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This article is part of a collection of practitioner research on the theme of “Learner Development Beyond the Classroom” for Issue 6 of the *Learner Development Journal* (LDJ6), edited by Isra Wongsarnpigoon, Dominique Vola Ambinintsoa, Phillip A. Bennett, and André Parsons. Published once a year, each issue of the *Learner Development Journal* follows a Community of Practices approach over a period of approximately 18 months in which contributors work together, under the guidance of the editors, to share, respond to, and develop their research and writing.

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Agency in and Beyond the Classroom: Learners' Selection of Resources for Self-Directed Language Learning

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This paper reports an investigation into how two Japanese EFL learners enacted and enhanced agency through their selections of resources to support self-directed language learning. The research focused on a short course offered at the university where I work, which aimed to serve as scaffolding for learning beyond the classroom. In the course, learners were encouraged to take the initiative for their language study by identifying needs and goals, implementing learning plans, evaluating methods and materials, and reflecting on their learning. The project took the form of a practitioner research case study with two learners, Nanami and Takumi, as they engaged in self-directed learning over a period of 5 weeks. Drawing on multiple sources of information, including direct observation, learner reflections, and stimulated recall interviews, the two cases illuminate the unique and complex ways individual learners enact agency as they select and use resources for self-directed language learning. The data also forced me to question my own assumptions about the learning behaviours and perspectives of learners in my classes and to reconsider what constitutes professional expertise in the context of language learning beyond the classroom.

本論文では、2人の日本人EFL学習者が、自主的な言語学習を支援するためのリソースの選択を通じて、どのように学習者エージェンシーを実現・強化したかを調査した結果を報告する。筆者が勤務する大学で、教室外での学習のための足場かけとなることを目的とした短期コースに焦点を当てた。このコースでは、学習者がニーズと目標を特定し、学習計画を実行し、方法と教材を評価し、自分の学習を振り返ることによって、言語学習のイニシアチブをとるよう奨励された。このプロジェクトは、5週間に渡り、自主学習に取り組んだ2人の学習者、ナナミとタクミに焦点を当てた実践的なケーススタディという形で行われた。この研究は、直接観察、学習者の振り返り、回想法インタビューなど、複数の情報源を用いて行った。この2つのケースでは、個々の学習者が自主的な言語学習のためにリソースを選択・利用する際に、どのように学習者エージェンシーを発揮するのか、独特で複雑な方法を明らかにするものであった。また、このデータは、クラスの学習者の学習行動や視点についての著者自身の仮定に疑問を投げかけ、教室を超えた言語学習という文脈で専門的知識を構成するものを再考させるものであった。

Keywords

self-directed learning, learner agency, learning beyond the classroom, learning resources, case study
自主学習、学習者エージェンシー、教室を超えた学習、学習リソース、ケーススタディ

We live in a world which is positively saturated with potential resources for language learning. However, as any teacher or learning advisor who has attempted to harness that potential for specific learners or groups of learners well knows, the task of finding materials which are accessible, stimulating, and personally meaningful is complex, time-consuming, and often no more than partially successful. How much harder, therefore, must this task be for those who are not language specialists and may be operating at relatively low levels of proficiency in the target language? Yet, if we want to enable our learners to successfully direct their own learning beyond the classroom, there can be few more important skills to develop than those of resource selection and evaluation.

For several years, I have worked with a group of colleagues to develop a subcomponent of our university's EFL proficiency program for non-English majors, known as the self-directed learning unit (SDLU). SDLU was devised as a bridge between classroom-based language instruction and language learning beyond the classroom (LBC), and it aims to promote and nurture learner agency in order to sustain our students' language learning

after they have completed their required EFL classes. One of the biggest challenges for myself, my colleagues, and my learners during the approximately 5 years since SDLU was initially devised and implemented has been that of finding resources that are appropriate for the needs, interests, and abilities of individual learners.

This paper reports a practitioner research (PR) case study which investigated how two of my students, Nanami and Takumi (pseudonyms), enacted agency through their choices and uses of learning resources during SDLU. My practitioner status encompassed my role as curriculum coordinator, responsible for the development and evaluation of SDLU, and classroom teacher, responsible for implementing SDLU with a particular group of learners. As well as generating important insights into how and why learners select particular resources to support their language learning, analysis of the data forced me to question some of my own assumptions and preconceptions about which materials are suitable for particular people and particular purposes.

