

Some Korean Sixth Graders' Propensity for Autonomy in English Learning

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I. Introduction

This study aims to report fifteen Korean sixth graders' propensity for autonomy in English learning. To understand their readiness to adopt learner-autonomy-based English learning, the teacher-researcher observed and interviewed them at an English class at a talented children's program affiliated with a university.

II. Research Question

To what extent were fifteen sixth-graders autonomous in their English learning?

III. Methodology

1. Students at a Talented Children's Program

20 sixth graders took an English lesson at a talented children's program. The class was offered at a college every Saturday, three hours a day in Spring 2013. All of them were observed and interviewed, but five of them were absent quite often and could not participate in the study. Only fifteen stayed at the class until the last day of the spring semester and became the informants of the study.

2. Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected in the class mostly when the informants were observed and they were interviewed occasionally at the class. While teaching them, the teacher-researcher took a short memo about their class participation and extended the memo into a full length note after the class was over. According to Benson's(2001) advice about autonomous learners' characteristics, the teacher-researcher tried hard to take a memo regarding the informants' active participation at the class activities, their reflections about their own English learning, and their voluntary talking in English at the class. The teacher-researcher interviewed them to know their English learning activities and their motivation and attitudes towards English learning. She also asked them to write what they do to learn English and why they think they learn English. After the interview data were collected, they were saved at a computer file to be transcribed and analyzed on the informants' readiness to apply autonomy-based English learning. Observation reports and writings also were saved at the file and analyzed to understand the informants' readiness propensity for autonomy in English learning.

IV. Preliminary Results²

They were not very active at performing the class activities. Almost always they enjoyed listening and reading activities more than speaking or writing ones. Although they spoke quite good English, they did not talk in English voluntarily. Only when the teacher asked them to speak English they said something in English, mostly to the teacher and very rarely to other students. Almost always they communicated in Korean at the class. Quite a few students wanted to make a no-class (or no-private-institute-class) day when the teacher asked them, to make Korean people happier, what holiday they wanted to make. Most of them said they were tired taking many private lessons after school. All in all, they did not seem to be very self-regulated in their English learning not because they were not autonomous, but because their parents did not understand the importance of self-regulated or autonomous English learning. The informants did not seem to

² It needs to be noted that the current results was written when the data analysis was not totally completed.

have a chance to direct their English learning and to reflect upon their English learning.

V. Implications and Conclusion

The current study results draw some implications: (1) Amongst all stakeholders involved in autonomy-based English learning at schools, parents seem to play one major role to adopt autonomy-based English learning/teaching at Korean primary schools. Some programs for parents are needed to adopt autonomy-based English learning for primary students; (2) Not only parents but also all stakeholders involved, like all teachers, policy makers and school administrative staffs, seem to have a say in autonomy-based English learning. That means, future autonomy research with primary students is recommended in two ways, one with all potential stakeholders involved, and the other one in a small scale with some students or some stakeholders. Identifying all stakeholders involved might be an interesting topic for future research.

BIODATA

Maria Oh has been teaching English over twenty five years mostly at colleges in Korea. After finishing her PhD dissertation on learner autonomy theory and practice, her current research topics are how to integrate learner autonomy theory into English classes for Korean learners and how to integrate technology into English teaching/learning.

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