Learner Development Beyond the Classroom

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Introduction to *Learner Development Journal 6*: How We View Learner Development Beyond the Classroom

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The editorial team for the *Learner Development Journal* Issue 6 (LDJ) have all known each other well for some time, and when we came together for this issue, we were aware that we shared a devotion to supporting the development of our learners in their learning beyond the classroom (LBC). Isra, Phillip, and Vola work together as learning advisors in the Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) at our university, where we aim to foster our learners' autonomous learning, which usually involves making the most of the entire worlds they live in. We had also had conversations with André about self-access, advising, and autonomy at various conferences over the past several years, and we had all completed the learner advising courses offered by the Research Institute for Learner Autonomy Education. Although we have different experiences and working contexts, our shared interests and background fueled our excitement to collaborate on this theme. Our unique experiences with LBC led to productive discussions in which we were able to co-develop the theme and this issue.

We knew that we were all familiar with the topic of learner autonomy and devoted to fostering it in learners. Still, we realized that despite the growing attention to learner autonomy in the field, much of the literature and presentations we saw locally tended to focus on how teachers could promote it within their classrooms. In our work as teachers and advisors, and additionally from our own life experiences, we knew how much of an individual's development as autonomous, agentive, fulfilled learners was engendered through actions taken outside of class, or outside of formal institutions. On the other hand, as Benson (2011) puts it, "As classroom teachers, we become accustomed to the idea that classrooms are the 'natural' place for learning to take place. Out-of-class learning processes are also often 'invisible' to classroom teachers" (p. 8); this passage resonated deeply with us. We felt that many educators were missing out on opportunities to appreciate their learners' development outside of the limited periods during which they were in direct contact. It was therefore our hope that the theme of Learner Development

Beyond the Classroom would allow contributors to undertake such explorations and readers to reflect on their own learners and contexts.

In formulating our theme, Phil Benson and Hayo Reinders's work (e.g., Benson & Reinders, 2011; Reinders & Benson, 2017) helped us to frame the focus of the contributions we hoped to encourage in this issue. They provide a framework (Benson, 2011) for LBC containing four dimensions: *location* (i.e., where and when learning takes place), *formality* (i.e., the connection between the learning activities and formal organized courses or qualifications), *pedagogy* (i.e., the amount of instruction involved), and *locus of control* (i.e., who makes decisions regarding learning). This framework was key in our clarification of the theme. Particularly, we appreciated the idea that location was not the only factor in determining LBC (it is, after all, learning *beyond* the classroom and not *outside* the classroom). We also realized that LBC did not have to be totally informal and unguided; Benson's (2011) clarification that such learning does not preclude the presence of instruction resonated with us. Furthermore, Reinders and Benson (2017) emphasize that "LBC does not exclude the classroom but rather CONNECTS WITH it [emphasis in the original]" (p. 563). Indeed, they have identified a need for explorations of how teaching and the classroom environment can link to LBC (Benson, 2011; Reinders & Benson, 2017).

For *LDJ 6*, we have hoped that by providing a venue for authors to explore how LBC connects to their own contexts, whether as teachers, other practitioners, learners, or researchers, they might discover new insights into how it also connects with learner development. These discoveries might in turn lead to future innovations in their (or readers') support of learners. We also felt this dovetailed nicely with the *Learner Development Journal*'s mission of connecting research and practice.

Our Connections to LBC

Having introduced our conception of the issue's theme as a group, in keeping with our enthusiasm for narrative exploration and *LDJ*'s encouragement of expressing personal voices, we will share each editor's personal connections to LBC.

Isra

While planning and discussing this issue over the last two years, I have realized the degree to which, like my colleagues, LBC has been a consistent thread throughout my personal and professional life. Although I was always fairly successful in language classrooms, when I got to university, I found it hard to connect my (elective) Japanese classes with my other studies and my life; eventually, I stopped studying Japanese in order to focus on my major. A few years after graduating, I started learning Japanese again informally by focusing on my personal interests, using music, videos, and the internet; this reignited my enjoyment of the language. After moving to Japan, knowing I had this capacity in me helped me to continue my own self-directed learning of the language.

While teaching in Japanese public schools, I found that the classroom environment was insufficient in providing access to authentic communicative language or opportunities for students to establish personal connections with English. My students who thrived in their English learning were usually those who sought exposure to language beyond the confines of the classroom, in their own worlds. When I became a language learning advisor, I was working with learners in the inherently "beyond-the-classroom" environment of the SALC, and I realized how fulfilling it was to help learners discover ways to learn successfully and take ownership of language in their own lives. Even though they had chosen to study

languages at a university specializing in international studies, I found that many of these students nevertheless faced obstacles imposed by the requirements of formal study or mandatory standardized exams; still others held ingrained beliefs that their teachers knew best and, even when they were not very engaged in the content of their classroom learning, could find no other alternatives. Through both reflection and learning from the literature, it became clear that flourishing as a language learner and user hinged on more than just possessing innate language ability or motivation. Both as a teacher and as an advisor, I found that the learners who achieved the most fulfillment, and often success, in their learning tended to be those who actively learned beyond the classroom, explored their language environments, and took advantage of the affordances available in them. Given my experiences as a learner and educator, I hoped that by encouraging exploration of LBC in this issue, I could help both contributors and readers to reach some of the same realizations.

Vola

My interest in LBC mainly stems from my own language learning experience. I have learned three languages in addition to the two official languages I grew up with in Madagascar. Of the three languages, I love English the most. I loved it so much that I decided to become a teacher of English when I was about 19 years old, even though the profession of teaching itself was not appealing to me. My goal was to use English as much as possible, and teaching it was the best way I could imagine to do that, as I lived in a country where English was barely used. In order to become a teacher, I knew I needed to work a lot on my English. I was aware that what I learned from secondary school was not enough to pass the competitive exam to enter the Teacher Training College at the University of Antananarivo, as only 20 first-year students were accepted for each department every year. Therefore, I took courses at two different English language centers for about 2 years in total. The courses were helpful in terms of the development of my language skills. However, I felt that the courses were not sufficient for me to attain some of my specific goals, such as being able to understand the BBC News on TV and on the radio (the only English listening resources I had outside of class at that time), to read English magazines and newspapers without constantly consulting a dictionary, and to interact with foreigners. Thus, I decided to take charge of my own LBC.

My English LBC was key to my success in entering the Department of English of the Teacher Training College, which was the gateway to a career and an adventurous life that I had never thought I would have. To ensure that I would succeed, I set a detailed weekly schedule that I had to follow at all costs. This schedule included activities and resources to use at the language center library and at home, the times allocated to each activity, and the target language skills involved in each activity. Without the dedication I put into LBC, I would not have become a teacher of English in the first place and would not have received scholarships enabling me to further my education abroad. That is why I strongly believe in the importance of LBC and of taking charge of one's own learning, which is referred to as "learner autonomy" (Benson, 2011). In my learning experience, it was only beyond the classroom that I felt autonomous, as I was in total control of my learning. Therefore, for me, LBC and learner autonomy are very much interrelated.

After receiving my master's degree in the US, I returned to Madagascar and taught English in the center where I used to study. After teaching for 5 years, I decided to learn more about the promotion of learner autonomy, because I realized that many of my

students were not autonomous enough in their English learning. In other words, they would attend classes and do the assignments I gave them, but they would not necessarily do any extra activities to improve their English. That was how the idea of doing a PhD focused on learner autonomy came to me. Since then, I have been researching learner autonomy and promoting it to my students through teaching and advising.

For me, then, the topic of LBC is deeply close to my heart due to my personal experience. I feel fortunate to have the opportunity not only to be part of the editorial team of this issue focusing on LBC, but also to co-author one of the articles with two of my former students, who have the same background as I do, and who share their English LBC journeys.

Phill

LBC may elicit a spectrum of ideas varying from person to person. This subjective view can be explained through the concept of *Umwelt*, which is simply explained as experiencing our subjective universe while sharing the same environment (Chang, 2009). As in the Japanese proverb 十人十色 [*jūnin toiro*; 10 people, 10 colors], each individual's own idea of LBC is influenced by their learning histories, values, customs, beliefs, and an infinite number of other variables.

LBC holds a particular place in my learning history, as it is how I would summarize, for better or worse, the majority of my lifelong learning experience. This is due to my learning preferences coupled with institutional and structural barriers that I have faced in my learning journey. I would like to share two very general but personal aspects of my LBC experience which are in some capacity touched on in this issue. First, in relation to learning preferences, LBC is something that I have always valued as a learner because it led to opportunities for hands-on learning in real-life situations. It's one thing to do math problems in class or homework assignments; however, applying a subject of study (math, language, chemistry, etc.) takes on a new life when using it to solve real-world problems. Related to this concept, in junior high school, I would help my father do tile work in people's kitchens and bathrooms. Although the math was basic, it gave me an appreciation for how what I was learning in class could be utilized outside of it. In other words, LBC helped me understand the value of what was being taught in the classroom. Another insight is that LBC can provide learners with greater opportunities for self-expression (e.g., language use, behavior that is taboo in classroom settings, and more freedom for exploration); I learned how to play instruments and genres of music that were not taught in school by starting bands with friends, playing live shows, and recording albums. This experience gave me the opportunity not only to learn electric bass and guitar, but to also learn an array of skills ranging from songwriting and music production to project management and sales.

The second aspect of LBC that connects to my learning history is that it helped mitigate the effect of barriers that impeded access to in-classroom learning opportunities. These barriers included environmental factors closely tied to social class and more intangible concepts of cultural capital (Block, 2014; Bourdieu, 1986), such as identity, beliefs, behaviors, etc. With regards to social class, the barriers I experienced were related to the cost of access to educational opportunities and lesser public educational resources relative to the surrounding communities. When discussing issues of cultural capital, access was also levied institutionally and structurally due to my being part of a racial and ethnic minority in the United States (e.g., prejudice based on my accent, dialect, hair style, dress,

and skin color). Although I was never legally barred from educational resources, through racial profiling, dress codes, and otherizing, learning environments such as libraries, student groups, and classroom discussions were at times quite unwelcoming. However, through accessing websites, belonging to local music scenes, and learning various skills at part-time jobs, I was able to gain the skills and knowledge which were paramount in gaining access to and satisfying standardized levels of academic achievement and certifications.

Lastly, one major factor of LBC which I would like to add is the importance of the role teachers, mentors, and peers all play in LBC, because without the key component of community, learning, in my opinion, is impossible. Although not a panacea, LBC opportunities generally allow less expensive options for access to education (e.g., massive open online courses, or MOOCs) or at the very least opportunities to continue learning at no additional cost. Further, as practitioners, it is crucial that we support and promote students in LBC because it allows them to learn in spaces that they find safe, welcoming, and familiar and can mitigate the effects oflearning environments that result in alienation. These are just some of the many ways LBC can be operationalized as you will see in this issue.

André

As both a language learner and a language teacher, I have always believed in the importance of LBC. When I first began working at a conversation school here in Japan, I was asked not only to teach English but French as well. Thanks to this opportunity, I began reviewing a language I had not studied for a couple of years as my focus had turned to Japanese. Going back to French and basically relearning it to teach my students gave me the opportunity not only to build my skills once again using a wide range of materials, but it also allowed me the chance to interact with French speakers online. Later, in order to develop my language skills further, I decided to take part in a short-term study abroad program in the south of France. During my time as a conversation school teacher, I also decided to take the Japanese Language Proficiency Test and would spend hours every day studying and reviewing kanji, grammar, and vocabulary and practicing reading and listening using a wide range of resources. Based on my own learning experiences with both languages, I started encouraging all my students to study or review on their own using as many resources as they could find, knowing firsthand that just practicing once a week would not lead to fluency. Indeed, it was during this time that I was able to strengthen both languages, which was the result of much learning beyond the classroom.