Learners' Selection of Materials

Increased choice in relation to learning materials has long been associated with higher levels of motivation, enhanced agency, or the fostering of learner autonomy (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Grabe, 2009; Mercado, 2015; Nunan, 1999; Reinders, 2010). Despite this, practical constraints of traditional classrooms often made it challenging for teachers to hand over responsibility for choosing learning resources to their learners. More recently, however, the growth of the internet and widespread availability of electronic devices with which to access it, as well as the move towards individualised learning approaches within mainstream education, have enabled learners to become more involved in decision-making. Meanwhile, LBC, in which language learning is associated with a wide variety of both physical and online environments, has emerged as a subfield of applied linguistics (Benson, 2017; Reinders & Benson, 2017).

In this emerging context, one of the biggest challenges for learners is the selection of appropriate learning resources. In addition to materials specifically designed for language learning such as textbooks, apps, graded readers, and websites, learners also have at their disposal a limitless array of materials, conventionally referred to as *authentic materials*, which are not specifically designed for language learning but can readily be utilised for that purpose (Larimer & Schleicher, 1999). These include music, movies, videos, podcasts, news, and social media and can be freely accessed via personal electronic devices.

The importance of selecting materials which are interesting and personally relevant has been highlighted in LBC literature. For example, Lin and Siyanova-Chanturia (2015) suggest that "when EFL learners select Internet television programmes, their individual interests should have priority over other factors" (p. 154). Meanwhile, Day and Bamford (1998) highlight freedom to choose one's own materials as a core principle of extensive reading, Lynch (2009) claims that learners with free choice over listening materials are more likely to continue learning in their own time, and Chik (2014, 2015) links independent decision-making in the context of gaming with both autonomy and community. However, other criteria such as the lexical complexity or applicability to real-world contexts are also important to consider (Lin & Siyanova-Chanturia, 2015; Webb, 2015), and inappropriate choices of content can have detrimental impacts on learning. For example, Chik (2015) notes that choice of game genre may severely limit opportunities to acquire vocabulary, while Lyon and Barr (2019) highlight how learners struggle to select graded readers that match their learning expectations.

Language Learner Agency

Language learner agency is an important construct in LBC environments, such as SDLU. Defined by Ahearn (2001) as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (p. 112), agency is a multifaceted and complex construct, generally associated with choice and action, but also encompassing non-visible behaviours, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings (Mercer, 2012). Benson (2007) suggests that agency be viewed as “a point of origin for the development of autonomy” (p. 30), while Gao (2013) emphasises the importance of learners’ reflecting on language learning choices and processes in order to enhance their agency and develop autonomy. Therefore, for learning to become truly self-directed rather than, say, mere homework, it is important to provide opportunities for learners to act agentively and engage in reflective thinking.

Research Objectives

SDLU was devised as an open but supported learning environment which would enhance agency by encouraging learners to make and reflect on choices about what to learn, as well as what resources to use and how to use them. However, the extent to which this objective is actually realised with our population of learners is difficult to ascertain without close and careful analysis of particular cases. Therefore, I decided to design a research study specifically to explore how agency was enacted by the students in my classes through their selection and utilisation of resources.

In attempting to link agency to resource selection, it is important to consider both learner reflexivity, that is, learners’ reflective evaluations of the materials, and learner flexibility in response to the materials, that is, how this thinking influences subsequent change in actions and beliefs. Thus, the investigation was less concerned with what resources participants initially selected than with why they chose them, how they utilised them, and whether they embraced, rejected, or appropriated them for their own goals and purposes. I hoped that insights into these processes would enable the curriculum development team to better target SDLU orientation materials and allow teachers to provide more effective support and advice for individuals and groups of students.

