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Students' Perceptions of the Impact of a Self-Directed Learning Skills Training Program on Language Learning

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This paper is concerned with the impact a self-directed learning (SDL) skills course has on students throughout their university career. The authors begin with an overview of the literature in the area of SDL and provide a definition for the purposes of this paper. The authors then go on to describe a study whereby students initially enrolled in a self-directed learning course in their freshman year are interviewed and talk about their perceptions of the benefits of such a program. Using an interpretive analysis of the interview data, the researchers suggest the role that such courses have in not only providing learners with SDL skills, but also in supporting longer-term, deeper level metacognitive and reflective processes.

Review of the Literature

One of the issues in the field of SDL for language learning is that there are many researchers that seem to be researching the same construct but from different angles. The three most well-known definitions of SDL come from Knowles (1975), Holec (1981), and Zimmerman (2002). While these definitions have undeniable similarities, they also differ in significant ways. In this paper, the term “self-directed learning skills” refers to the shared

skills claimed as core elements by each of the above three definitions:

Self-directed learning skills entail managing (planning, monitoring, controlling and evaluating) one's language learning such as language goals, language learning activities and self-directed learning process for the purpose of maximized effects and optimal efficiency in goal achievement where "self" is seen to be composed of and be managed in terms of one's actions, thoughts and feelings.

The importance of teaching SDL skills derives from the demand on learners of constant adaptation to new ideas and systems caused by the paradigm shift brought about by the rapid development of technology in the 21st century (Du, 2013). SDL skills are especially valued in the area of language learning because SDL can afford learners more opportunities for language development outside of fixed institutionalized learning.

Among SDL skills, some researchers emphasize the importance of regulation, systematicity, and study habits (Carter, 1921; Zimmerman, 2002). For instance, Corno (2011) discusses the importance of habits of self-regulation, which are composed of "(a) effort and management of resources as developed behavioral routines, and (b) information processing regularities referred to as self-regulation tactics and strategies" (p. 361). He argues that such habits enhance volition, which is "a process of implementing steps leading to accomplishment of commitments; it reflects an ability to persist in the face of difficulty, handling distractions and setbacks" (p. 361). Some also emphasize the importance of study habits for effective self-control (Cubukcu, 2009). In their article, Neal, Wood and Drolet (2013) argued that strong habits enable people to "stay on track through various implicit and automatic processes that reduce the attraction of temptations and promote adherence to desired goals." Making a good habit is a key to self-control that is closely related to effective and efficient goal pursuit

(Neal, Wood, & Drolet, 2013).

In order to make a habit of something, one of the most common things people do is to routinize the process, doing an activity at a certain time on a regular basis. Thus, making a plan to routinize by allocating desired tasks to be done at a certain time regularly would be a useful first step toward habit making. Also, in the process of habit making, the habits being established need to be actually effective for achieving the targeted goals, especially considering how difficult it would be to break habits once they are formed. Thus, the process of making habits demands a good command of the four types of metacognitive skills, namely, planning, monitoring, controlling and evaluating.

Metacognition is perceived to play an essential role in various types of self-control and self-instruction by some researchers as well (Flavell, 1976; Sannomiya, 2008). Thus it is natural that its integration in learner training programs is considered beneficial for successful learning (Wenden, 1998). However, due to its complex and multidimensional nature, the definition of this construct is still unclear. Therefore, many researchers prefer to use a simple definition such as “thinking about thinking.” In this paper, Flavell’s (1976) definition will be employed, which refers to metacognition as “the active monitoring and consequent regulation and orchestration of [thinking] processes in relation to the cognitive objects or data on which they bear, usually in the service of some concrete goal or objective” (p. 232). Metacognition is often seen as consisting of two parts: metacognitive regulation and metacognitive knowledge.

“Meta” is a Greek word meaning “after, behind or beyond” (Zechmeister & Nyberg, 1982 cited in Tarricone, 2011) and therefore, it should be defined in relation to the object of the “meta.” For instance, Oxford (2011) differentiates metacognitive strategies, meta-affective strategies and meta-sociocultural-interactive strategies because the object of each metacognitive strategy is different (cognitive strategies, affective strategies, and socio-cultural-interactive strategies respectively). Hence, when discussing metacognition, we need to pay careful

attention to its “object,” which determines the meta relationship. In self-directed language learning (SDLL), the object can be any concepts related to one’s language learning such as English knowledge, English tasks, or the English learning process itself. The object can also be oneself (i.e. one’s metacognition or one’s cognitive, behavioral, and affective state).