Upon becoming a lecturer, I was able to learn even more advanced Japanese through my daily interactions with faculty and office staff and the various paperwork I had to fill out. I still remember having to learn words such as 購入する [*kōnyū suru*; purchase] instead of 買う [*kau*; buy], as that was the vocabulary commonly used in the office. It was also quite motivating when some of the faculty who had known me before heard me speak Japanese a few years later and told me they were impressed at how much I had improved.

It was also at this time that I opened our university's first self-access language learning center to provide students with a space and a variety of resources and services to foster more autonomous learning. Over the last couple of years, however, I have started to look beyond the physical space and have embraced online learning with its wealth of resources and possibilities. By doing so, I believe I can help remove the barriers that exist in physical spaces and allow students more freedom to take control over their learning beyond the classroom.

It is with this mindset and experience in both my own learning and now supporting my students' learning beyond such physical spaces that led me to participate in this project. By reading and commenting on the various papers in this issue, I have gained new insights into this topic as well as learned new ways of possibly helping my students become better learners beyond such physical spaces.

In our narratives above, we, the four editors, have explained why LBC is important to us and why we promote it as teachers and advisors. Although our personal and learning experiences are quite different in terms of interests and contexts, we have all used LBC to attain our individual goals. André, Isra, and Vola's LBC experiences were especially related to language learning involving personal interests and motivation. On the other hand, Phill's experience shows that LBC is not just limited to language learning but is also necessary for other areas of life. Together, we feel that our experiences as well as our writers' have helped to develop this issue into a cohesive unit which readers will be able to relate to.

Development of This Issue

The writing process for the *Learner Development Journal* differs somewhat from other academic publications; this finished product represents the culmination of a 2-year process. The issue began not with a call for papers, but for *proposals* for submissions. Writers initially shared brief proposals for an inquiry they planned to undertake or a topic they wished to explore more. This allowed for a diverse group of contributions; although some of our authors had their research clearly planned out and were already underway, others were still working through their ideas. We sought proposals for longer "explorations" as well as for "practice-based reviews." The latter differed from traditional academic book reviews in that we were hoping for authors not only to review a book (or a portion of one), but to include reflections on their own practices (as educators, researchers, or even as learners themselves) and use those reflections as a lens through which to view the piece in question.

We on the editorial team selected a group of contributors we were excited to work with and grouped them into "response communities," or small groups within which the authors could provide feedback to, and share reflections with each other as their papers developed. Members of the editorial team also joined each community to scaffold discussions and provide support from a slightly more objective standpoint for fostering the development of the papers. These communities are a unique feature of *LDJ*. In line with constructivist theories of learning, we felt through interacting with others, sharing different perspectives, and coming to understand those perspectives, writers might re-shape their existing understandings and create new meanings together (see Fosnot & Perry, 2005). That this type of shared learning conforms favorably with constructivist and sociocultural theoretical perspectives also seemed appropriate for the four of us as editors, as both theoretical viewpoints play important underlying roles in the field of language advising (Mynard, 2012), which is a major part of our professional practices. Furthermore, in Isra's case, the feedback and interaction with members of his group in the previous issue of this journal (*LDJ5*) had been valuable in crafting his paper (Wongsarnpigoon & Imamura, 2021).

After the formation of the communities, the authors started commenting on each other's proposals using Google Docs and met online in Zoom to share and discuss their upcoming work with each other in March and April 2021. They then began their writing

process, sharing their first partial piece of writing within their communities in May 2021, again commenting on each other's work in Google Docs and meeting online over the following month. These meetings and comments ideally gave the authors momentum to continue their writing during the summer vacation period, after which they submitted a full (or nearly full) working draft in September 2021.

Contributors' working drafts were each reviewed by two members of the *LDJ* Review Network. Authors were asked to select either open (non-anonymous) or double-blind review. In either case, we attempted to match each author with reviewers who would be well suited to provide feedback on their paper due to their areas of expertise or previous research. In the autumn of 2021, the reviewers provided supportive feedback on each paper, in line with the journal's and the Learner Development SIG's goal of helping to *develop* the writers and their writing. Similar to the dialogic process of building new understandings in the response communities, a key part of this review process was our desire to facilitate a constructive dialogue, and as such, we encouraged the authors to respond to the reviewers' comments and pose questions of their own.

Using the reviewers' feedback, the authors submitted revised full drafts in February 2022. Although we on the editorial team had posed questions and given encouraging comments throughout the process, at this point we stepped in and positioned ourselves in a more traditional editorial stance. Throughout the spring of 2022, we provided editorial direction and feedback on all papers; the *LDJ* Steering Group also gave their own feedback. We had been present throughout the development of the papers from the start, and so receiving this feedback from the members of the Steering Group, who were reading the papers with fresh eyes, was highly valuable. After spending the summer of 2022 responding to the feedback in revising and writing, the authors submitted their final drafts in September 2022. Two subsequent rounds of proofreading and final revisions resulted in the completed finished works you see here.

Throughout this process, as editors, our focus has been on supporting our contributors in developing not only their pieces but also their own voices as authors of their inquiries into learning beyond the classroom. The contributors to this issue have varying degrees of experience in writing, but it is fair to say that all of the pieces have changed and evolved during this publication process. As editors, seeing this growth has been one of the most satisfying parts of working on this issue. It is also a huge credit to our writers that they have taken all feedback in the positive spirit of the journal and used it to their benefit.

In This Issue

Reinders and Benson (2017) suggest a research agenda for LBC with several strands. These include:

1. explorations of settings for LBC (e.g., how it connects with the classroom, or how learners may tie opportunities for LBC in their own environments with the classroom),
2. the processes involved (e.g., the experience of LBC or the strategies or technology involved), and
3. teachers' support for LBC (e.g., teachers' beliefs or how teachers may prepare learners for LBC)

We believe that the seven papers assembled in this issue—six longer explorations of LBC and one practice-based review—each apply to one or more of these strands in various ways.

Ann Flanagan, "Building a Critical Reflective Practice With High School Language Learners"

In our first paper, Ann Flanagan explores her efforts to promote critical reflection in high school students. She provided support for her learners' goal setting, and they kept reflective journals on their learning activities beyond the classroom, as well as on their progress towards their goals. Ann examines how two particular students' reflections helped them to more closely examine their own study strategies, habits, and resources, as well as how she was able to foster their reflective practice. She also muses upon the nature of the feedback she can provide in order to improve students' reflection.

Gretchen Clark, "Extensive Listening in the Time of COVID-19: Supporting Students so They Can Become Self-Reflective, Independent Learners"

In her paper, Gretchen Clark describes how extensive listening combined with digital journal writing helped a group of university students develop their metacognitive skills and increase their opportunities for listening practice beyond the classroom. Although the practices she describes were specially designed due to the pandemic when face-to-face classes were not being conducted, they can be equally helpful even after the COVID-19 pandemic, as they enable students to gradually develop their autonomy.

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

In the third paper, Jon Rowberry describes how two learners in a self-directed learning course called SDLU take charge of their learning by making use of the affordances for learning in SDLU. Through the two case studies, Jon shows the differences between the ways the two learners selected their resources and the amount of support they needed from others. Jon ends his paper by considering some challenges teachers and learning advisors may have when facilitating self-directed learning courses, and sharing some unexpected realizations about the two learners' agency.

Chika Hayashi, "A Case Study of Collaborative Online International Learning Between Finnish and Japanese University Students: Learning Beyond the Classroom"

In her paper, Chika investigates the potential for collaboration through an out-of-class online activity involving students in Finland and Japan participating in a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project. Using a case-study approach that included analysis of one of her Japanese students' exchanges with a Finnish student over four months, and interviews with her student at the end of the project, Chika shows that while the student was able to work together with the Finnish student, her language learning anxiety, especially with regards to accuracy, prevented her from fully engaging in the project. Nevertheless, the project did help the student better understand her needs and aided her motivation. Chika concludes by suggesting some implications for teachers interested in setting up such projects.

Aya Hayasaki, "Beyond the Classroom, Beyond the Track: The Role of English in the Transformation of Career Perspectives in Three Females in Rural Japan"

In this paper, Aya Hayasaki addresses topics which deserve serious consideration but are sometimes overlooked in language education, especially in Japan: the barriers imposed on academic and career prospects by inequalities tied to gender, socioeconomic, and regional differences. Aya writes about how project-based language learning beyond the classroom helped three female high school graduates from rural Kagoshima, Japan to surmount such constraints. Drawing on Trajectory Equifinality Modeling, Aya discusses how they were affected by social and educational inequalities, as well as the specific factors brought about through LBC that helped them to discover their own paths. She also compares the three women's circumstances with her own background.

Dominique Vola Ambinintsoa, *Haingo Fanaperana Rajaonaritiana*, and *Volatiana Olivia Rasoanindrina*, "Learning Beyond the Classroom in an EFL Malagasy Setting: Two Student Teachers' Experiences"

In their paper, Vola, Fanaperana, and Olivia discuss the importance of learning beyond the classroom in Madagascar, a context that so far has been little researched. Through the use of language learning histories (LLHs), they show how one's interests, not just in the language itself but also in the culture of the places where it is spoken, can help a learner strengthen and maintain their motivation to continue studying a foreign language. Based on their findings, they argue that teachers should consider ways to incorporate such interests and strategies used outside the classroom into the classroom, and that teacher education should include more reflection on student teachers' LLHs as this can benefit future teachers' practices.

Mizuka Tsukamoto, "Some Thoughts on Implementing a New Teaching Approach: A Review of Clarke's 'Exploring Autonomous Learning . . .'"

In the final piece, Mizuka Tsukamoto provides a chapter review that explores a practitioner's approach to teaching a university English class. Mizuka details her experience implementing similar concepts to those in Clarke's chapter with the aim of creating a student-centered classroom. In reviewing Clarke's account of her practice and research, Mizuka reflects on some of the parallels and differences with her own teaching. Through this reflective process, Mizuka was able to answer some of her questions as well as uncover new ones related to creating a classroom that is student centered and facilitates learner autonomy.

Commentary

Phil Benson and *Mayumi Kashiwa*, "Space Matters: Language Learning Environments Beyond the Classroom in the Post-COVID World"

In their dialogic commentary on this issue, Phil Benson and Mayumi Kashiwa discuss LBC with regard to spaces in the post-COVID world. They explore the conceptualization of space (see Benson, 2021), learner perceptions of learning environments, and the complexity of digital spaces in relation to learning environments both in and beyond the classroom. Drawing out fascinating connections and questions to do with learner

development, Phil and Mayumi point readers towards intriguing pathways for future research on learning beyond the classroom.

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The editors would like to thank everyone involved in the publication of this journal. We would first like to thank the reviewers for taking the time not only to check the papers but also offer valuable comments to the writers. We would also like to thank Stuart Warrington for his contribution in the initial stages of this journal, as well as Kayoko Horai for helping to proofread and edit the Japanese abstracts, and Ivan Lombardi for the layout and design. Next, we would like to express our gratitude to both Mayumi Kashiwa and Phil Benson for their insightful commentary on the issue. Finally, we would like to give a special thanks to all the contributors for sharing their various experiences with language learning beyond the classroom. We hope the research herein will offer new insights and open new venues for research in this ever-expanding and important field.

— *Isra Wongsarnpigoon*, *Dominique Vola Ambinintsoa*, *Phillip A. Bennett*, and *André Parsons*
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Building a Critical Reflective Practice With High School Language Learners

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It is rare for language learners, especially young learners, to have the awareness to reflect on their language learning process. This study examines the use of critical reflective writing journals in high school. It follows the journey of two female high school students through three stages of critical reflection: reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action. Students were encouraged to practice consistent reflection outside the classroom, writing twice or three times a week. This case study is aimed at exploring critical reflection, learning beyond the classroom, and motivation. The students applied critical thinking skills to analyze and modify their own learning. Journaling facilitated a greater sense of self-awareness in students, which enabled them to identify their own strengths and improve areas of weakness in language learning. In their view, journals were a valuable resource for studying English. Results support the adoption of critical reflection practices encouraging students to become more involved in their language learning. In becoming more responsible for their learning, students begin to make conscious choices about what they are interested in exploring further while monitoring and evaluating their progress.

