Autonomy in External Learning: Developing Learner’s Ability to Choose and Use Study Materials

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Introduction

- Internet is rich source of study materials
  - Too rich?
- Do learners know how to choose materials?
- Do learners know how to use materials?
Overview

• Background
  - Learner autonomy in Internal and External learning

• Classroom Approach
  - Comprehension course
  - Students as teachers

• Materials selection
  - Teachers
  - Students

• Discussion
Learner Autonomy

● “Autonomy is … the ability to take charge of one's own learning.” (Holec, 1981, p. 3)

● Crucially involves …
  - Determining goals
  - Deciding how to reach the goals
  - Measuring progress
Levels of Learner Autonomy

1. **Awareness**: Learners become aware of learning goals.

2. **Involvement**: Learners get involved in choosing their goals.

3. **Intervention**: Learners intervene in their learning program.

4. **Creation**: Learners create their own learning goals.

5. **Transcendence**: Learners link their classroom learning to the outside world.

(From Nunan, 1997)
Learner Autonomy - Inside

- Emphasis on collaboration and negotiation in autonomy research in 1990s (Benson, 2001)

- Examples
  - Self-access centers
  - Learner development (i.e., strategy training)
  - CALL

- 1990s research focused on autonomy in the educational context.
Learner Autonomy - Outside

- In 2000s, call for more attention to learner autonomy outside the educational context
  - “Continuing learning” (Harmer, 2001)
  - “External learning” (Field, 2007)
Classroom Approach

• Context
  - University of Tokyo
  - Comprehension course
  - Compulsory

• Objectives
  - Improve students' listening comprehension skills.
  - Prepare students for future independent study of English
Classroom Approach

- First half of course
  - Teacher-directed
  - Comprehension practice with one material each lesson

- Second half of course
  - Student-directed (in groups)
  - Each group chooses one material and presents lesson to classmates.
Structure of Group Projects

- Instructor gives instructions about how to organize an effective comprehension lesson.
- Groups choose A/V material on Internet and report to instructor. Instructor gives feedback.
- Groups develop lesson plan and submit to instructor. Instructor gives feedback.
- Groups teach their lesson.
- Groups prepare a review quiz and submit to instructor.
- Class takes review quiz in following week.
Survey

- Objectives
  - Gauge students' perception of the development of their ability to engage in independent study
  - Measure importance that students place on various factors in choosing materials for independent study.

- Given after completion of all group projects

- Structure
  - Likert-scale questions
  - Fixed-response questions

- Respondents: n=64
Results

The group project was useful.

The group project was enjoyable.

Teaching my classmates was a good experience.

Receiving a lesson from my classmates was a good experience.

- $t(63)=5.9$, $p<0.001$
- $t(63)=4.7$, $p<0.001$
- $t(63)=7.9$, $p<0.001$
- $t(63)=1.8$, $p=0.08$
Results

My listening comprehension ability improved.

My knowledge of how to study English using the Internet increased.

I got some ideas about how to be an independent language learner.

- *strongly agree*
  - $t(63)=4.4$, $p<0.001$
  - $t(63)=7.2$, $p<0.001$
  - $t(63)=5.6$, $p<0.001$
Results

My motivation to do independent study of English increased.

My motivation to do independent study of another language increased.

My motivation to do independent study of another topic increased.

$t(63)=3.3$ p<0.005

$t(63)=1.7$ n.s.