Certain types of knowledge that are closely related to factors that affect the ways and outcomes of cognitive processes are often referred to as meta-knowledge. Flavell (1979) divided these factors into three major categories: person, task, and strategy. These factors are further divided into three sub-categories of beliefs about 1) intraindividual differences, 2) interindividual differences, and 3) universals of cognition. Of the three, intraindividual differences or self-knowledge is regarded as a crucial element to make informed and effective decisions on one’s learning (Cotterall & Murray, 2009; Wenden, 1998). Oxford (2011) developed more sophisticated categorization of metacognition which contains five types of metaknowledge: 1) person knowledge (individual), 2) group or culture knowledge (community), 3) task knowledge (short-term, immediate), 4) whole-process knowledge (long-term), and 5) strategy knowledge (knowledge of strategies and metastrategies). There is also one overarching knowledge called conditional knowledge that governs when, why and where to use any combination of the five types of knowledge.

As for metacognitive regulation, some researchers divide it into two components: metacognitive monitoring and metacognitive control (e.g. Sannomiya, 2008), whereas some researchers divide it into three categories of metacognitive planning, evaluating and monitoring. Based on the combined interpretation of metacognitive regulation by Bruer (1998), Wenden (1998), Pintrich (2004), and Schraw (1998), metacognitive regulation in this paper includes the following four components: planning, monitoring, controlling, and evaluating.

The definitions for each metacognitive component in regards to the context of the

current study are as follows:

- Planning: Making decisions on the targeted aspect of self-directed learning based on the information gathered through monitoring and evaluating
- Monitoring: Observing consciously for the purpose of gathering information and keeping records of the targeted aspect of self-directed learning
- Controlling: Modifying the course of actions, flow of thoughts, allocating attention to improve the targeted aspect of self-directed learning
- Evaluating: Creating a set of criteria to make judgements on the targeted aspect of self-directed learning and analyze it to check if those aspects were effective and efficient for the goals and suitable for the learners themselves.

The teachability of metacognitive regulation has been proven, with a number of studies reporting significant improvement in learning through classroom instruction, and its integration into learner training programs is recommended (Curry, Mynard, Noguchi, & Watkins, 2017; Mynard, Curry, Noguchi, & Watkins, 2016; Schraw, 1998). Furthermore, training specifically designed to develop metacognitive skills is desirable especially because “usual life events and traditional cultural and educational efforts do not necessarily guarantee the development of metacognition” (Cornoldi, 2010, p. 274).

There are a few studies that report the benefits of SDL training programs perceived by students and faculty. Some of the findings highlight the increased awareness of metacognitive strategies by the students (Chavali, 2001; Curry et al., 2017; Cotterall & Murray, 2009; Dişlen, 2011; Du, 2013; Kjisik, 2007; Law, 2009; Lunyk-Child, Crooks, Ellis, Ofosu, O’Mara, & Rideout, 2001; Mynard et al., 2016). For instance, Du (2013) reported that investigation of an autonomous learning project that was embedded in an intensive basic Chinese training program revealed that participant-perceived benefits of the project were 1) an exposure to

news texts, 2) an improvement in meta-cognitive ability, 3) higher motivation, and 4) improved SDL abilities. Cotterall and Murray (2009) also investigated the effect of a self-directed language learning (SDLL) course on students' metacognitive development. They concluded that the SDLL course provided students with five affordances, namely personalization, engagement, reflection, experimentation and support.

However, these studies tend to investigate students' perceptions of the concept of SDL on an abstract level, or the conclusions are not exclusively concerned with SDL training since the training was embedded in regular courses. Thus, it is difficult to see if the benefits mentioned were due solely to the training part or the course content as a whole. Also, previous research studies have tended to be based on one semester's work, and no longitudinal studies have been conducted. Therefore, the objects of the metacognitive skills studied are often limited to linguistic aspects of learning and are not extended to the effectiveness of learners' overall learning process or self-knowledge. In order to see whether there are longer-term impacts on learning, learners need to be tracked over time. Hence, this study was conducted as part of ongoing longitudinal case study that started from spring semester in 2015, whose findings hopefully will be able to provide some insights that other studies conducted for a shorter period of time were unable to produce.