言語学習者、特に若い学習者にとって、自分の言語学習過程を振り返る意識を持つことは稀である。本研究は、高等学校における批判的省察文ジャーナルの使用について検討する。4人の女子高校生が、行動に関する考察、行動のための考察、行動中の考察という3つの段階を経て、批判的な考察を行う過程を追ったものである。生徒たちは、教室外で、週に2、3回書くという一貫したリフレクションスタイルを実践するよう促された。この研究の目的は、批判的省察、教室を超えた学習、モチベーシを探ることである。生徒たちは、批判的思考スキルを応用して、自分たちの学習を分析し、修正した。ジャーナルは、生徒の自己認識力を高め、その結果言語学習における自身の強みを認識し、弱点となる分野を改善することを可能にした。参加者は、ジャーナルが英語学習にとって貴重なリソースとなったという見解を示した。この結果は、生徒が批判的な省察の実践を採用することが、自身の言語学習により深く関与することを可能にするという仮説を支持するものである。その過程で、学生は自分の学習にもっと責任を持つようになり、自分の進歩を監視し評価しながら、さらに探究心が刺激されることを意識的に選択するようになるのです。

Keywords

critical reflection, learning beyond the classroom, motivation, journal writing
批判的省察、教室を超えた学習、モチベーション、ジャーナルライティング

I have been a secondary education teacher for more than 20 years, and one question that I ask my students at the beginning of the year is about their goals for the class. Nine out of 10 times, their response is to be fluent in English. This is a lofty goal for students to achieve in less than a year, considering their busy high school life. Fluency, to my students, means not only speaking and writing quickly but also being able to navigate the target language to understand, be understood, and express themselves in both oral and written contexts. However, it is difficult to meet each student's learning needs when proficiency levels differ in each class. So, instead of giving students a list of ways to improve their English proficiency, I began to think of ways for students to take responsibility for their learning.

Empowering students, especially teenagers, to take responsibility for their learning is not an easy task. First, you have to convince them that it is a meaningful activity worth their time trying. Then, you have to be consistently there for them throughout the journey, which is not always possible for high school teachers, especially considering their workload. I have found that having students set realistic goals is a great way to encourage

them to take responsibility for their learning. By setting and achieving goals, students gain self-confidence and become more willing to keep trying.

I have always practiced critical reflection in my teaching. It is a skill I have developed over time, and it has helped me be a better teacher, facilitator, and mentor. My journey as a critical reflective practitioner began with reading books by John Dewey and Parker Palmer. It continued to deepen through my MA in TESOL at the School for International Training (SIT, Brattleboro, Vermont). It is there that I learned about the Kolb experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). I explored what I taught, why I taught the way I did, and how I could be a better teacher for my students. The late Dr. Steve Cornwell was my advisor during my teaching practicum, and he worked with me to hone these skills. The Kolb experiential learning cycle was a powerful tool for me to use to learn about my role as a teacher, discover what and how I teach, learn how I interact with my students and how they interact with each other, and create better interactive material for my classes. I believe that having a facilitator is also important because a facilitator can ask questions to help unlock the answers within the individuals that they work with. In my personal experience, Dr. Cornwell helped me to summarize my thoughts better by being more concise. He also challenged me to go deeper in reflection on various aspects of my teaching. Through reflection, we can see past our sometimes-narrow ways of thinking that can limit us and lead to exploring new learning methods that may, in turn, facilitate change (Fook, 2011).

In my own work as a teacher, I wanted to know whether what I did in my own reflective practice would help students in their journeys to become more proficient in English. In this paper, I examine whether critical reflection can strengthen students' motivation to learn English by helping them analyze, reconsider, and question what and how they learn. In addition, I explore the challenges I faced when conducting this research. Finally, I offer some solutions for how I would improve the critical reflection activity in the future. I hope other educators who are interested in using critical reflection as a supplement to classroom instruction and who want their students to take more ownership of their language learning will benefit from the narratives presented in this paper.

Key Themes in This Exploration: Critical Reflection, Learning Beyond the Classroom, and Motivation

In reflective learning, students are encouraged to develop critical thinking skills and become aware of their own learning processes. Reflective learning for students involves reflecting on what they have learned, analyzing their experiences, and finding alternative ways to improve.

As a problem-solving tool, reflection helps teachers and students understand their strengths and weaknesses after an experience. As Dewey (1933) pointed out, "We learn from reflection on experience, not from experience itself" (pp. 78–79). Looking reflectively back on past experiences, learners can construct new meanings based on their acquired knowledge. As a teacher, I believe that learners actively involved in their own learning have the capacity to create their own learning approaches if they are given decision-making opportunities. Creating an environment in which learners develop sound reflective practices around such learning opportunities can build confidence and a sense of responsibility for their learning actions.

In this respect, two types of reflection that I find personally meaningful are Schön's (1983) *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. The first stage of critical reflection is

reflection-in-action. Students who reflect in action are able to reshape situations and activities they are working on as they unfold, in other words, "thinking on their feet." By doing so, students reflect on what they are doing in the moment, leading to a new understanding of the experience and a change in the situation. Let us consider a student who has set aside 30 minutes to study vocabulary. Their task includes listening to the audio recording and writing the word and example sentences. However, during the study period, they receive text messages from their friends. At this time, the student has to decide whether to fully engage with the text messages or disregard them. They also need to recognize whether a distraction interferes with their learning or if their approach is proving successful. Making such decisions is a key part of reflection-in-action.

The second type of reflection, *reflection-on-action*, means to reflect on an experience, situation, or phenomenon after it has occurred. Students reflect on the situation by exploring why they acted the way they did, and whether or not they could have acted differently. The student looks at their overall improvement, or lack of success or progress, on a specific learning task or goal. After the previously mentioned student studies vocabulary for 30 minutes, from 9:00 p.m. until 9:30 p.m., they reflect on their experience. The student decides that this time is not beneficial to study because they were falling asleep and could not concentrate on the task, so they decide to shift the vocabulary study time to the following morning.

In the critical reflection process, the next stage is where individuals begin to look towards future actions. Farrell (2013) identifies this third stage in the reflection process as *reflection-for-action.* This is the most difficult for students because they have to anticipate what will occur in the next task and consider how to improve further or change their current language learning before the task takes place. Examples of students' reflection-for-action will be included later in the discussion.

Developing the practice of critical reflection by doing journal writing can be a rewarding and transforming experience for those who embark on the journey. So, to support students' reflective practices, I drew on these three types of reflection (reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action) to guide students in their journal writing (see Figure 1).

Students moved from one stage to the next to look at their tasks from a different perspective. By moving through each stage in this order, students could go deeper into their reflection and decide further actions, which Mezirow (1990) refers to as *transformative learning*.

The students' language learning is not limited to the classroom, as it can occur anywhere and at any time. By engaging in learning beyond the classroom, learners can address some of the limitations of classroom-based learning, such as insufficient authentic input and output (Nunan & Richards, 2015). The internet, technology, and media make it easier to use English effectively and authentically in real-life interactions and virtual social networks (Richards, 2015), and, as Nunan (1991) has pointed out, learners' application of emerging skills outside the classroom is crucial to developing their second language. Because high school students spend so much time using their devices to engage with technology, from games to social networking sites, it can be a source of engagement that students like. By reflecting on these activities, learners will be able to determine which activities work best for improving their proficiency. Additionally, they can adapt different activities based on their reflection to support their goals.

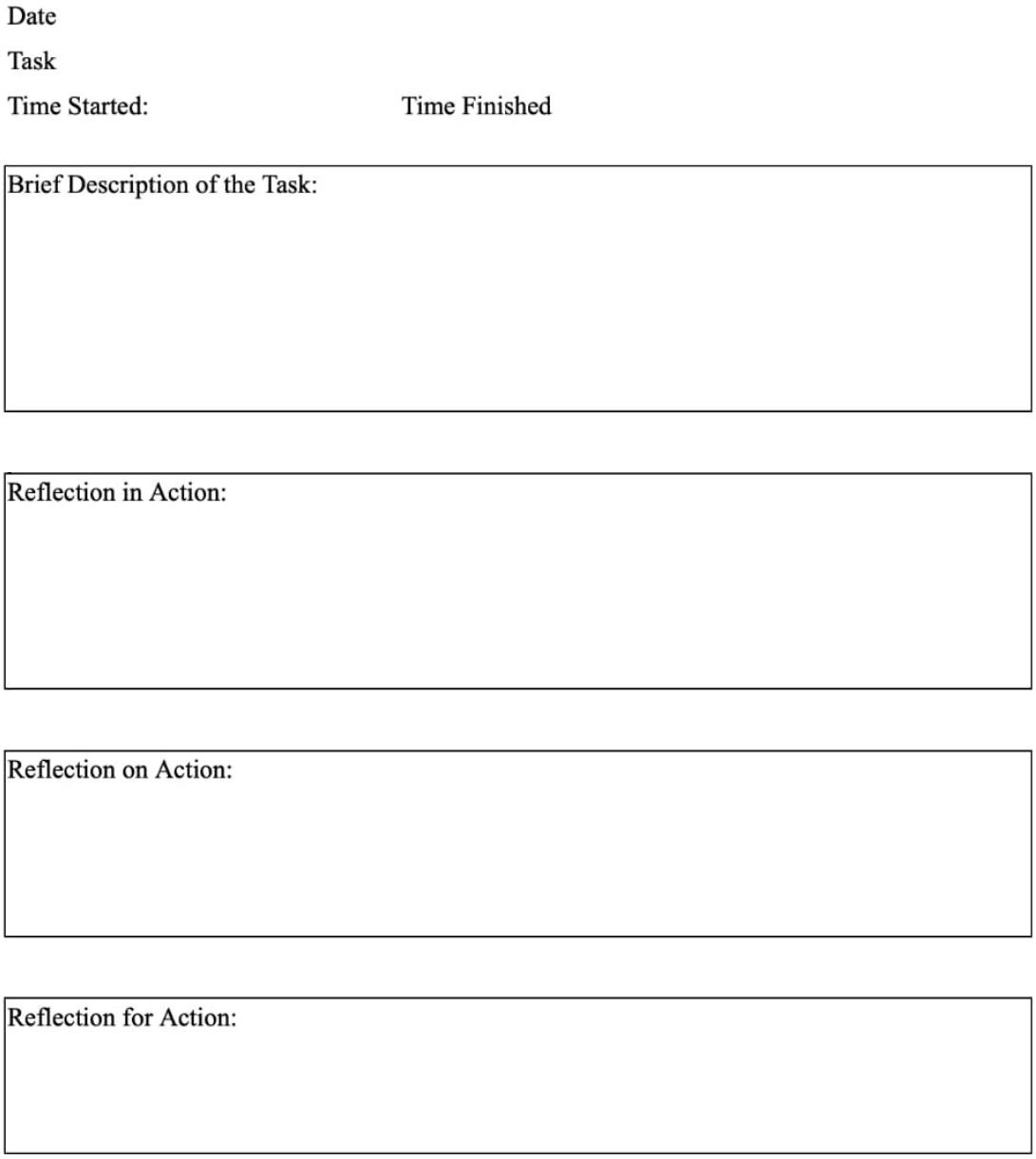


Figure 1. Journal Format

The final key theme that I started from is motivation. Motivation helps learners endure the ups and downs of learning something challenging. Without sufficient motivation, learners cannot achieve their long-term goals. For this project, I find Dörnyei's (2001) conceptualization of motivation at three levels—the language level, the learner level, and the learning situation level—useful for looking at and understanding learners' changing motivation. First, the language level focuses on the student's learning goals and the usefulness of proficiency in the target language. In contrast, the learner level focuses on confidence, competence, and self-efficacy (Dörnyei, 1994). Within this level, one might consider whether students are curious and energized by their learning. Are they self-determined in their learning? In separating the levels, Dörnyei believed that each had its own effect. When initiating this study, within the specific learning situation of this high school's English classes, I wanted my participants to have total autonomy in designing

their own learning plans to improve their English language proficiency while sustaining their motivation.