Research Design

Practitioner Research (PR) is defined by Borg (2013) as professionals’ systematic investigation of their own practices. PR is ideal for investigating the lived complexities of participants in language learning classrooms (Pinner & Sampson, 2020), and it tends to be pragmatic and goal-orientated (Baumann & Duffy, 2001), potentially leading directly to changes in practices. Consequently, PR is consistent with an ecological approach to classroom research, in which context is viewed as integral to, and inseparable from, the investigation (van Lier, 2002). An important term for conceptualizing the interrelationship between individuals and the environment in ecological research is that of *affordance* (Gibson, 1979). An affordance can be conceptualised as an “action potential” (van Lier, 2004, p. 92), which emerges as we interact with the physical and social world. In the context of SDLU, a specific resource such as a book or app, or a particular way of using a resource, might provide such an action potential. SDLU procedures and materials have been designed to create a learning environment which is rich in affordances. However, not every learner will perceive or act on such affordances, while other unexpected or unplanned affordances will emerge organically for each learner as they interact with the unit. The goal of this study, therefore, was to track how Nanami and Takumi enacted

agency as they identified and manipulated specific resources as affordances for language learning in the context of SDLU.

Research Participants

The research site is the university in Japan where I work. The participants for the study were members of two different second-year classes that I taught during the first semester of the 2021–2022 academic year. Nanami and Takumi approached the task of choosing and using resources for self-directed language learning very differently, and I chose to focus on them partly for this reason. The selection of clearly contrasting cases is a viable sampling strategy in case study research (Duff, 2008), which acknowledges that each case offers unique insights. However, it is important to acknowledge that the approaches adopted by Takumi and Nanami are just two of an almost limitless range of possibilities and they are not necessarily representative of larger samples of learners.

The Self-Directed Learning Unit

SDLU occupies ten 90-minute sessions, approximately one-third of a compulsory blended learning EFL class for non-English majors. Originally conceived as a classroom-based, face-to-face intervention, drawing on the rich technological and physical resources of the building in which the classrooms and self-access learning centre (SALC) are housed, SDLU had to be reconfigured in a blended learning format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the 2021 iteration of the unit, some sessions were conducted face-to-face, in compliance with social distancing measures, while other sessions took place asynchronously online. During the sessions on campus, it was possible for students to borrow materials from the SALC. I conducted a short meeting with each member of the class individually towards the start of the unit to check whether they understood SDLU procedures and to provide feedback and support.

The weekly structure of SDLU is shown in Figure 1. At the heart of the unit are five *planning-action-reflection* cycles, a term taken from Ohashi (2018), who describes a similar self-directed learning program at another Japanese university. For each of these cycles, learners spend 15 minutes setting goals, planning what to study, and searching for suitable materials; 60 minutes implementing their plan; and finally, 15 minutes evaluating the resources used and writing a learning reflection focusing on the effectiveness of their plan. Each learner records details of work done in SDLU in their self-directed learning portfolio alongside their learning plans and reflections. The format of the self-directed learning portfolio is shown in the Appendix.

After the third cycle, learners have an opportunity to exchange information and ideas about their self-directed learning with peers. This includes an activity in which they choose a resource or study method that they found particularly interesting or useful and prepare a short slideshow video to introduce it to their classmates. Subject to student consent, these videos also become key sources of information for future cohorts of learners, since they can be used to orientate incoming students to SDLU. This ensures that suggestions for resources and how to use them come directly from peers, not just from teachers or curriculum designers. In addition to these learner-generated materials, further suggestions for resources are provided via an online space, called *Learn Independently*, in our institutional Moodle. During orientation to SDLU, learners are encouraged to explore these and other resources and to utilise whatever they feel is most appropriate to their learning needs and personal preferences.

Week	Face to Face (90 minutes)	Online (90 minutes)
1		SDLU Orientation 1: Me as a language learner: Previous experiences of language learning; perspectives of English and English study
2	SDLU orientation 2 Explanation of SDLU objectives & procedures; introduction to self-directed learning portfolio; SALC tour & physical resources orientation.	SDLU Orientation 3: Setting Learning Goals Approaches to SDL; setting SMART goals; orientation to <i>Learn Independently</i> site
3	Planning-action-reflection cycle 1 (Teacher supports students as needed to set appropriate goals, identify resources, keep effective notes, & reflect on learning)	Planning-action-reflection cycle 2 (asynchronous online session)
4	Planning-action-reflection cycle 3 (Teacher provides support and feedback on cycle 1 & 2, as needed)	Evaluating Resources and Learning Methods Students review SDLU 1, 2 & 3 and choose a resource or activity to present to classmates as an animated slideshow video
5	Class share activities Share experiences, problems & advice; view classmates' videos and try out some of the suggested resources	Planning-action-reflection cycle 4 (asynchronous online session)
6	Planning-action-reflection cycle 5 (Teacher provides individual support and feedback on cycle 3 and 4, as needed)	