Methodology

Context

This study took place at the Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS), a medium-sized university specializing in language studies located in Japan. It offers optional, self-directed learning skills training programs in the form of self-study modules as well as class-based courses open to all students (see Takahashi et al. (2013) and Thornton (2012) for details). These programs provide students with opportunities

to individualize their learning. They also provide a framework for learners to develop self-directed learning skills and independent learning habits. Students work with an assigned learning advisor for one semester (15 weeks), while creating and implementing a self-directed learning plan related to their language goals. Each week, they need to complete a cycle of plan-study-evaluate. In the beginning of the week, they decide what kind of activities they will do with the details of when and where. During the week, they follow and implement their learning plan while keeping a record of what they actually did by logging the times they spent for each planned activity or overwriting what they actually did if they did something other than what they had planned. At the end of the week, guided by some reflective questions in the reflective journal, they evaluate their learning that week and identify successful areas as well as areas needing improvement. They are also prompted to explain the rationale for their evaluation followed by a section to write about their plan for the next week with concrete ideas on how to make their learning more effective, efficient and suitable (See Appendix A). Upon filling in their written reflections, they submit their weekly learning journal to their learning advisor. The learning advisors provide weekly comments, feedback and advice to the learners. For the modules, the learning advisors also meet them frequently either one-to-one or in workshop groups and for the courses, they meet once a week in addition to the self-directed learning activities. Learning advisors often hear learners comment on how influential the module process is (see Noguchi & McCarthy (2009) for details about the module contents).

Several research studies have been conducted at KUIS in recent years indicating that the students benefit from the structure of the module and are supported by the advising process (e.g. Watkins, 2015). Analysis of the reflective journals, written reports, and documented use of resources has indicated that the modules have a beneficial impact on learning. Furthermore, the results of an end-of-semester survey that has been conducted almost every

semester indicate students' overall positive experience with the modules and courses. Furthermore, focus group interviews were conducted as part of a curriculum evaluation with the purpose of eliciting students' perceptions of the module (Hasegawa & Thornton, 2014), and in this feedback the modules and courses also received positive feedback overall.

In order to investigate students' perceptions of the influence and benefits of the self-directed learning program and the changes in students over the span of four years as a result of the program, ongoing longitudinal case studies were started in the spring semester of 2015. This interview project was part of the longitudinal study and it investigates students' initial perceptions of the self-directed learning modules/courses after a semester-long training. The data collected this time are to be compared as a baseline with those that will be collected yearly onward. The central research question is as follows:

What value do students place (if any) on the experience of taking self-directed learning skills training modules/courses?

It is hoped that the results of the study will be useful for understanding more about the self-directed learning experiences of our students, and also for evaluating and improving the modules and courses offered by the SALC.

Participants

The longitudinal study targets the population of freshman students who had just completed one semester of SDL training and will continue on to another module/course the following semester. We initially contacted our participants by including a message in our end-of-term survey, asking for permission to contact them regarding recruitment for research participants. After receiving the students' indication of whether they were willing to participate or not, we contacted those students who said yes to being contacted by us via e-mail. Six students agreed to participate in the interview part of this study. Two researchers

(two of the authors) interviewed three of those six participants each. The researchers purposely avoided interviewing their own advisees because they were concerned with the possibility that the advisor-advisee power relationship may influence negatively on how honestly the participant would be able to answer the questions during the interview.

Details of the initial interviews with three participants will be shared in this paper and they will be referred to as Akira, Mamiko, and Shizuka. A summary of participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' information

Participants (Pseudonyms)	Department	Spring semester	Fall semester	Number of interviews
Akira	Indonesian	Course	Course	1
Mamiko	Indonesian	Course	Module	2
Shizuka	IC	Module	Module	1

Data Collection Methods

In order to investigate students' initial perceptions of the self-directed learning modules/courses after a semester-long training, the researchers conducted face-to-face interviews for 30 to 60 minutes in Japanese (the participants' native language) with each student. The first interviews were video/audio recorded. The theoretical questions that are expected to be answered through the interviews are as follows:

- What do participants perceive that they have gained or benefited from the experience of taking modules/courses?

- What does the experience of taking self-directed learning skills training modules/courses mean to the students?

With the theoretical questions in mind, the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format with the following guiding interview questions.

- Why did you decide to take the self-directed learning course/module?
- What do you remember the most about the course module?
- What aspect of the module/course was most challenging for you?
- Is there anything that influenced your actions or thoughts in your life at or outside school? Is there anything you changed because you took the module/course?
- What does the experience of taking modules/courses mean to you?