Research Focus

As I wanted to explore the critical reflection practice that I use in my daily life to see if it would impact my students' language study outside the classroom, I decided on the following questions to guide my research:

1. How does building a critical reflection practice with high school students affect their language proficiency and motivation to learn a language?
2. Do students experience any learning transformations during the critical reflection process?

I see this research as a case study, which is a common framework for conducting qualitative research with learners as it lets practitioner-researchers explore "the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995, p. xi). The aim of this case study was to develop a deeper, detailed understanding about the role of critical reflection in students' language learning outside the classroom.

Participants, Timeline, and Research Procedure

For this research, I focused on the written journals of two female Japanese high school students. The two participants, Mika and Aoi (both pseudonyms of their choosing), had been students of mine for 3 years at the start of this research. They had mixed levels of English ability, ranging from Grade Pre-1 (CEFR B2) to Grade 2 (CEFR B1) on the EIKEN Test. EIKEN is a test of practical English proficiency taken mainly by junior and senior high school students in Japan. Before participating, students were informed of the requirements of the research project and volunteered to participate by signing a consent form. They were also told that they could withdraw at any time. Parental consent and school consent were also granted to participate.

Introducing Aoi

Aoi had been learning English since she was 7 years old. She started to study English in primary school. Students at her primary school learned English as a tool for communication. She had English classes twice a week in the first and second years, increasing to three times a week until the end of 6th grade. She did not attend a private English conversation school to support her language learning outside her daily education at primary school. She participated in a study abroad program in Australia for 2 months when she was 11. Her English proficiency level at the time of this study was at EIKEN Pre-1, and her TOEFL ITP score was 530. She wanted to concentrate on speaking, vocabulary, writing, EIKEN, and the TOEFL IBT. She listened to music and watched American TV shows with Japanese and English subtitles to study English. Occasionally, she practiced shadowing with CNN English Express or TED Talks.

If Aoi was not interested in something, she saw no point in studying it. In her response to the survey question, "What strategies are you using to learn English now?", she wrote in English: *I listen to music or watch TV, I don't do it for the entertainment value, but I want to memorize how words are used and expressions that singers and actors use when using English.*

Specifically, she hoped to achieve Level 1 on the EIKEN Test, score 6.0 on IELTS, and be more proficient in English so that she could participate in school-related events in English.

Introducing Mika

Mika had been learning English since she was 12 years old. She passed the third EIKEN level and scored 368 on the TOEFL ITP. She wanted to focus on reading, speaking, and passing Level 2 of the EIKEN test. Mika enjoyed playing online games in English. Using game language to learn English was one of her favorite things. To study these specific English phrases, she kept a vocabulary notebook. On the left side of the paper, she wrote English sentences; on the right, she wrote Japanese sentences. However, she realized that this method was not working for her.

Mika had trouble distinguishing certain English phonemes. On her SMART Goal Worksheet (Appendix A), she wrote: *Being able to hear sounds is important when speaking and listening. I want to hear what the teacher has to say clearly.* Her worksheet also conveyed this: *If I could hear all the words in a conversation, I would be able to understand and follow it and not feel intimidated by participating in conversations.* This shows that she was developing a level of awareness of her transformational journey in critical reflection.

Table 1. *Research Timeline*

Time period	Steps taken
March 2021	• Invitations to participate were sent out to students in the 12th Grade Global Learning Course and Super Science Global Course • Five students independently volunteered • Parental consent and school permission were granted
Phase 1 April 2021–May 2021	• Needs analysis questionnaire was administered • SMART goal worksheet was completed • Three aspects of critical reflection were explained (*reflection-in-action*, *reflection-on-action*, and *reflection-for-action*) • Students began journaling at least twice a week (reflection journals collected every other week) • I provided feedback on their journals to support this type of critical reflection
Phase 2 June 2021–July 2021	• Students continued journaling at least twice a week • Peer Groups were introduced to support this type of critical reflection • Reflection journals were collected every other week • I offered feedback in the form of reflective questioning to support them in going deeper into their reflective practice • In July, Padlet was introduced to offer another way to interact in Peer Groups
Phase 3 August 2021–December 2021	• I met with students individually to see if they wanted to change their SMART Goals • Students continued journaling twice a week • Students moved their journaling online due to my being overseas
Phase 4 January 2022	• I met with students individually to get their feedback about critical reflection

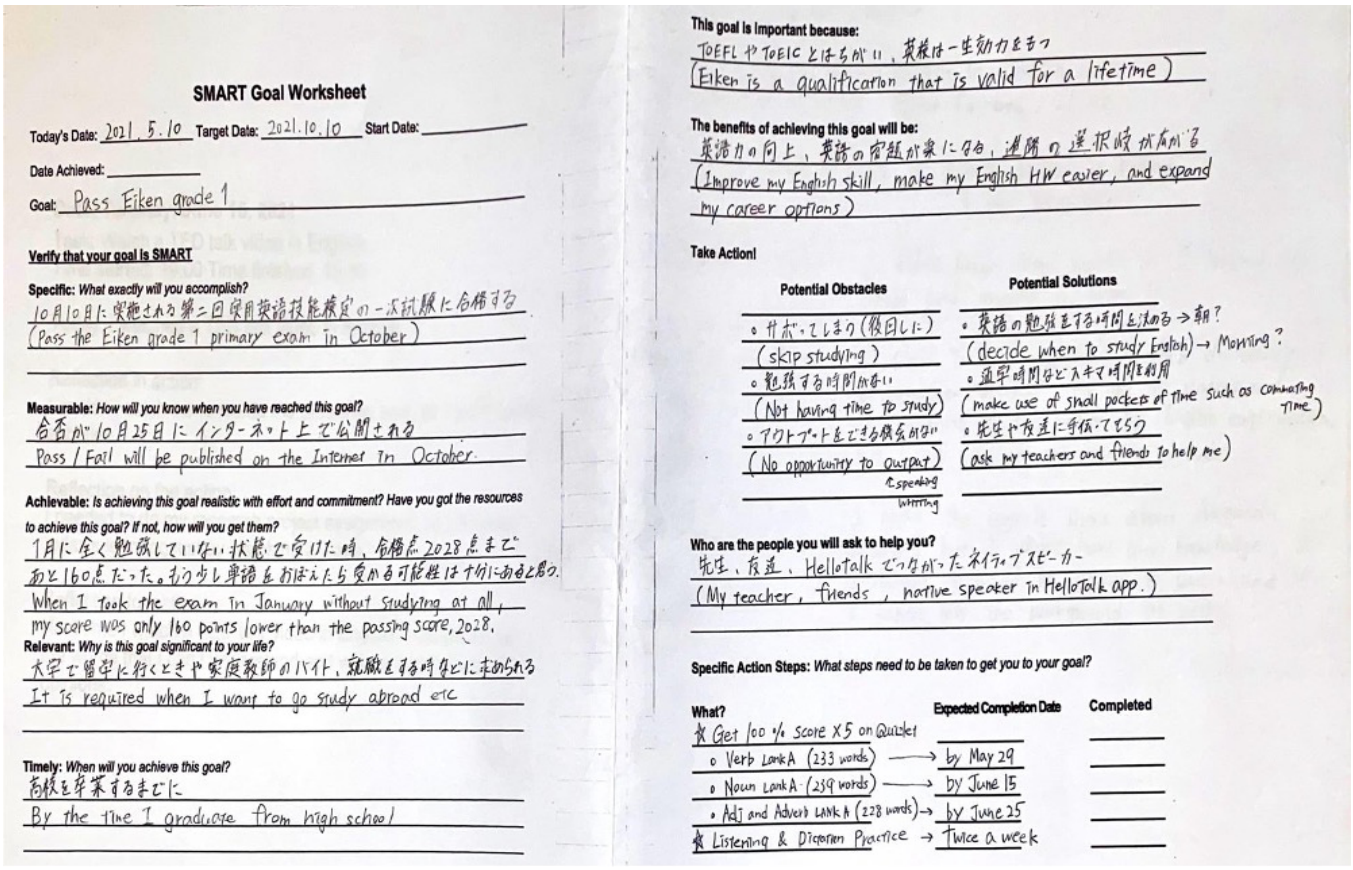
The project lasted from April 2021 until mid-January 2022, and Table 1 outlines the steps I took for my research from March 2021 until January 2022 as the project developed over those 9 months. In Phase 1, I conducted a needs analysis to gather background information about my students. I also explained how to fill out the SMART goal worksheet and do critical reflection journaling, so they could start writing in their journals. To support their reflection practice, I reviewed their journals and provided feedback. They continued their critical reflection practice in Phase 2 with the addition of peer groups. To help students dive deeper into their practices, questions were provided for each phase of critical reflection. In Phases 3 and 4, students explored different language activities to reach their goals. Through critical reflection, they were able to determine what worked and what did not. The benefits of critical reflection and the power it has on learning beyond the classroom became evident to them.

In April 2021, students answered a basic Google Form Questionnaire (Appendix B) about themselves. The questionnaire was used to gather information about (a) the length of time they had been studying English, (b) their English proficiency levels (EIKEN and TOEFL ITP), (c) the language skills they wished to focus on during the project, (d) the strategies they use now to study English, (e) the strategies that are not working for them, and (f) their personal goals for this project.

Next, in early May 2021, I met with the students on Zoom to go over what they needed to do with the SMART Goals Framework. Because we use Google Classroom for our regular classes, I created a new class, *Ann's Research Group*, where I uploaded a SMART Goal worksheet, an interactive PowerPoint slideshow, and a goal-setting worksheet for students to complete at home. The students used this framework to help them create achievable goals. "SMART" is an acronym (O'Neill et al., 2006) for "Specific" (What precisely is being pursued?), "Measurable" (Has the goal been accomplished?), "Achievable" (Can the goal be achieved?), "Relevant" (Does this seem worthwhile?), and "Time-Bound" (Can the goal be completed in a reasonable timeframe?). This framework was used to give students an organizational structure to work with and a sense of direction to reach their goals. Students could write their SMART Goals framework in English or Japanese (See Figures 2 and 3 for an example). To make the framework, I used a template found on Southern Oregon University's website (OfficeArrow.com, 2008), so that the students would need to think deeply about their goals and try to identify possible obstacles they might encounter and actions they could take to avoid them.

Introducing the Critical Reflection Journal

In mid-May, I met with the students to show them the format for writing in their reflection journal. Each student was given a notebook for their journal. Students wrote the date, independent learning task, time started, and time finished. Then, they had to write a *reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action,* and *reflection-for-action*. They could choose how often to reflect, but it had to be at least two times a week, so students could develop their reflective practice. I collected the journals every other week. In the beginning, students wrote in their notebooks, but some wanted more flexibility in being able to write journal entries online. They felt this would give them more freedom to reflect anywhere and anytime. I accepted either. Students wrote between 14 to 17 journal entries from Phase 1 to Phase 2. In Phase 3, students were busy with various activities at school and applications for universities, so there was a slight decrease in journal entries.



SMART Goal Worksheet

Today's Date: 2021. 5. 10 Target Date: 2021. 10. 10 Start Date: _____

Date Achieved: _____

Goal: Pass Eiken grade 1

Verify that your goal is SMART

Specific: *What exactly will you accomplish?*
10月10日に実施される第二回実用英語技能検定の一次試験に合格する
(Pass the Eiken grade 1 primary exam in October)

Measurable: *How will you know when you have reached this goal?*
合否が10月25日にインターネット上で公開される
Pass / Fail will be published on the Internet in October.

