

Exploring Self-regulated Language Learning among Japanese Senior High School Students

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This study aims to explore the factors involved in self-regulated language learning among Japanese senior high school (henceforth SHS) students and to identify the different types of self-regulated English learners. Self-regulated learning (henceforth SRL) deals with learners' complex intrinsic factors, including their learning strategies and motivation to learn. In order to cultivate "Japanese with English abilities" in the present context with the limited number of English lessons taken and the minimal amount of exposure to English, students' autonomous learning outside classes is the key to success. SRL offers learners the opportunity to become autonomous—a situation that is essential for ensuring that Japanese students acquire English proficiency.

This thesis is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 1 provides theoretical background. First, the trend toward a framework for self-regulated language learning in the field of second language (henceforth L2) learning is delineated. Although there are innumerable studies on learning strategies and motivation, neither of these approaches provides a complete understanding of the learning process. The concept of self-regulation combines the cognitive, behavioral, and affective aspects of learning, thus offering great potential for

comprehensively exploring the learning process. By drawing on the theoretical construct of self-regulation, many L2 researchers are attempting to unravel the internal complexities of language learners. Next, the limits and problems of language learning strategy research, such as theoretical inconsistencies and conceptual ambiguities, are discussed. Metacognition is introduced, which has been attracting the attention of L2 strategy researchers as an indispensable element of English learning. Third, several theories in motivation research related to self-regulation are reviewed: self-efficacy theory, goal setting theory, goal orientation theory, and self-determination theory. Willingness to communicate (WTC) is also referred to as a motivational construct. Lastly, the theory of self-regulation is explained. Although there are various definitions and standpoints on self-regulation, in this thesis, the definition by Zimmerman is adopted, and the discussions are made based on the standpoint and model by social cognitive researchers represented by Zimmerman, Schunk and Bandura, whose models are more practical, useful and thereby beneficial for practitioners.

In order to fill the research gap explained in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 gives an overview of the entire research design regarding the purposes,

the data elicitation and the data analyses of two studies. Study 1 identifies the general trends of self-regulation among Japanese SHS students in a quantitative way. Study 2 employs a “Questionnaire survey with follow-up interview” and examines learners’ profiles both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Chapter 3 describes the details of Study 1. Study 1 explores the factors involved in the self-regulated language learning and the changes in these factors over time. A 45-item Likert-scale questionnaire covering learners’ cognitive, behavioral, and affective aspects was distributed to 1,076 students from seven prefectural senior high schools in Japan. Exploratory factor analysis confirmed the presence of five factors: *Metacognition*, *Skill-Specific Language Learning Strategies*, *Self-efficacy*, *Self-motivation & WTC*, and *Intrinsic Value*. These factors have been recognized as important components and variables of self-regulation by previous studies. A follow-up one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that patterns of self-regulated language learning differed between high and low achievers. Students’ scores on Metacognition increased significantly in the upper group. Intrinsic Value increased in both the upper and lower groups, although the increase occurred much earlier in the upper group.

Chapter 4 reports on the details of Study 2. Study 2 investigates learners’ profiles. Cluster analysis was used to classify students into four distinct profiles, and learners’ characteristics and their problems in each cluster group were uncovered quantitatively. The results revealed that various internal factors were complexly intertwined and affected

the language learning of Japanese SHS students. A follow-up interview was conducted with six students extracted from each cluster group. The findings of qualitative research elucidated that each student’s background and various external factors had a great influence on their cognitive, behavioral and affective aspects, and it was important for them to create their own virtuous circle of cyclical self-regulatory phases in order to be self-regulators in foreign language learning. In this study goal setting and goal orientation seemed the key to forming the virtuous circle.

Chapter 5, the final chapter, summarizes the research by reviewing each study, and offers the following pedagogical implications:

- 1) Teachers need to focus not only on the instructional aspects of the language but also on the students’ internal factors;
- 2) Teachers ought to intervene with students’ metacognition and cultivate intrinsic value as early as possible;
- 3) Teachers should offer individualized guidance, taking into account the unique and multifaceted internal characteristics of the students;
- 4) Teachers should help learners understand the cyclical self-regulatory phases, create the virtuous circle and avoid falling into the vicious circle; and
- 5) Teachers should improve their lessons so that students will form the virtuous circle of cyclical self-regulatory phases and be self-regulators.

This chapter concludes with a final note emphasizing the important role teachers play in transforming their students into highly self-regulated, autonomous learners.

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