These interview questions were sent to the participants prior to the interview so that they knew what they would be expected to answer and they could be prepared to answer them with ease during the interview. It was hoped that this process would help the participants to feel more comfortable and relaxed during the interview and make the interview go relatively smoothly. All the interviews were conducted based on the constructionist paradigm where the way they perceived their experiences in the self-directed learning programs was explored and constructed through dialogue with the interviewer. In this study, the interview is seen as “social practice” (Talmy, 2011 p. 25) in which the researcher and the interviewees are co-constructing the perception of the value created in the training experience. Thus, the interviews were semi-structured in that it contained some prompts to elicit answers to the research questions but still was open enough for the interviewee to explore their thoughts and elaborate on their accounts with sufficient details. An interpretive analysis (Hatch, 2002, p. 179) was employed in order to examine “how meaning is negotiated, knowledge

co-constructed, and the interview is locally accomplished” (p. 27). Therefore, member checking followed the initial interview. Member checking was done with the participants in a form of e-mail exchanges. The interview summary was sent to each of the participants to check if the summary reports summarized what they had said in the interview sessions accurately. Two of them responded to the e-mail and agreed that what was in the reports truthfully grasped the gist of the sessions but one of them never replied. Only one of the two participants who responded was available for a further face-to-face interview.

The purpose of the second interview was member checking: to clarify anything that was not clear in the initial interview report and to confirm that the researchers understood her perception of the benefits of the SDL training course that had been elicited through the first interview. After listening to the interview recording, there was also an aspect that might be worth exploring deeper, which was the participants’ perceptions of the role and influence of reflection in their module experience. Prior to the second meeting, the participants’ reflective logs and journals were analyzed for the purpose of confirming their perceptions of the experience gained from the SDL course based on what they had mentioned in the initial interviews. The following interview questions regarding reflection were asked:

- What kind of things did you often think about when you reflect?
- What kind of things do you think you gain from reflection? Any specific examples?
- What kind of changes did the practice of reflection bring to your learning?

Methods of analysis

Interview logs, which were created with Microsoft Excel and include time stamp with a brief summary of what was said for each 1-3 minute segment, were created based on the recorded interview data so that the researchers could go back to parts of interest easily. A detailed transcription was made as necessary for the parts that required fine-grained

examination. The interview logs, which are partly transcribed, were analyzed by utilizing an interpretive analysis approach and roughly following the steps described in Hatch (2002, p. 181):

1. Read the data for a sense of the whole
2. Review impressions previously recorded in research journals and/or bracketed in protocols and record these in memos
3. Read that data, identify impressions, and record impressions in memos
4. Study memos for salient interpretations
5. Reread data, coding places where interpretations are supported or challenged
6. Write a draft summary
7. Review interpretations with participants
8. Write a revised summary and identify excerpts that support interpretations

After listening to the interview recordings repeatedly, the summary for each interview was drafted with a time stamp and categorized into topics/themes. Following the case study methods introduced in Yin (2003, p. 50) for multi-case studies, the emerging themes were compared and contrasted among the cases. During the data analysis, the categorization of themes will naturally be influenced by the researchers' interpretations and conceptualizations of the course learning outcomes (See Appendix B), which represent expected learning gains that students will receive after taking the course. Through such comparison/contrastive analysis, cross-case conclusions were drawn.

Findings

One of the main findings that emerged from the interview data is that students were able to foster habits of self-regulation, which are 1) developed behavioral routines and 2)

self-regulation strategies (Corno, 2011).

First of all, it seems that students utilized the framework of the weekly plan-study-evaluate cycle provided by the SDLL program in order to develop their study habits, which function to enhance their volition for continuing their learning routine while overcoming any lack of motivation by using the momentum or inertia of the established study rhythm. As a result of regularly and continuously succeeding in implementing their weekly learning plan, they foster a sense of achievement and enhance their self-efficacy. Another prominent finding is that they enhanced their awareness of self-evaluation through weekly reflection practice, which helped them to identify their weakness and encourage them to think about what they need to do in order to make their learning more effective, efficient and suitable. In addition, there seems to be some evidence that students were able to apply what they have acquired from the training program to some other areas of their life. In the following sections, the details of the findings will be discussed in detail by presenting specific data excerpts that represent each claim.