Achievable: *Is achieving this goal realistic with effort and commitment? Have you got the resources to achieve this goal? If not, how will you get them?*
1月に全く勉強していない状態で受けた時、合格点2028点まであと160点だった。もう少し単語をおぼえたら受かる可能性は十分にあると思う。
When I took the exam in January without studying at all, my score was only 160 points lower than the passing score, 2028.

Relevant: *Why is this goal significant to your life?*
大学で留学に行くときや家庭教師のバイト、就職をする時などに求められる
It is required when I want to go study abroad etc

Timely: *When will you achieve this goal?*
高校を卒業するまでに
By the time I graduate from high school

This goal is important because:
TOEFLやTOEICとはちがい、英検は一生効力をもつ
(Eiken is a qualification that is valid for a lifetime)

The benefits of achieving this goal will be:
英語力の向上、英語の宿題が楽になる、進路の選択肢が広がる
(Improve my English skill, make my English HW easier, and expand my career options)

Take Action!

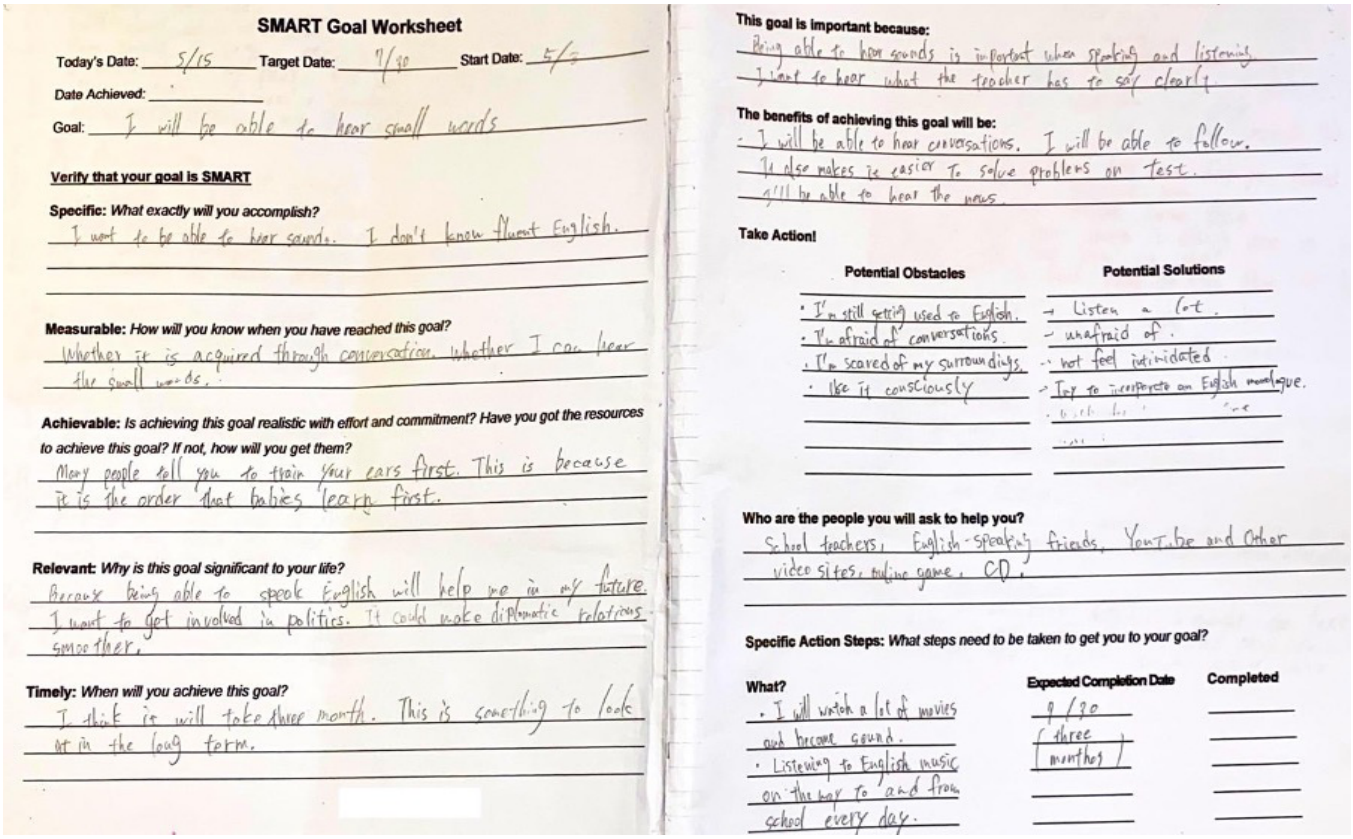
Potential Obstacles	Potential Solutions
・サボってしまう(怠けしに) (skip studying)	・英語の勉強をする時間を決める→朝? (decide when to study English)→ Morning?
・勉強する時間がない (Not having time to study)	・通学時間などスキマ時間を利用 (make use of small pockets of time such as commuting time)
・アウトプットをできる機会がない (No opportunity to output) ※speaking writing	・先生や友達に手伝ってもらう (ask my teachers and friends to help me)

Who are the people you will ask to help you?
先生、友達、Hellotalkでつながった ネイティブスピーカー
(My teacher, friends, native speaker in Hellotalk app.)

Specific Action Steps: *What steps need to be taken to get you to your goal?*

What?	Expected Completion Date	Completed
★Get 100% score X5 on Quizlet		
・Verb LankA (233 words)	→ by May 29	
・Noun LankA (259 words)	→ by June 15	
・Adj and Adverb LANK A (228 words)	→ by June 25	
★Listening & Dictation Practice	→ Twice a week	

Figure 2. Aoi's SMART Goal Worksheet



SMART Goal Worksheet

Today's Date: 5/15 Target Date: 7/30 Start Date: 5/5

Date Achieved: _____

Goal: I will be able to hear small words

Verify that your goal is SMART

Specific: *What exactly will you accomplish?*
I want to be able to hear sounds. I don't know fluent English.

Measurable: *How will you know when you have reached this goal?*
Whether it is acquired through conversation. Whether I can hear the small words.

Achievable: *Is achieving this goal realistic with effort and commitment? Have you got the resources to achieve this goal? If not, how will you get them?*
Many people tell you to train your ears first. This is because it is the order that babies learn first.

Relevant: *Why is this goal significant to your life?*
Because being able to speak English will help me in my future. I want to get involved in politics. It could make diplomatic relations smoother.

Timely: *When will you achieve this goal?*
I think it will take three month. This is something to look at in the long term.

This goal is important because:
Being able to hear sounds is important when speaking and listening. I want to hear what the teacher has to say clearly.

The benefits of achieving this goal will be:
- I will be able to hear conversations. I will be able to follow.
It also makes it easier to solve problems on test.
I'll be able to hear the news.

Take Action!

Potential Obstacles	Potential Solutions
・I'm still getting used to English.	→ Listen a lot.
・I'm afraid of conversations.	→ unafraid of.
・I'm scared of my surroundings.	→ not feel intimidated
・Use it consciously	→ Try to incorporate an English monologue.

Who are the people you will ask to help you?
School teachers, English-speaking friends, YouTube and Other video sites, online game, CD.

Specific Action Steps: *What steps need to be taken to get you to your goal?*

What?	Expected Completion Date	Completed
・I will watch a lot of movies and become sound.	9/30 (three months)	
・Listening to English music on the way to and from school every day.		

Figure 3. Mika's SMART Goal Worksheet

Throughout the collection periods, I provided feedback. In the beginning, I gave more guidance about how to write in the journal, especially when they asked questions directly to me in their journal or in person. Some questions were administrative: *Can I give my notebook to you on Monday instead of Friday?* Others were technical questions: *Can I type my journal instead of handwriting it?* or *Can I slow the audio speed down?* However, some questions were about reflecting: *How can I improve my reflecting skills?* and *How do I ask myself questions?* We also met periodically at lunchtime or online using Zoom for check-ins. After the summer vacation, I began to write comments such as *Can you tell me more?* or *What did you learn?* to help them go deeper into their reflections.

Peer Learning and Feedback

It was also important for students to give feedback to each other. Encouraging peer interaction not only fosters critical reflection and communicative skills but also builds community (Boud et al., 1999) so that students can use their personal learning experiences to help each other. In July, I asked students to interact collaboratively with each other on Padlet, a platform where students can post documents, videos, comments, and audio to a digital wall. By talking to each other or writing comments on Padlet about problems they were encountering, students were able to suggest new strategies for each other to try. Some suggestions were to try dictation, read shorter passages, write summaries, and watch movies (see Figure 4). We often use this platform for our classes and online student conferences at my high school.

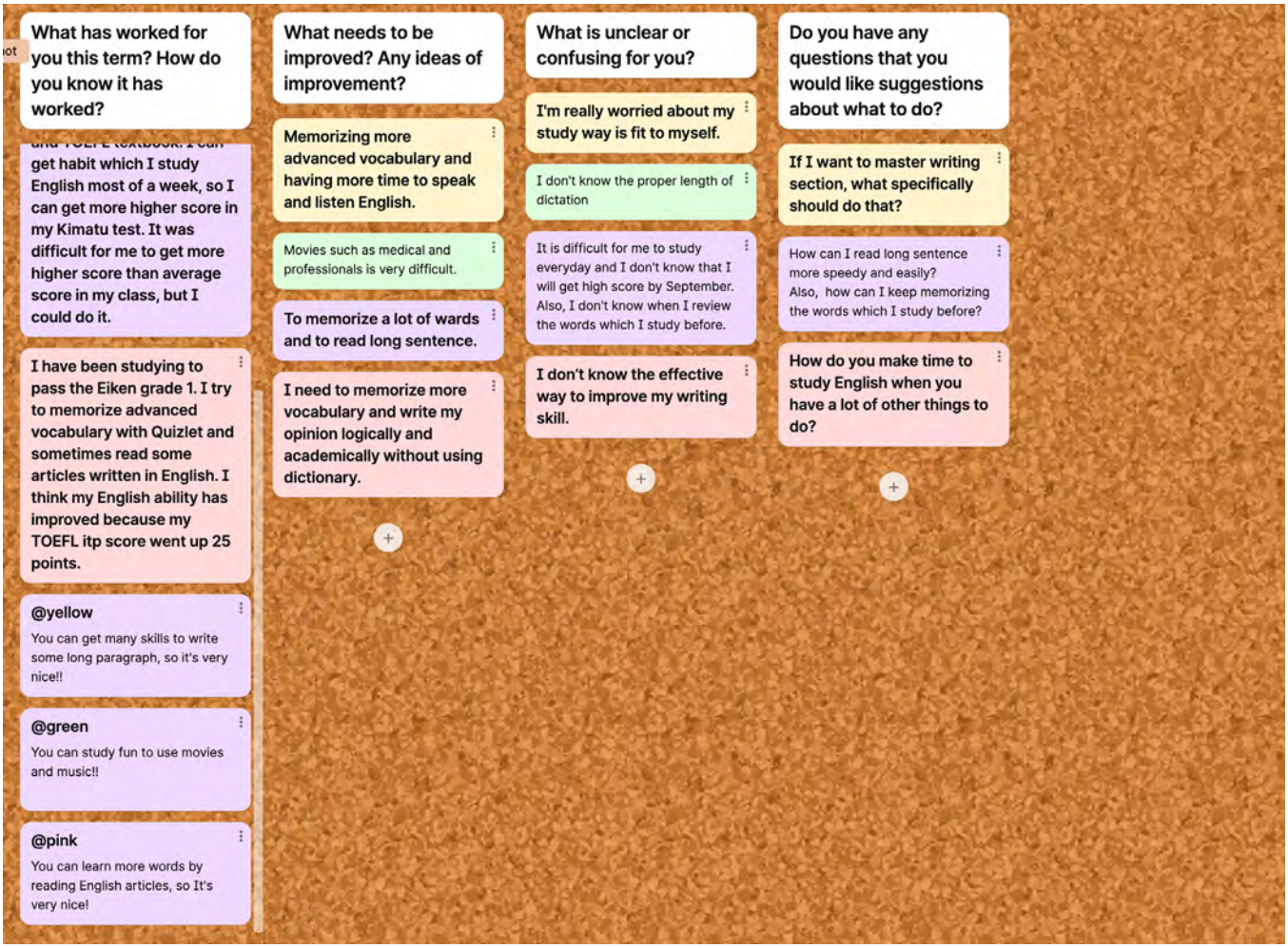


Figure 4. Padlet Interaction

Insights from Aoi's and Mika's Critical Reflection Journeys

The primary methods of data collection I used were journal entries from the students' handwritten journal notebooks (Phases 1 and 2), which later shifted online in Phase 3. I organized the qualitative data into two categories, oral and written, and applied interpretational analysis to the data. This involved a systematic procedure of coding and classifying the data to explore constructs, themes, and patterns as they emerged (Gall et al., 2005). Here I highlighted consistent themes in the journal, for example, places of distraction, frustration, and change. In addition, I underlined words of emotion such as "happy" and "disappointed." By doing this, I could identify the commonalities and uniqueness of Aoi and Mika's critical reflection journeys. From here, I present a summary interpretation of both students' critical reflections on their English learning journeys. I follow this with a reflection on my own learnings and realizations.