Figure 1. Weekly structure of SDLU

Data Collection

Data collection combined direct observation of class procedures and learner behaviours with analysis of learners' self-directed learning portfolios. In addition, stimulated recall interviews were conducted using the portfolios as the stimulus. Students' self-directed learning portfolios are an integral part of SDLU, since they provide a record of work done and materials used, along with written reflections on each self-directed learning session. Students are encouraged to write their reflection in Japanese, their L1, although they are free to use English, or a combination of both languages, if they prefer. Portfolio entries are submitted electronically via a Microsoft OneNote Class Notebook housed within Microsoft Teams. The OneNote format allowed students to upload recordings, images, and documentation, as well as to insert direct links to online resources. Since access to each student's OneNote notebook is shared with the teacher, I could access and monitor their self-directed learning portfolios at any time. A teacher-researcher journal was used to record my observations, thoughts, and feelings as they arose.

In addition to the data collected naturalistically via observation and learner portfolios, stimulated recall interviews were conducted to shed further light on participants' choices of resources. Interviews were conducted in person at the research site by a Japanese colleague who is a trained and experienced language learning advisor. Learning advising typically takes the form of individual interviews in which advisors employ elicitation techniques adapted from counselling (Mozzon-McPherson, 2007) to encourage learners to engage in reflective dialogue (Kato, 2012; Kato & Mynard, 2016). Therefore, an experienced learning advisor is ideally placed to elicit students' decision-making processes and perspectives in a non-threatening and productive manner. The participants' self-directed learning portfolios served as stimuli for the interviews, with participants asked to elaborate on their reasons for selecting particular resources and their experiences of using them.

Data Analysis

Preliminary analysis of the data was conducted during SDLU even as the data was being collected. I carefully observed SDLU sessions and wrote memos in my teacher-researcher journal after each class, as well as while reviewing the self-directed learning portfolios. This initial analysis of the data allowed me to target specific learners to participate in interviews. Interview recordings were transcribed in Japanese and translated into English, then coded in MAXQDA 2020 (<https://www.maxqda.com>) alongside other data, including participants' learning plans and reflections, records of learning resources used, and written responses to classroom-based tasks associated with self-directed learning. Although the bulk of both the spoken and written data was originally in Japanese, data extracts in the sections below have been rendered in English.

In order to operationalize the construct of learner agency, I drew on indicators of agency proposed by van Lier (2008) and subsequently employed in a study by Vandergriff (2016), such as the ability to initiate learning, formulate personal goals, self-regulate the learning process, and seek help when needed. For example, I considered the extent to which participants' selections of resources were related to their expressed learning goals, the extent to which they sought out novel resources rather than merely selecting from options presented to them, and the extent to which they adjusted their resource selections based on their experiences and reflections.

Case Description

In this section I will describe Nanami and Takumi's cases separately, focusing on how they selected and used resources, and how their self-directed learning behaviours evolved over the five sessions. Then, in the following section, I will discuss new understandings that arose through my consideration of these cases and what implications these have for LBC-supportive teaching practices.

Nanami

Nanami was a student from the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, and, according to the placement test she took when she entered the university, her proficiency level for listening and reading was upper A2 of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001), slightly below average for her department, but above average for the university as a whole. Pharmaceutical science students tend to be highly conscientious, and Nanami was no exception. Although she described herself in the interview as "not very good at English to

begin with," she attended classes regularly, diligently completed assignments, and wrote thoughtful and detailed learning reflections.

For the first of the five self-directed learning cycles, Nanami struggled to formulate learning goals and to decide what materials to use: "At first, I felt it was quite difficult to make a plan and do it by myself because I'm not good at English." Following suggestions given in the *Learn Independently* Moodle site, she was directed to YouTube as a potential resource. However, the idea of watching videos on YouTube on her own computer during class time ran completely counter to her notion of how students behave in language classes. She told the interviewer, "If I had a bad attitude there would be nothing to stop me watching other things if I wanted to. I wondered if I should really be using YouTube in class. I couldn't do it at first." In fact, she spent so much time in this first cycle trying to formulate learning goals and find appropriate materials that there was very little time left for actual study, and it was clear from her self-evaluation and reflection comments that she felt the session had gone badly.