Utilization of weekly learning cycle for establishing study habits

When talking about what they had gained from the SDL training programs, all three participants talked about how the weekly learning cycle became part of their routine, which helped them to establish their study habits.

Prompted by the question of “What do you think you gained from the experience of taking the SDL courses?”, Akira and Mamiko both said that they were able to make the weekly plan-study-evaluate cycle part of their routine.

Akira

What I think I got the most is the fact that I was able to make a study routine. I think that is the most important thing.

Mamiko

It's something that helps me to establish my routines.

Shizuka

Yes. It's already become something that I have to do. Since I have been doing this since the first semester, it is already a part of my routine like a math drill that you were forced to do every day (when you were in 5th grade or something).

By making the habit of plan-study-evaluate cycle every week, they were able to establish one of the two types of habits of self-regulation, namely "effort and management of resources as developed behavioral routines" (p. 361), which enhanced their volition so that they could continue to commit to their learning process (Corno, 2011).

Another interesting thing mentioned by Akira regarding routinization was how he intentionally utilized his study habits to regulate his actions and motivation.

Akira

Because I think the key to (keep on) studying is to just build up momentum. I need to make it a habit; otherwise I will just slack off.

This statement is profound on multiple levels. First of all, he seemed to have a good grasp of what kind of learner he is. After the above statement, he told the interviewer that making it a habit to study is important for him. Explaining the rationale, he said that he needs "to feel pressure in order to start something." Knowing that he will slack off eventually unless there is some external pressure, he selected a strategy of making a habit to prevent it from happening. This choice was made based on his past experience of using it successfully when he studied for university entrance exams. Second of all, he knew that building up momentum by making a study habit is one of the most suitable strategies for him to avoid slacking off. It

seems he intuitively understood the function of habits to enable people to avoid distractions, as claimed by Neal et al. (2013). Furthermore, he even knew that making a habit is difficult to do on his own and that is the reason why he decided to continue to take the second SDL program after he completed the first one. It is intriguing to see how he chose to turn this SDL program into an external motivator to regulate his studies knowing his tendencies as a learner.

Utilization of weekly learning cycle for self-evaluation

Another salient theme that emerged from the interview data is that all the participants seem to have placed value on self-evaluation. One interesting thing was that while Akira seemed to focus mainly on evaluation of the linguistic aspects of his studies, Mamiko paid attention to evaluation of her overall learning process. Shizuka also said that she now reflects on her learning more, but she did not specify what she primarily thinks about.

Answering the question of “What does the experience of taking modules/courses mean to you?”, Akira answered as follows:

“This course provides me time to evaluate my English ability. I’m currently very busy working part-time and have hardly any time to study English, not to mention to evaluate my English skills [...] If I hadn’t taken the SDL course, I wouldn’t have noticed my weakness or realized how much I had forgotten what I had learned.”

Akira uses the opportunities provided by the SDL program to evaluate his English skills while increasing his linguistic knowledge. From his statement it is clear that he values the reflection that is built into the course and implies that he would not have time to do this reflection without the course.

Unlike Akira, Mamiko looked at her learning activities and overall learning process when she evaluated what she did during the week. In response to the second main interview

question (“What does the experience of taking modules/courses mean to you?”), Mamiko replied as follows:

I was able to plan, monitor and evaluate effective time, place and methods. After I specifically decided what I study and where I do it, I implemented the plan. Then, I was able to reflect on the effectiveness of my implementation. For instance, I was able to realize I was able to do a certain activity because the place was appropriate or the timing was suitable. Because of such reflection, I now know that studying before class is effective.

It seems that the course provided this student with an opportunity to improve conditional knowledge (Oxford, 2011, p. 21) so that she will know not only what activity will be useful and suitable for her but also understand how to orchestrate the most suitable combination of time, place and approach for each activity.

Similar to Mamiko, Shizuka also evaluated her learning process. When prompted by the question of “What does the experience of taking the SDL modules mean to you?”, she answered as follows:

It actually means a lot to me. It really helps me to make plans. When I go over the plans (and reflect on the things that I accomplished on the day), I can realize how much I have done, making me feel fulfilled. I can also evaluate the things that I could have done better. It is like keeping a diary. I can assess how I'm doing. I can check my actions in order to manage them (effectively). I can manage my study so that I won't slack off.