Aoi's Journey

Aoi wrote 17 journal entries from June until the end of September. In her SMART Goal Worksheet, she expressed a desire to pass Level 1 on the EIKEN Proficiency Exam by March 2022. Getting a high score on this test is necessary to attend an overseas university. She felt that the benefits of achieving this goal would be to improve her English skills and expand her career options after graduating from university. Some of the obstacles she felt would prevent her from achieving the goal were insufficient time to study or lack of opportunities for output like speaking and writing. When we met in May to go over her SMART Goal Worksheet, she wanted to focus on learning vocabulary, as seen in the Specific Action Steps (see Figure 2). Additionally, according to the needs analysis questionnaire that was given to students in April, one of her personal goals for this research project was to improve her vocabulary skills.

High school students often study vocabulary by writing the English word and its Japanese meaning next to it. In June, Aoi started to study vocabulary by using Quizlet (a digital flashcard application). She wanted to review some study cards she had previously used in her English class. However, when she began studying vocabulary at 9:00 p.m., she noticed that she became sleepy: *While reviewing the vocabulary, I felt drowsy sometimes. I drank a glass of cold water to shake off the sleepiness.* Here she noticed that she had a problem, and she quickly changed her behavior to continue. As she reflected on the action: *After reviewing the vocabulary, I noticed that I forgot the majority of the words even though I have spent a lot of time memorizing*, she concluded: *I was surprised that how I forgot the learning of vocabularies even though I could memorize them once. I think it's better not to leave a long time between reviews*. From that point on, she began to study fewer words but did so more frequently during the week.

A week later, Aoi decided to watch a 20-minute TED Talk video in English. As she was watching it, she noticed that she could not catch some of the words the presenter was saying, so she turned on the English subtitles. She continued: *Next time I watch a TED talk video in English, I should list up the words that I can't understand and write a summary and opinion.* Aoi began to notice that there are different ways to learn vocabulary. She did not have to use Quizlet only.

In July, Aoi began to write more about her mood: *I was not in the mood for studying with a pencil, so I watched Netflix to learn English.* Because she had the choice of watching the program *Terrace House* with English subtitles, she was able to reflect: *I enjoyed watching it, so I can continue this learning. I was able to see English translations of Japanese people's daily*

conversations, so I was able to learn English expressions that are easy to use. This shows that Aoi was gaining a new insight into her learning style. She seemed to be departing from her SMART goals and choosing resources that do not help her with exam-related vocabulary (see Figure 2). She also spent more time watching *Terrace House* than she did studying vocabulary.

Towards the end of July, Aoi's focus shifted from EIKEN to getting a high score on IELTS, which was required to enter a competitive program at the university of her choice. In her journal, she wrote: *I've been so busy working on my uni application. From today, studying English is a top priority for me. My goal: HIGH SCORE ON IELTS!* Her journal entries reflected a shift in her learning strategies, too. Figure 5 shows how her tasks became more creative and seemed to suit her learning style more. This also shows that she is experimenting with different ways to learn new words. Aoi wrote: *I think this method is nice. I enjoyed doing it. The important thing is to continue.*

From September, Aoi once again changed her focus from learning vocabulary to preparing for the IELTS writing section. Her tasks shifted to reading and memorizing example answers from the IELTS practice tests. As she reflected on the action: *Write what I remember and highlight the parts I forgot. Must write again and again*, she began to develop a new learning strategy. She further reflected: *I hope this exercise will help me with my IELTS test! But it takes time to memorize*. She practiced this strategy for about a month until she was able to achieve the required score to enter the university program. She added a time limit to simulate the actual time she would have for the IELTS writing section. She reflected: *I think I did a good job. But next time, I will set a time limit like a test.*

Towards the end of September, Aoi took the IELTS test and attained a 7.0 in the listening section and 6.0 on the other sections. She received an overall score of 6.5 and was accepted into the university program of her choice. In her journal she wrote: *The XXX program requires students to get an overall 6.5 so I can apply with this result! YAY!*

After she gained acceptance into the program, she continued to use Quizlet, but she also used other tools that interested her such as Netflix, TED Talks, and podcasts to challenge herself to learn new vocabulary. She remarked: *I am happy that my band scores of listening and reading increased. But I should have practiced speaking more.* She further elaborated: *I tried to do my best, but my speaking test ended terribly. … I should have been calmer. I couldn't say what I wanted to say. I have a week to prepare for the next IELTS, so I will work harder.*

Overall, Aoi mentioned in a written note I received in January that she was happy with her progress and that this style of journal writing really made her focus when she was studying. It was challenging, but she could see her overall progress. She enjoyed the freedom of doing what she liked to do to learn English. She wanted to continue doing this type of journal writing at university.

Aoi achieved many things during her critical reflective journey. First, she began to realize that watching TED Talk videos and Netflix series motivated her more to learn English because she was able to listen to natural English. In addition, she began to try different learning strategies for her vocabulary study, such as drawing pictures and writing new expressions from English subtitles. Through critical reflection, she was able to recognize and change her habits when she became distracted during studying such as being interrupted by friends on SNS or being tired or hungry. She also learned how to get back on track with studying for tests after being distracted by *Terrace House*. This style of reflection-on-action helped her transform the way she studied and learned English.

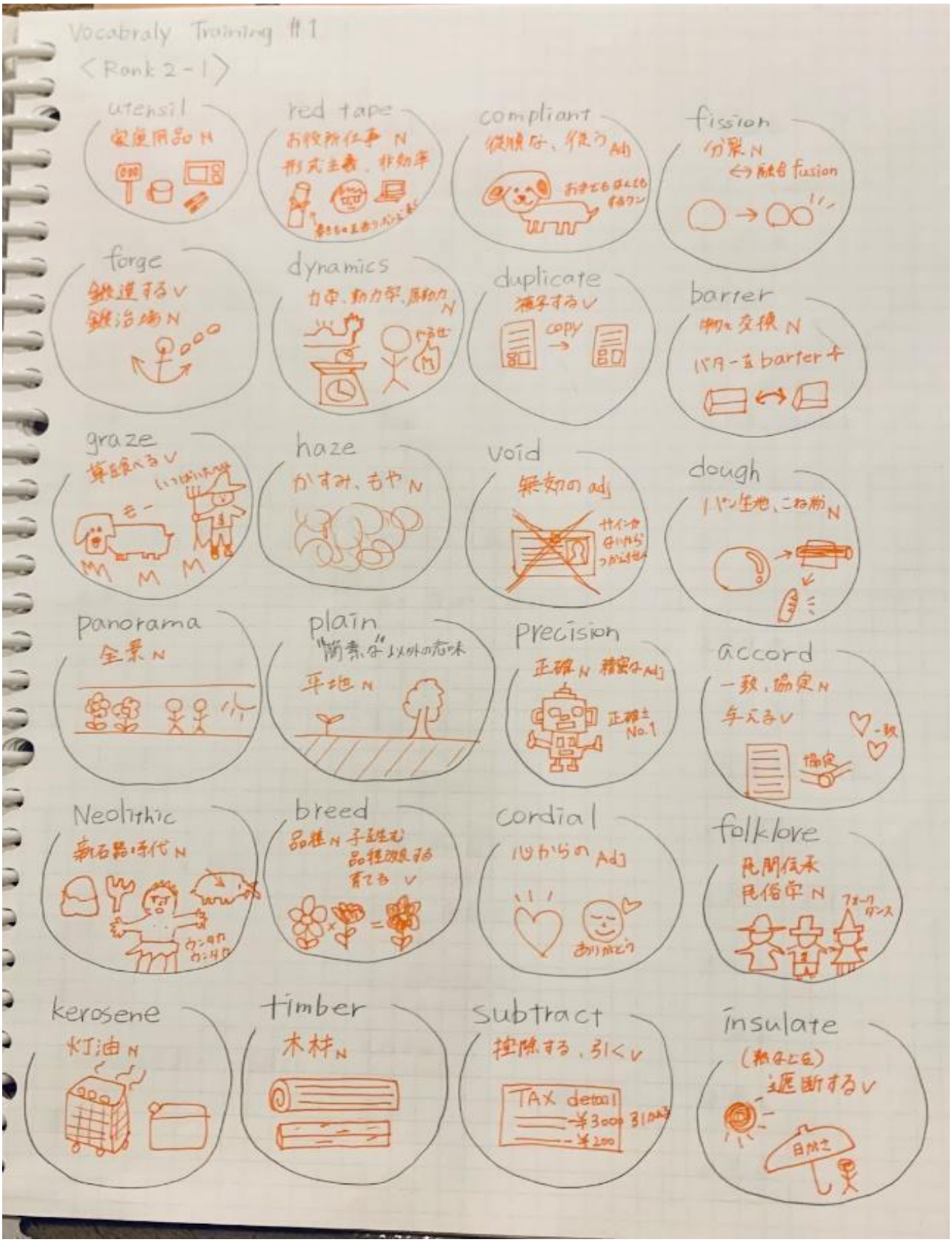


Figure 5. Aoi's New Way of Studying Vocabulary

Mika's Journey

Mika also completed 17 journal entries. When filling out her SMART goals worksheet, she indicated a desire to focus on improving her listening skills. She had difficulty picking up words when listening to two people speaking in a video, and she felt that it was important to improve her listening skills in order to have better conversations with foreigners. This goal was significant to her because she wanted to get involved in politics and she felt that being able to use English could make diplomatic relations smoother. Some specific benefits of achieving this goal were to be able to follow conversations better and to understand news broadcasts in English. Mika wrote that she was afraid of having conversations in English because at times she misunderstood what was being said.

Mika preferred to do shorter listening tasks lasting no more than 10 minutes. She mentioned in her journal: *I become nervous when I have long conversations*. I thought that it was very important for her to know about her own learning style. She felt that her first listening task of transcribing a short conversation from *Genshin Impact (*an open-ended role-playing game) was too difficult, so she decided to focus on listening materials for children.

Mika began to watch Disney films. She felt that listening to the spoken language was easier to follow: *I thought the words were easy for kids. And very easy to hear. I think Disney is good teaching material.* She reflected: *I did a good job today. If this is the case, I can continue. If it is too long, I'll lose motivation. But I want it to be a little longer.* Here is another example of transformation through reflection-on-action. In the next journal entry, Mika mentioned that she tried to listen to a longer conversation: *Today I heard a short conversation from* Tangled*. I felt like I could do this.* Mika began to gain more confidence as she challenged herself to increase the amount of time she spent listening to conversations and songs from Disney films.