Prior to the second planning-action-reflection cycle, I briefly met with each student in case they needed support. In this meeting with Nanami, I was able to reassure her that it really was acceptable to use YouTube for self-directed learning. She reported in her interview, "When I didn't know what to do, I had a meeting with Jon, and he gave me some advice about using movies, so I started looking for movies that I liked and using them for self-directed learning." Subsequently, Nanami persevered with her focus on audio-visual resources, and her learning objectives for the second and third self-directed learning cycles were carefully formulated according to the guidelines for SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals recommended during SDLU orientation. For example, for Cycle 2 she decided to use *English Listening Lesson Library Online* (ELLLO; <https://www.elllo.org>) to develop her communication skills with the goal of identifying "five phrases that I can use on a daily basis," then for Cycle 3 she decided to use the *Cake* app (<https://mycake.me/>) to "watch Disney movies and learn words and sentences about different emotions." In addition to ELLLO and *Cake*, she experimented with the *Movieclips* YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/movieclips>), as well as *LyricsTraining* (<https://lyricstraining.com/>), a site for developing listening skills through English song lyrics, and she evaluated her progress more positively than she had for Cycle 1. However, in her third reflection, she indicated that she was uncertain of the usefulness of the phrases she had picked up from the source videos, and she again expressed a desire in future cycles to avoid spending too much time searching for suitable resources.

After the third planning-action-reflection cycle, students present resources they have used to support their self-directed learning in the form of slideshow videos. For Nanami, watching her classmates' videos turned out to be a pivotal experience because she was introduced to resources which reconciled her desire to use video materials with her need for a more structured approach to learning than that provided by *Cake*, ELLLO, or *Movieclips*. She found the YouTube channel *Rupa-sensei* (<https://www.youtube.com/c/Rupasensei>) particularly useful and used it extensively in the fourth planning-action-evaluation cycle, commenting in her reflection that this session was by far the most successful yet. However, *Rupa-sensei* turned out to have been a mere stepping stone on her learning journey, because for her fifth and final session she moved away from entertainment media altogether and settled on YouTube content specifically targeting English for pharmaceutical science. What she seemed to have arrived at, via a rather circuitous route, was a resource which in many ways resembled the textbook materials

she had grown up with but was delivered in an audio-visual format. In her final reflection she commented,

In this session, I focused on English words and sentences that I might be able to use when I work as a pharmacist in the future. This time, I think I was able to plan well and think about which resources to use. In addition, I learned things that I will be able to use in the future, so I feel that I had a fulfilling learning experience.

Takumi

Takumi was a student in the Department of Nanoscience. According to placement test scores, the English proficiency of nanoscience students is below average for the university as a whole, but in my experience of working with these students, they do not necessarily lack interest in English or motivation to study it. Although Takumi had been studying English since the fifth grade of elementary school, his test score placed him at only CEFR A1 level, and his grades for previous English courses at the university were relatively low. However, although he occasionally neglected to submit assignments, he attended regularly and participated actively in class activities.

Unlike Nanami, when it came to self-directed learning, Takumi seemed to have a clear idea from the outset what he wanted to do, and he wasted no time in applying himself to it. His portfolio entry for the first planning-action-reflection cycle indicated that he had spent the first part of the session using *Quizlet* (<https://quizlet.com/>) to review vocabulary related to chemistry before shifting his focus to reading. I was impressed, but also rather surprised and concerned, to find that he had chosen an extremely technical article from the journal *Nature* (<https://www.nature.com/>) entitled "Aziridine Synthesis by Coupling Amines and Alkenes via an Electrogenenerated Dication," which he had linked to his portfolio. On reading the article's abstract I found the text fairly impenetrable. It was certainly not the sort of material I would expect or encourage elementary level students to select, and I assumed Takumi would quickly abandon it and look for something more accessible. However, when I met with Takumi briefly at the end of the class, it was clear that he had not given up. In fact, he talked about the article with such enthusiasm that I soon abandoned my own attempt to guide him towards materials that seemed more suited to his level.

During his stimulated recall interview, Takumi acknowledged that this kind of academic text was very difficult for him to comprehend and well beyond the scope of the recommended reading materials or anything his classmates were attempting. However, he persevered with the same article all through the first three planning-action-reflection cycles, demonstrating in the process a range of sophisticated reading strategies, including identifying key vocabulary, summarising the main points in Japanese, and making judicious use of online translation tools to aid text comprehension combined with use of the Internet to supplement his knowledge of the content.

