during learning activities. To have extrinsic motivation in the class can motivate students to learn and leads to autonomy while learning.

We assumed that the international students in United States spend their time with their friends from their own countries more than native-English speakers. For the personality of the teachers, the students prefer the teachers who are easy to communicate because they feel more comfortable interact with the teachers. For the teaching styles of the teachers, the students would prefer the teachers who provide different kinds of activities in the class. With teacher material, the students would prefer the teachers to bring authentic materials in the class. For learning environment, the students would prefer to sit in group to interact with their classmates or group members.

According to our research, the exposure of the English , the personalities of the teachers, teaching styles of the teachers, teaching materials, and learning environment do motivate students with their learning. When learners leave the classroom or language curriculum, they still need to learn independently in order to improve their language ability. As teachers, one should facilitate students to take the responsibility of their own learning. Therefore, in order to develop lifelong learners, teaching learners how to learn independently and autonomously with motivation are the major duties for teachers.

**APPENDIX**

**Survey**

**This survey is meant to assess the classroom environment in regards to learner’s autonomy and motivation in SLA. Please fill out the questions below.**

Gender: M / F Age: \_\_\_\_\_\_ Country: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ English Proficiency: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been learning English? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Why do you learn English? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\* How often do you learn English besides in class?

(Not at all) 0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 (Very high)

\* How often do you practice English after English class (besides for school work)?

(Not at all) 0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 (Very high)

Do you refer A or B?

**1. The Personality of the Teachers**

A. The teacher is strict. I’d like to go to class more often.

B. The teacher is easy to communicate. I would like to go to class more often.

**2. The Teaching Style of the Teachers**

A. The teacher who gives only lectures in the classroom. I’d like to go to class more often.

B. The teacher who gives you a lot of activities (worksheets). I’d like to go to class more often.

**3. Teaching Material**

A. The teacher uses only textbook. I’d like to go to class more often.

B. The teacher brings a lot of real life situation material. I’d like to go to class more often.

**4. Classmates**

A. My classmates are hard-working. I’d like to go to class more often.

B. My classmates are lazy. I’d like to go to class more often.

**5. Learning Environment:** What kind of classroom do you like?

1.  B.

Why do you like it? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\* What kinds of learning style do you think it will make English-learning more interesting? Ex, watching movie.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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