Mika also noticed that when she was unable to understand all the words, she wanted to give up: *I heard it many times, but thought it was necessary to give up if I couldn't hear it.* Even though songs can be more difficult to understand than dialogue, she felt: *The use of idioms was easy to remember.*

As the song "Speechless" from *Aladdin* was slow, Mika found it easier to understand. She felt more confident after listening to it: *Today, I heard short music from* Aladdin*. This song is very slow and easy to hear. I thought how to use rhymes was amazing. It is difficult, but I learned the beauty of English.* Until the end of July, Mika continued listening to music in English. She associated the length of the song with her motivation: *The longest song is hard. The length that does not lose motivation is just right.*

After the summer vacation, Mika decided to change from listening to Disney songs to pop artists such as Adele and Taylor Swift. For these, she slowed the speed to 0.5x because she felt that she would be able to follow them better. However, she realized that this did not work because she was used to listening to the song at regular speed: *I realized that it is important to listen at the speed of a native speaker.*

By the end of September, Mika had gained more confidence in her listening skills. She gained 20 points on her TOEFL ITP score. Mika also felt that critical reflection was interesting because it gave her the tools to recognize that she wanted to try more listening strategies to improve her proficiency. When she began keeping her critical reflection journal, her choices for resources and tasks sometimes did not match up with her learning goals. Her main goal was: *To hear small words in conversations to follow them better which would make it easier to solve problems on tests. I'll be able to hear the news.* In a private conversation with me, Mika said: *I never had thought about how to improve my listening*

skills before doing this critical reflection journal. She was not sure if she would continue this journal activity in the future, because English was not going to be a priority. After hearing this, I began to wonder how I could encourage students to use this type of reflection in any part of their lives, not just their learning.

Through critical reflection, Mika became more confident in using conversational English. In the early stages, she was frustrated that she could not catch what was being said in conversations used in online role-playing games, so she decided to listen to songs that were easy for her to understand. By recognizing the causes and effects of the tasks she chose and the emotions she felt during the activities, transformative learning took place.

My Learnings and Realizations

Building a critical reflective practice with language learners can be a successful tool for students to use outside the classroom. Using the SMART Goal Worksheet (see Figures 2 and 3) helped students to think about potential obstacles such as receiving text messages from friends or falling asleep during studying that could prevent them from reaching their goals. The worksheet also asked students to think of potential solutions to the obstacles they had written. One such solution was for Aoi to put her phone in her bag, so her friends did not interrupt her studying.

The key point for students to build a critical reflective practice is receiving guidance from the teacher at specific points along the journey. Some students struggle or lose sight of their goals because they feel frustrated that they are not making progress, as in Mika's case. Aoi, on the other hand, was able to take risks and challenge herself. She asked more questions: *Ann sensei, what do you think about the way I took to improve my writing skills? Do you have any suggestions?* Aoi seemed like she was ready to act on her curiosity by asking questions, and she was not afraid to seek help when needed. It is important for teachers to encourage and scaffold this kind of behavior because it could effectively provide feedback to learners so they can plan the next steps toward attaining their goals and furthering their learning.

If I could do this research project again, I think I would encourage more feedback between me and each student as well as between the students themselves. By asking questions, Aoi was able to go deeper into her reflection compared to Mika. I felt Mika would have benefited more if we had done more peer reflection. She might have learned different ways to improve her listening and vocabulary skills from Aoi.

The process of learning another language can be a very emotional experience, as anyone who has tried it can attest. A key realization that emerged from this exploration was the level of emotions generated during the reflective cycle. Language learning can be positively or negatively affected by these different types of emotions. Throughout their journeys, Aoi and Mika experienced both ups and downs. Some words and phrases that they used to express their emotions included: "It was easy," "excited," "fun to learn new things," "YAY!" whereas other entries voiced: "frustration," "disorganized," "difficult to understand," "want to give up." It is important to note that students were becoming motivated to learn as a result of experiencing this range of emotions. Aoi conveyed: *I was very motivated to study! I could write a nice essay*. Mika voiced: *I did a good job today. If this is the case, I can continue*. As they continued to examine their activities deeply and make adjustments to reach their end goals, their learning beyond the classroom was becoming transformative.

Challenges and Improvements

I faced several challenges during this exploratory project. I would like to go over some suggestions for improvement should readers like to try critical reflection practices with their students. First, it would have been better, in the beginning, to have brainstormed different strategies for learning the four skills. Brainstorming might have given the students more activities to try to meet their goals. Students were able to come up with their own ideas individually, but it took a long time. Second, providing guiding questions (Appendix C) at the beginning of the study would have helped the students to reflect more deeply on the strategies they were using and how they could improve their approach to learning. If teachers notice that their students' depth of reflection is limited, guiding questions or prompts may help their students to reflect more deeply on their task. Third, I would provide more bilingual assistance to support students with lower levels of English proficiency. Three possibilities that come to mind are: (a) bilingual worksheets, (b) individually meeting with the students more regularly, and (c) students writing their journal entries in their L1 until they gained more confidence in using their L2. Mika might have benefited more from this activity if journaling in her L1 had been an option. She would have been able to dive more deeply into her reflection and perhaps find a stronger connection with what she was trying to achieve. Another possible change would be to use a model journal from this project, with permission from the writer, as an example to show future students how to develop critical reflection practices about their learning.

Conclusion

Learners can examine the strategies that they utilize to study English when they engage in critical reflective practices. Through reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action, students were able to evaluate their current approaches to learning. Mezirow (1990) defines critical reflection as an activity that students engage in to analyze the relevance and appropriateness of their assumptions and beliefs. It enables students to look at how they are doing things by questioning the usefulness of the tasks and thinking ahead for the next step of action to ensure that learning is taking place. Through their journal entries, it was evident that transformative learning was taking place for Aoi and Mika.

The practice of critical reflection has always been a part of what I do as a teacher. I found it insightful and encouraging to be able to use this type of practice with my students and see how their language learning could also be transformed, as was my teaching too. Encouraging language learners to develop critical reflective practices beyond the classroom fosters greater self-awareness by challenging them to question their learning beliefs, draw conclusions about their learning, and finally decide on actions that will transform their learning experiences.

Author Bio

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Review Process

This paper was open-reviewed by Hugh Nicoll and Stacey Vye of the *Learner Development Journal* Review Network and by the Journal Steering Group. *(Contributors have the option of open or blind review.)*

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Appendix A

SMART Goal Worksheet

Today's Date: _____ Target Date: _____ Start Date: _____

Date Achieved: _____

Goal: _____

Verify that your goal is SMART

Specific: *What exactly will you accomplish?*

_____

_____

Measurable: *How will you know when you have reached this goal?*

_____

Achievable: *Is achieving this goal realistic with effort and commitment? Have you got the resources to achieve this goal? If not, how will you get them?*

_____

_____

Relevant: *Why is this goal significant to your life?*

_____

_____

Timely: *When will you achieve this goal?*

_____

_____

This goal is important because:

_____

_____

The benefits of achieving this goal will be:

_____

_____

Take Action!

Potential Obstacles	Potential Solutions
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Who are the people you will ask to help you?

_____

_____

Specific Action Steps: *What steps need to be taken to get you to your goal?*

What?	Expected Completion Date	Completed
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Note. Adapted from https://inside.sou.edu/assets/socsci/Advising__Student_Success/Goal_Setting/ica.SMARTGoalWorksheet.pdf

Appendix B

Questionnaire on Personal Goals for Research Project

1) Choose your name
2) Age
3) At what age did you start learning English? (何歳から英語を学び始めましたか。)
4) Are you taking or not taking English lessons outside of school now? (今学校以外で英語のレッスンを受けていますか。)
5) If you answered, "yes" to question #4. How many days a week do you study English and for how long? For example: once a week for 3 hours. (質問4で「はい」と答えた方へ。週に何日、どのくらいの時間、英語を勉強していますか？ 例：週に1回、3時間。)
6) EIKEN LEVEL (英検級)
7) TOEFL ITP SCORE (TOEFL ITPスコア)
8) What skill or skills do you want to focus on this year? (今年重点的に取り組みたい英語スキルは何ですか。)
   a. Listening
   b. Reading
   c. Speaking
   d. Vocabulary
   e. Writing
   f. TOEFL ITP
   g. EIKEN
   h. TOEFL CBT/iBT
   i. Other
9) If you have a specific area that you would like to work on, write it below. (Ex: Debate or Conversation) (具体的に取り組んでみたい分野があれば、下に書いてください。例：ディベートまたは英語会話)
10) What strategies are you using to learn English now? (Ex. Listening to music.) (今はどんな戦略で英語を学んでいますか。例：音楽を聞く。)
11) What strategies did you use to learn English, but did not work? (Ex. Listen to music.) (英語を学ぶためにどのような戦略をとったが、うまくいかなかったのか。例：音楽を聞く。)
12) What goal(s) would you like to achieve this year? (今年はどんな目標を達成したいですか。)

Appendix C

New Reflection Questions

Before the task
- What would I like to learn today?
- How can I break this task down into manageable parts, so I don't get distracted?
- How long am I going to work on my goal today? Why?
- What are my goals for today?
- What's my energy level? How am I feeling about doing today's goal?

During the task
- What have I learned so far?
- What else do I need to do to finish today's goal?
- Which parts of today's goal are easy for me? difficult for me?
- Does my work reflect my effort thus far?

After the task
- What new information have I learned from today's goal?
- What surprised me about what I learned?
- Where were the roadblocks?
- How did I move through the roadblocks or challenges?
- Does my work reflect my effort thus far?
- Am I proud of my work?

Future
- If given the opportunity, one thing I would change about this task is . . . . . .
- How does what I did today compare with previous tasks?
- Have I achieved the goal I set for myself for today's task? How do I know it?
- Are the goals I set before this task still reasonable? Do I need to adjust them?
- How close am I to achieving my overall original goal?
- In what ways have you gotten better?
- What resources did you use to achieve today's goal? Which ones were particularly helpful? Which ones would you use again?

PAPER

Extensive Listening in the Time of COVID-19: Supporting Students so They Can Become Self-Reflective, Independent Learners

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Due to the spread of COVID-19, universities around the world began making use of online tools such as learning management systems (LMS) and Zoom. For language teachers, teaching skills such as listening and speaking proved to be a challenge. This paper describes how an extensive listening (EL) program was organized asynchronously for a class of 21 students studying English at a private women's university in central Japan. Students were asked to choose at least one audio or video resource from a list provided by the author and complete a digital listening journal for 21 weeks. In the journal students were required to document the resource title, website information, a summary, listening problems, and goals for future journal entries. On the LMS, the author provided feedback to help students navigate listening problems and choose resources that fit their needs. This paper reports on the experiences of three students who completed the task regularly. An analysis of their journals and submission practices was used in combination with semi-structured interviews to understand their listening processes. The students' stories provide insight into how the skill of listening is practiced and may be of interest to educators who wish to introduce EL in their own contexts as an out-of-class activity.