It is interesting that she is using her self-evaluation not only to evaluate the effectiveness of her learning process, but also to regulate her actions and motivation. It seems that when she evaluates her learning process, acknowledging successful areas including her efforts and

accomplishments, it enhances her motivation. On the other hand, finding out what she could have done better keeps her from slacking off.

Transferable skills

Each student also mentioned how what they learned through the SDL programs was transferred to other areas.

Akira. Akira said that he was able to transfer his routinization strategy to his Indonesian study as well. He said that he studied English grammar on the way to school using a phone app and Indonesian vocabulary using his vocabulary notebook on the way home. He also said that he made study plans allocating specific time slots for assignments for all the classes, which he said he learned to do from the SDL course.

Mamiko. Similar to Akira majoring in the same foreign language, Mamiko also said that she was able to transfer some strategies to her Indonesian studies. It was interesting that she told me that she did not realize that she could study Indonesian in such a systematic way as she is doing with her English study with support from the SDL program. She said that it was when her learning advisor suggested to her that she could make a summer learning plan both for her English and Indonesian learning activities in the final meeting at the end of the first semester that she started thinking about doing her Indonesian studies in the same way that she does with her English studies. This may imply that the concept and usefulness of transferring some of the skills acquired from the SDL program to other areas is not as self-explanatory as it seems and learners may require explicit awareness raising about the possibility of transferring skills to other areas.

She went on to provide several examples of successful transfer to her Indonesian studies. For example, she said that she was using the same vocabulary flash card application to learn Indonesian vocabulary which she had started to use for her English vocabulary learning. She

also mentioned that she applied the same time management strategy she learned from her learning advisor to her Indonesian studies. She explained that she used to try to do many things all at once but now she prioritizes and select what to study, which helps to keep her focused. She also tended to study inefficiently for a long period of time but changed the habit. Now she tries to break what she needs to do into smaller tasks and do them one at a time for a short period of time so that she can keep her concentration. She started to do this with her English study when her learning advisor recommended the strategy and now she does this with her Indonesian study as well.

Another strategy she mentioned that she was able to transfer to the ways she studied Indonesian was to routinize her learning activities. She told me that she started to go to have conversations with native speakers of Indonesian at the Multilingual Communication Center during lunch time every day, just as she made it a habit of going to the Self-Access Learning Centre to practice her English conversation skills during her free time between classes. This routinization of conversation practice enabled her to continue these activities, which she said led to her increased confidence in having conversations in both English and Indonesian.

Shizuka. Shizuka mentioned that she did not know how to study, especially for TOEIC, before taking the SDL modules. However, the way her learning advisor asked questions and encouraged her to think on her own about what kind of learning activities may be suitable for her helped her to understand herself and the effective and efficient ways to learn for her. She said that she was able to apply this general understanding of preferred learning methods to learning of other subjects and was convinced that the reason why her TOEIC score increased by 100 points is due to the support from the SDL program, although she provided no elaboration on how that came about.

Discussion

What was most intriguing to find out from the analysis was that, as Bown (2009) found in his study, the participants seemed to be aware of their behavioral and affective tendencies (i.e. self-knowledge), and created the conditions necessary for effective learning and self-management by using their metacognitive skills and utilizing the framework that this SDL program provides. For instance, as discussed in the previous section, Akira identified his tendency to procrastinate and utilized the weekly journal as a means of combatting this tendency. As the figure below demonstrates, repetition of the plan-study-evaluate cycle develops a study habit, and repeating this study habit helps learners with the development of their self-direction skills. The SDL course helps instill in learners this cycle through the weekly journal, which consists of learning plans, learning logs and the reflective learning journal. By completing a weekly journal students gain practice in the self-direction skills of planning, monitoring, controlling, and evaluating.

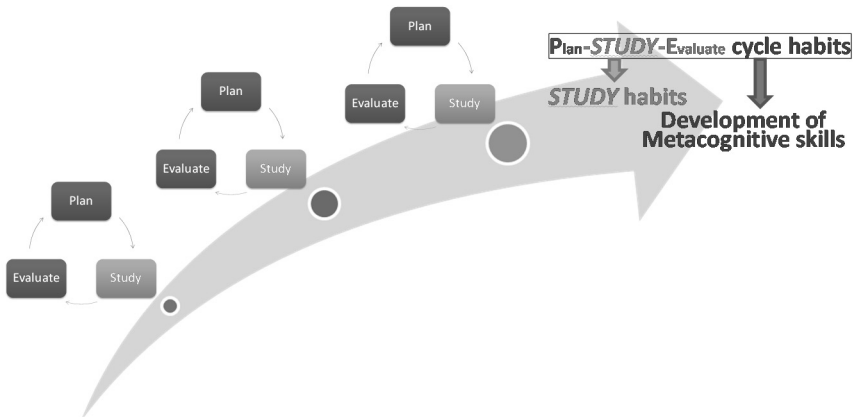


Figure 1. Visual representation of two-tiered model of habit formation process.