Takumi explained to the interviewer that, prior to SDLU, he had not really considered his goals for studying English and had studied simply to improve his scores in English tests, an endeavour that had been largely unsuccessful. He noted that the texts he had used were decided by the teacher and were often either too difficult for him to access or were too easy to interest him. He reported that, during SDLU, he felt greatly empowered by being able to choose the article for himself, and while engaging with the text, he noticed that he was able to maintain his concentration for far longer than usual. He also described experiencing a strong sense of accomplishment when he was able to

comprehend the text: “What I chose was above my level so I had to work really hard, but it gave me a real feeling of satisfaction when I was able to make sense of it.”

As described above, there is a break after the third planning-action-reflection cycle, in which learners exchange their experiences of SDLU with their classmates. For many students, including Nanami, this prompted a shift in trajectory as they experimented with materials and approaches recommended by peers. In Takumi’s case, however, there was no such shift. In fact, he failed to submit a slideshow video of his own, though he claimed this was simply due to forgetfulness rather than reluctance to engage with the task. In the fourth self-directed learning cycle he did not try out any of his peers’ suggested resources or approaches, but instead selected a second chemistry article from *Nature*. Although the linguistic content of this paper was just as challenging as the previous one, he reported in his final reflection that he had become less reliant on translation tools and Internet searches to support his reading. As a result, he was able to make sense of the text within the two planning-action-reflection cycles, further enhancing his feeling of accomplishment.

Discussion

These cases richly illustrate ways in which two learners enact their agency through their selection of learning materials for self-directed learning. The first thing to note is how assiduously both Nanami and Takumi applied themselves to the task of finding suitable resources for their self-directed learning. As their teacher, I was rather humbled by this since, on reflection, I believe I had tended to underestimate how seriously students in my class engaged with SDLU. Neither Nanami nor Takumi settled for the recommendations listed in the SDLU orientation materials; instead, they proactively sought out resources that were personally meaningful and related to their expressed learning goals.

For Nanami, this process was tentative and exploratory as she tried out a wide variety of different materials and gradually refined her selections. At first, lacking self-confidence in her English abilities and uncertain about the expectations and procedures associated with SDLU, Nanami seemed largely unable to enact agency. Although she later came to value the planning-action-reflection process and apply it to other areas of her study, she was initially rather paralysed by this entirely novel approach. She seemed to agonise over decisions relating to her learning and was tentative in her selections of materials, experimenting with various resources without appearing to settle on any of them. She was immediately drawn to music and movies, but she struggled to find resources that suited her learning style or met her learning goals. Her expectations about what learning entails, perhaps influenced by her previous experience of teacher-directed learning, were in conflict with her desire to use audio-visual materials to address the learning goals she had formulated. Moreover, as someone who claimed to particularly enjoy studying with friends, her problems were compounded by limited access to peer support because of social distancing constraints. Consequently, she was initially dependent on resources suggested by me or the SDLU support materials, even though she did not feel they were quite right for her. It was only after she had been introduced to the resources that her peers were using that she was able to enact and enhance her agency.

One of these resources, *Rupa-sensei*, appeared to serve as a bridge between her desire for video-based input and her need for a structured approach to learning. *Rupa-sensei* is a YouTube channel targeting Japanese learners of English with over 500,000 subscribers. Rupa himself is an Australian teacher based in Japan with an enthusiastic style of

presentation, and his videos present a wide range of content, including tips for studying English, clips from movies with useful words and phrases highlighted, and dialogues of conversations with people Rupa meets on the street. It is not difficult to infer why Nanami might have been drawn to this material. The video content and style of presentation are engaging, and Japanese support is provided throughout in the form of subtitles. Also, in his role as "*sensei*" [teacher], Rupa is very much directing the learning by focusing on key words and phrases and highlighting pronunciation and other linguistic features.

One might argue that rather than directing her own learning, Nanami had merely replaced one teacher with another, but even if so, at least it was a teacher of her choosing rather than one chosen by the institution where she studies. In any case, Nanami did not settle on this resource for long but further enacted her agency by seeking out more personally meaningful YouTube content with a specific focus on English for pharmacists. Again, the videos she chose were highly scaffolded and specifically aimed at Japanese learners, and as her teacher, I could not help wondering whether this approach was leading her towards or away from independent learning. Nonetheless, she seemed finally to have achieved success in aligning goals, resources, and learning behaviours.