$t(63)=1.6$ n.s.
Summary

- Students become more autonomous learners.
- Students are aware of their own autonomy.
- Autonomy in language learning does not necessarily engender autonomy more widely.
- As autonomous learners, how do students choose materials?
  - Which selection criteria are most important?
  - How do they judge each criterion?
Materials Selection Criteria

- Length
- Visual support
- Difficulty
- Topic
- Genre
- Text Purpose
- Popularity
- No. of speakers
- Background knowledge
- Speaker accent
- Speaker attitude
- Speaker speed

1. Which criteria are most important?
2. For each criterion, what is the range of options and which is optimal?

(Adapted from Arcario 1992, Burt 1999)
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Not Important at All</th>
<th>A Little Important</th>
<th>Rather Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>length</td>
<td>t(63)=1.0 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=2.4 p&lt;0.05</td>
<td>t(63)=4.1 p&lt;0.01</td>
<td>t(63)=1.0 n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visual support</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
<td>p&lt;0.001</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
<td>p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficulty</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>topic</td>
<td>t(63)=0.2 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=0.2 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=0.2 n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genre</td>
<td>t(63)=4.8 p&lt;0.001</td>
<td>t(63)=8.1 p&lt;0.001</td>
<td>t(63)=4.8 p&lt;0.001</td>
<td>t(63)=4.8 p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>text purpose</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>popularity</td>
<td>t(63)=2.7 p&lt;0.01</td>
<td>t(63)=2.0 p=0.051</td>
<td>t(63)=3.8 p&lt;0.001</td>
<td>t(63)=3.8 p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no. of speakers</td>
<td>t(63)=8.1 p&lt;0.001</td>
<td>t(63)=8.1 p&lt;0.001</td>
<td>t(63)=8.1 p&lt;0.001</td>
<td>t(63)=8.1 p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bkgd knowledge</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spkr accent</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
<td>t(63)=0.1 n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spkr attitude</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>spkr speed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relative Importance of Factors

• Important to most students
  – Difficulty, speaker speed, visual support, topic

• Important to some, not to others
  – Length, genre, text purpose, background knowledge, speaker accent

• Not important to most students
  – Popularity, No. of speakers, speaker attitude
**Difficulty**

- Important factor to most students
- Students want to work with materials that are a little challenging.
  - n+1 (!)
  - Gaps for noticing

\[ \chi^2(5) = 91.8, \ p < 0.001 \]
Visual Support

- Important factor to most students
- Students want to see the speaker
  - Mouth, for linguistic support
  - Face and body, for discourse pragmatic support

\[ \chi^2(4) = 69.5, \ p<0.001 \]
Topic

- Important factor to most students
- "Interest" is not the relevant factor in topic choice?
  - Academic relevance?
  - Current relevance?
  - other?

χ²(2) = 43.9, p<0.001
Speaker Speed

- Important factor to most students
- Students seem to be particularly frustrated by fast speakers.
  - Comprehension errors and gaps compound rapidly.
  - Students give up soon.

χ²(5) = 87.4, p<0.001
Length

• Important factor to some students, not others

\[
\chi^2(4) = 93.2, \ p<0.001
\]
Genre

• Important factor to some students, not others

\[ \chi^2(5) = 86.4, p<0.001 \]
Text Purpose

- Important factor to some students, not others

\[ \chi^2(5) = 51.3, \ p < 0.001 \]
Background Knowledge

- Important factor to some students, not others

\[ \chi^2(4) = 47.8, \ p < 0.001 \]
Speaker Accent

- Important factor to some students, not others

\[ \chi^2(7) = 120.7, \ p < 0.001 \]
Popularity

- Not important to most students
- Surprising result for young people

\[ \chi^2(2) = 29.0, \pi < 0.001 \]
Number of Speakers

- Not important to most students

\[ \chi^2(4) = 9.7, \ p < 0.05 \]
Speaker Attitude

- Not important to most students

\( \chi^2(3) = 4.6, \text{n.s.} \)
Fostering Autonomy

Benson (2001)

- How does this practice help learners take greater control over their learning?
  - Opportunities for control
  - Enable learners

- How does the practice improve language learning?
  - Proficiency
  - More effective language learners
Discussion

- What questions, comments, or suggestions do you have about the present research?

- What experiences or observations about (un)successful practices to promote learner autonomy do you have?

- How can we go about assessing autonomy in a reliable or objective manner?
References


Burt, Using Videos with Adult English Language Learners, 1999.