One of the common usages of this plan-study-evaluate cycle was to control their actions and emotions. All the participants mentioned that they routinize their study schedule so that they can make sure to maintain momentum for studying regularly regardless of their day-to-day motivational level. For example, two of the participants mentioned that by making sure that they do their weekly studies and write about them in the weekly journal they would get a sense of achievement, which in turn motivated them to keep up their good work. This momentum appears to support their commitment to continue studying. For example, the exact words that two of the participants used to illustrate their reasons for maintaining a study routine were “so that I won’t slack off.”

In summary, the interview analysis implies that learners’ control over their learning, which is the essence of self-directed learning, is enhanced by establishing habits of self-regulation (i.e. study habits and metacognition habits) (Corno, 2011). These continuous and successful learning efforts will likely be rewarded with language gains, and it is hoped that evidence of these gains will be found in the coming years as the longitudinal project continues.

Conclusion

This study explored students’ perspectives on how the SDL program benefited their self-study experiences. The major limitation of this study is the difficulty of generalizing the findings to other educational settings, as the module program at Kanda University may be unique to the university. Also, care must be taken in interpreting the results in any sort of definitive or global manner because the conclusions of this study are based on a small number of interviews. Nonetheless, the findings show some evidence that a routinized learning system which is adapted to fit learners’ individual needs and tendencies can help learners self-regulate themselves behaviorally, and affectively. Furthermore, training in self-evaluation

appears to improve learners' confidence in evaluating their learning habits. It is hoped that these accounts will provide SDL trainers with insights in how to best foster SDL skills in their trainees.

Appendix A

Weekly learning journal

Week : Plan and Record your activities

Plan • What do you want to achieve this week?
 Try to be as specific as you can (e.g. the number of words you want to learn, the number of books (part of a book you want to read, etc.).

Record • Keep records of your learning
 Make copies of your documents to hand in.



• Write S, U, R, E activities you did.
 • When and for how long you did them.
 • Which date, and for how long you actually did the activities.

TUBE	Learning activity	WRITE!	When	Actual date
Topic		For how long?	of the day	
USE				
REVIEW				
EVALUATE				

Total that I spent on each activity:

Study	Use	Review	Evaluate	Total
00:00	00:00	00:00	00:00	00:00

Example: How was your learning balance this week? Learned 10000 words in 2 months
 What do you need to do more or less of next week? More study but not too much!
 How was your learning balance this week? _____
 What do you need to do more or less of next week? Study more words!

Evaluate how you did / Plan for next week

Evaluate: Use the following questions as a guide:
 1. How did you do?
 2. Why did you do that?
 3. ... 1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ... 5 ...
 4. Why did you do that?
 5. ... 1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ... 5 ...
 6. Do you plan to change for the next week? ... when your learning goals ... until for your goal?
 7. ... 1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ... 5 ...
 8. What did you do well? ... What are the problems?
 9. ... 1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ... 5 ...



Feedback from your Learning Advisor:

Use this space to answer your learning advisor's questions. Also, you can ask questions, your advisor will be there to help.

PLAN: For next weeks, what will you change to solve problems or just to improve? Why?

Appendix B

Learning Outcomes of the Self-directed Learning Programs

1. Setting and reviewing goals

The student can set a relevant and realistic goal

2. Selecting, using and evaluating resources

The student tried at least one resource and reflected on its suitability for his/her goals

3. Identifying, using and evaluating strategies

The student tried a new strategy and reflected on its effectiveness and suitability for his/her goals

4. Making, implementing and evaluating a learning plan

The student demonstrated that she/he understands the difference between S, U and R (Study, Use and Review) activities

The student can make a basic learning plan which forms a practical guide for a period of self-directed study

The student implements the learning plan for a minimum period of self-study (3 weeks).

The student evaluates the effectiveness of the implementation phase

5. Evaluating linguistic gains

The student demonstrates how to evaluate linguistic gains

The student can evaluate whether or not there have been linguistic gains

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