Like Nanami, Takumi was motivated by a desire to improve his competence in using English related to his academic field. At the start of SDLU, he formulated a long-term goal to improve his ability to read, and ultimately to write, academic texts related to chemistry. Although operating at a lower level of proficiency than Nanami, he was clearly willing and able to enact agency as a language learner. He required no reassurance from me or from his classmates about the suitability of his selected materials; on the contrary, he chose them knowing that such reassurance was unlikely. However, as he explained in his interview, he invested considerable time and attention to his search for suitable articles using keywords and then skimming titles and abstracts to find familiar and interesting topics.

Having settled on a specific resource genre, Takumi never wavered in his approach. The fact that he did not seriously consider alternative learning approaches made him seem strong-willed, if not rather stubborn, but his determination, enjoyment, and tremendous sense of achievement clearly justified the approach he had taken. It was almost as if he had long been primed for such a chance to enact his agency and had enthusiastically grasped the opportunity. Moreover, while Takumi was unequivocal in his approach to resource selection and did not take up any of his classmates' suggestions, he was highly reflective about his learning. For example, he soon noticed neither knowledge of chemistry, nor English ability alone were sufficient for decoding the texts he had chosen: "I think it's important to know the English terminology first, but if you don't study chemistry properly, you won't be able to understand what's going on when you read." Consequently, investment in both these areas simultaneously was key to understanding the articles. He also said that following the first SDL cycle, he had realised that studying chemistry-related vocabulary in isolation was time-consuming and of limited value since he rarely encountered the words he had studied:

In SDL 1, I started out by studying vocabulary first, but this was not efficient because the vocabulary study took so long that I had little time left over for reading, and few of the words I had studied appeared in the text. So next time, I decided to start with the reading and only look up the vocabulary that I needed to understand the text.

With this shift in approach, Takumi took control of his learning by deciding for himself which words were important rather than deferring to the predetermined selections presented in the course materials.

Implications and Realisations

This study has shown how Nanami and Takumi enacted agency through their selection and use of learning resources for their self-directed language learning in the context of SDLU. Both were able to identify affordances for learning in the SDLU environment and used them to enact agency. If, as Benson (2007) and Gao (2013) argue, agency is a precondition of learner autonomy, it seems that both Nanami and Takumi are well primed to become autonomous language learners. This is a positive finding for colleagues responsible for developing and implementing SDLU since it aligns closely with the unit objectives.

However, a clear implication from Nanami's case is that, for many learners, the selection of resources for self-directed language learning is tremendously complex and challenging, even within a supported learning environment such as SDLU. Teachers, learning advisors, and course designers must tread a fine line between, on the one hand, guiding learners towards particular resources and approaches, and on the other hand, ensuring they do not exacerbate existing learning dependencies, or create new ones. To make matters even more challenging, the right balance is different for each learner—while Nanami needed a high degree of support and reassurance, Takumi needed very little.

For many learners, the most productive means of providing such support may be through other learners rather than, or at least in addition to, teachers. For Nanami, watching her classmates' slideshow videos was integral to her own subsequent success, even though many of the resources they highlighted, such as *Rupa-sensei*, were already listed in the *Learn Independently* Moodle site. Following the coronavirus pandemic, SDLU became a rather individual experience mediated primarily by computer screens rather than by other people and physical objects. However, especially under these circumstances, opportunities to interact with real or imagined communities of learners seem extremely important. Such opportunities can be realised in various ways including presenting orientation materials and procedures in the voices of near-peer students, encouraging learners to exchange learning resources or strategies, providing opportunities for learners to troubleshoot problems, and having learners consolidate their experiences of self-directed learning by producing information to support future cohorts of learners in the form of videos, webpages, or handouts.

Finally, the data suggests that an intervention such as SDLU can be highly facilitative of language learner agency in Japanese EFL environments, even for low-level and non-English-major learners. This has important implications for traditional teacher-learner roles and suggests that we may need to reconsider what it is that constitutes teacher expertise. In fact, analysis of the data made me realise that I was guilty of holding a number of preconceptions about my learners that did not stand up to scrutiny. For example, the quality and depth of reflections written by students such as Nanami and Takumi, as well as the comments they made during the interviews, made me realise I had been guilty of underestimating our learners' engagement and investment in their self-directed language learning. Furthermore, Takumi's case forced me to question my beliefs about which texts are appropriate for which learners. It could be argued that Takumi was successful in his self-directed learning in spite of, rather than because of, his teacher's

advice and expectations about text selection. While I had assumed that dense texts with complex grammar and vocabulary would be poorly understood and demotivating, Takumi's case shows that text complexity need not be a barrier to comprehension, particularly given the scaffolding that is now readily available in the form of web-based tools. Provided they are personally meaningful, engaging with such texts can enhance rather than stifle learner agency.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of the study is that it tracks Nanami and Takumi over a relatively short period of just a few weeks and only five planning-action-reflection cycles. The analysis suggests that both of them are well primed to become autonomous language learners, but from the point of view of the LBC research community, it is what happens to Nanami and Takumi after SDLU that is likely to be of particular interest. Investigation of whether, and how, this process occurs would warrant a larger-scale, longitudinal study. Moreover, a further limitation of the study is that it describes the cases of only two learners, and the differences between them clearly highlight the fact that each learner's experience is unique. The study would therefore be considerably enriched by including more cases. In fact, I am currently engaged in a larger-scale doctoral research project which aims to address these limitations by focusing on a larger number of cases over a longer period of time.

Another potential avenue for research would be an investigation of how specific audio-visual resources function as affordances for learning beyond the classroom. YouTube is extremely popular with Japanese students and young people, and the success of channels such as *Rupa-sensei* suggests that it has become a productive resource for language learning beyond the classroom, as well as for entertainment. Studies investigating how interaction with specific YouTubers or YouTube channels serves to enhance or constrain language learner agency may contribute significantly to our wider understanding of LBC.

Finally, the current study has highlighted the importance of social interaction, even in the context of socially distanced or computer-mediated classes. Therefore, research targeting how learner agency is enhanced through interactions with a community of (actual or imagined) peers is another promising avenue for future investigation.

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Appendix

SDLU Portfolio Entry (Submitted via Microsoft Teams After Each of the Five Planning-Action-Reflection Cycles)

Learning Plan *Fill in this section before you start work* 開始前、このセクション（黄色）に記入。

1. SET GOALS

A) What is your long-term English goal for this year? 英語の目標で、今年度の自分の達成したいゴールは何ですか？

B) What are your learning goals for this SDL session? 今日のSDLの自分のゴールは？

1.	<input type="text"/>
2.	<input type="text"/>

Make sure your goals are SMART! 目標はSMARTであることを確認しましょう!

S-Specific 明確なゴールを！
M-Measurable 測定できる、進捗の確認できるゴールを！
A-Actionable 実行可能なゴールを！
R-Relevant 自分に適切なゴールを！
T-Time-related 期限がある、ゴールまで時間確保を考慮！

2. PLAN

What activities will you do? どんな学習活動をするか？

How long will you spend on each activity? それぞれにどれくらいの時間をかけますか？

What resources will you need? どのような学習リソースが必要ですか？

Activity 学習活動	Time	Resource 利用するリソース
1.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
2.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
3.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

3. DO *Fill in this section as you work*

学習活動中にノートとして活用し、ここに記入しましょう。学習した英単語や表現、コメントやリンクなど学んでいる内容を書きましょう。

4. REFLECT

A) Reflection: 振り返り：学習を終了後に記入しましょう。

今日の自分の学習は上手くいきましたか？なぜそう思うか/またはそう思わないか？

日本語で記入する場合は100字、英語で記入する場合は40ワードは記入しましょう。

B) Self-evaluation 自己評価 (Put X in the box)				
1. <i>I can make a plan for language learning.</i> 自分で語学学習の計画を立てることが出来る。				
2. <i>I can work without being told what to do.</i> 指示されるのではなく、自ら取り組むことが出来る。				
3. <i>I can use my time well.</i> 自分の時間を上手に使うことが出来る。				
4. <i>I can find suitable resources.</i> 自分に合った学習リソースを探すことが出来る。				
5. <i>I can reflect on my learning.</i> 自分の学習を振り返ることが出来る。				
6. <i>I can enjoy learning.</i> 学習を楽しむことが出来る。				