COVID-19の蔓延により，世界中の大学がLMS（Learning Management System）やZoomなどのオンラインツールを活用するようになった。しかし、語学教師にとって、リスニングやスピーキングといったスキルの指導は難しい。この論文では、中部地方の私立女子大学で英語を学ぶ21人の学生を対象に、非同期で行われた多聴（EL）プログラムについて説明する。学生は、筆者が提供したリストから少なくとも1つのオーディオまたはビデオリソースを選択し、21週間にわたりデジタルリスニングジャーナルを完成させるよう課題を行った。ジャーナルには、教材のタイトル、ウェブサイト情報、要約、リスニングの問題点、今後の目標などを記録するよう求めた。LMS上では、著者がフィードバックを提供することで、学生がリスニングの問題を解決し、自分のニーズに合ったリソースを選択できるようにした。この論文では、定期的にタスクをこなした3人の学生の経験を検証する。彼女たちのリスニングプロセスを理解するために、半構造化インタビューとジャーナル、提出物を組み合わせて分析に使用した。彼女らの体験談は、リスニングのスキルがどのように練習されているかについての洞察をもたらし、授業外の活動としてELをそれぞれの文脈で導入したいと考える教育者にとって関心の高いものであろう。

Keywords

extensive listening, teacher feedback, metacognition, journal, LMS
多聴、教師からのフィードバック、メタ認知, ジャーナル、LMS

Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing governmental mandates to conduct class online, the traditional method of language instruction using textbooks, CDs, or handouts became almost impossible. In Japanese universities, online learning meant fully asynchronous efforts conducted using learning management systems (LMS), such as manaba (https://manaba.jp) or Moodle (https://moodle.org), or some kind of hybrid course in which webtools such as Microsoft Teams or the video conferencing software Zoom were also used. Not only were teachers and students separated physically, but the digital divide meant all of us had to get used to paperless, digital ways of learning that were unfamiliar, slow, and excruciatingly frustrating at times. The pandemic years were not easy for anyone; however, this period offered an opportunity for both teachers and students to try new ways of learning.

Faced with this situation, my department at a Japanese university struggled with how to organize a listening class that would circumvent technical issues yet also be rewarding for

the student and easily managed by the teacher. Initially, we decided to have the students watch and summarize a TED video (https://www.ted.com) weekly under the assumption that we would be back in the classroom soon and face-to-face classes would resume as usual. But as we found, COVID cases rose, and in the end, classes remained online. I felt we needed to devise better ways to cope with learning online. Our students seemed to struggle with TED videos, and in many cases the task did not seem to be within their grasp. For example, some students submitted "summaries" that consisted of passages taken verbatim from the transcripts. Any input I gave about writing summaries did not seem to help. At this point, I decided to revamp the assignment, so I looked into extensive listening (EL) as a possible solution.

The Case for Extensive Listening

Extensive listening can be likened to extensive reading (ER; Waring, 2008). In both pursuits, learners are exposed regularly to a large volume of language. Also, learners are encouraged to choose texts that are interesting to them. ER and EL differ in important ways, however. First, while it is recommended that the level of text be equal to or slightly above comprehensibility for ER, due to the ephemeral nature of the act of listening, researchers have found that aural texts that are equal to or below a learner's listening ability contribute more to learning (Waring, 2008). In addition, when practicing EL, the use of multimodal scaffolds, in which learners use transcripts while listening, is recommended (Ivone & Renandya, 2019). Another option is to have learners practice "extensive viewing" and make use of video resources as well (Renandya & Jacobs, 2016). When viewing, learners can utilize subtitles and captions to improve comprehension (Ivone & Renandya, 2019). These multimodal scaffolds are not generally used with pure ER because the written text is readily available for the learner to refer to as they read.

Like ER, extensive listening provides many learning opportunities for students. First, regular extensive listening practice promotes the development of listening fluency (Chang, 2018). Also, listening to samples from different speakers of English helps increase familiarity and comprehension of a variety of accents (Ivone & Renandya, 2019). In addition, choosing texts that are similar in topic will increase the number of meetings with new or unfamiliar vocabulary within a content area (Ivone & Renandya, 2019). Finally, using the myriad of options available online instead of sample audio tracks included with a textbook can have positive effects on learners' motivation for developing their language proficiency (Honarzad & Ressaei, 2019). EL is a flexible learning activity as it can be used in or outside the classroom and in combination with aids such as subtitles or transcripts, speed controls, or games and quizzes created by website developers.

EL offered the flexibility I felt was necessary for both the students and me. As a new teacher in my department without any first-hand knowledge of the students and their abilities, I believed that EL would allow each individual student to work at their own pace and level. Additionally, if the students used a journal to document their progress and any problems, I could offer feedback tailored to their needs on the LMS. Through this individualized and supportive process, I thought I would be able to teach the students how to listen and encourage them to think about what they were doing and why, thereby helping them develop a metacognitive stance to their learning based on their individual levels.

When researching the role of metacognition in learning, I found that it is considered to be a driver of successful learning (e.g., Anderson, 2008; Chamot, 2008; Griffiths,

2008; Oxford, 2011). In fact, Chamot (2005) suggested the effective language learner is a "mentally active learner" and one who aggressively approaches study through metacognition (p. 115). For example, successful learners plan for study and allot time for it (e.g., Anderson, 2008; Wong & Nunan, 2011). Successful learners are also aware of different strategies (Chamot, 2008) and select those that are appropriate for a given task (Anderson, 2008; Ehrman et al., 2003). They tend to notice any problems that occur during a learning episode, such as a gap in knowledge or a mismatch of strategy in relation to a task, and address them effectively (Anderson, 2008; Chamot, 2008; Wong & Nunan, 2011). In the field of listening, Goh and Vandergrift (2022) emphasized metacognition as the driving force for any learner with a desire to improve. Thinking about these different perspectives, it seemed to me that if I had my learners practice EL with a journal and if I were to work closely alongside them by offering specific feedback on their progress to aid in their self-reflection process, I might be able to help them choose suitable listening resources themselves and give them tools to navigate other out-of-class listening experiences. In the end, EL with a focus on metacognitive awareness seemed to be a suitable task for learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this paper, I describe the process I used to introduce EL and highlight the stories of three prolific listeners who seemed to enjoy the task, made a habit of listening, and achieved some level of success that was meaningful for them. The purpose of this project was to explore how the learners approached the task and to see if the weekly journaling, combined with my feedback, contributed to a sense of autonomy for each learner.

Participants

The students who were chosen for this research project belonged to the Department of English Language and Literature at a small private women's university in central Japan. All three spoke Japanese as their first language and were members of my second-year Advanced Listening course, which met once weekly for 90 minutes during the 2021–22 academic year. They were 19-20 years old. I used the Oxford English Listening Level Test (https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/english-level-test/listening) to measure the students' listening levels during the first class. All three students began the project in April at a listening skill of CEFR level A2, pre-intermediate. For the posttest in December, they scored a higher level at B1, intermediate level. As far as their exposure to English outside of this project is concerned, the students were exposed to teacher-talk in English in other classes, in addition to mine. Two of the three participants, Hina (pseudonym) and Yue (pseudonym), listened to English frequently outside of their university classes. Hina regularly watched movies and TV shows in English a few times a month. She also used a mobile application called NativeCamp (https://nativecamp.co.jp/en/) weekly to practice speaking with an English-speaking teacher in real time. Yue frequently listened to TED talks and textbook tracks to practice pronunciation and intonation outside of class obligations. The third participant, Maki (pseudonym), confessed that her only focused listening practice occurred during my class. These three students were selected for this study because their scores on the tests improved; they demonstrated a steady consistency of journal entry completion; and they also submitted well above the minimum number of entries, thereby making them prime candidates for exploring the development of their listening skills and practices.

Procedure

Because this project occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, when it was unclear how the virus would affect the learning environment, I paid special attention to devising simple, easy-to-do tasks for students who may or may not have had much experience with computers and using English-language websites. The procedure for the listening journal task is explained in this section.

Listening Level Pretest and Posttest

In order to gauge the three students' levels of listening skill at the beginning of the course in April 2021, I used Oxford's online Listening Test. The students took the test a second time at the conclusion of the project in December 2021. Instructions were given in Japanese, and the students took the test individually, using their earphones and mobile phones during the class period. The 24-item test consists of six short listening passages, each followed by four multiple-choice comprehension questions.

The Listening Journal

After the initial listening test, I introduced the Listening Journal (LJ) assignment. I explained the process verbally during the course period and posted the details of the assignment on the school LMS. It is worth noting that after this initial in-person meeting in April, COVID forced classes to move online until mid-October, when classes shifted back into the classroom. For simplicity, I kept the entire LJ project on the LMS. In principle, the students were to do at least one LJ assignment a week, using a website I recommended, such as News in Levels (https://www.newsinlevels.com) or TED-Ed (https://ed.ted.com). The full list is included in Appendix A. I made a screencast to explain how to navigate each site and posted the videos on YouTube so the students could view them before completing the assignment. After watching an online video or, alternatively, listening to an online audio track, the students completed a one-page journal entry in English using a Word document template (see the model entry in Appendix B). The students submitted their weekly journal entries on the LMS for the entire LJ project. I asked the students to complete at least one journal entry a week for 12 weeks in the spring semester and 9 weeks in the fall semester to get credit for this portion of the course. However, I also encouraged them to complete as many LJ entries as possible in order to maximize their exposure to English. In addition, to ensure student engagement and accessibility, for the majority of the project, in 17 out of the 21 weeks, I introduced a new website with an accompanying screencast about how to use it. Students were free to choose videos from the new website that week, any previously recommended websites, or use another website of their choice. In Week 18 of the project, students were also given an opportunity to share other websites I did not introduce as an assignment on the LMS message board. Appendix A outlines the list of websites used for this project and other pertinent information, such as the format of resources (audio or video), any available means of support (e.g., subtitles, speed controls), and/or supplementary activities (e.g., comprehension tests or games).

Teacher Feedback

For the duration of the project, I acknowledged journal submissions on the university LMS every week by commenting in English in the ways described in Table 1. I gave individualized written feedback to each student every week for the two data collection periods. Nearing the end of the fall semester, based on their comments and performance

in the journals, I had a sense that the students now had a grasp of how to navigate the task, so I devised a document with a flowchart of my advice and ceased providing the individual feedback. I invited the students to use this document for the final 3 weeks of the project (see the "Problem-Solution" document in Appendix C). The purpose of this stage of the project was to encourage independence and provide students with an opportunity to use the implicit knowledge they had gained with my support to tackle any problems they encountered on their own. They could also use the document if necessary to decide what action to take.

Table 1. *Teacher Feedback*

Semester	Week	Teacher Feedback
Spring (April–July)	1–4	Further instruction was given about how to use the journal if it seemed a student misunderstood what to do. Brief comments were given about the chosen video to create a friendly student-teacher relationship.
	5–11	Based on the problems reported in the log, specific advice was given. The number of completed journals was noted.
	12	The number of completed journal entries was noted.
Fall (September–December)	13–17	Based on the problems reported in the log, specific advice was given. The number of completed journals was noted.
	18	Students recommended resources in the LMS message board.
	19–21	The number of completed journal entries was noted. Students independently used the "Problem-Solution" document to understand listening weaknesses and make informed, self-reflective choices about which videos to use in the future.

Data Collection Instruments and Analysis

Organization of the Listening Journal

To understand the learners' experiences of EL, I asked students to complete a listening journal (LJ) using Word, and submit their entries on the LMS. The LJ had two components. First, similar to the journals devised by Bibby (2020) and Gönülal (2020), I asked the students to document practical aspects such as the date of completion, which website was used, the video title and level, a short summary, and to note any new vocabulary they encountered. In addition, like Schmidt (2016) and Chen (2016), I also wanted to encourage the students to think about their listening study metacognitively, so I included a section in which they indicated any listening obstacles by choosing the corresponding issue from a selection of options listed in Table 2. The learners could also indicate they experienced no trouble (option 1) and provide another listening difficulty if the designated items didn't fit their experience (option 7). The learners also responded to an open-ended item asking them to surmise their goals for the following week. A copy of a model LJ entry is included in Appendix B.

Table 2. *Possible Listening Problems*

Options	Description
1	I had no problems understanding the video.
2	I didn't know a lot of the vocabulary.
3	I couldn't understand the speaker's accent.
4	I could understand the words but not the full meaning of the content.
5	The speed was too fast.
6	I was not familiar with the topic at all.
7	Other (Please explain.)

During the data analysis phase, I used several methods to understand the learners' listening patterns. First, I used the submission data on the LMS to understand how frequently the students practiced EL. Second, using the journals themselves, I was able to compile frequency totals for the websites used and the type of problem that was encountered. Finally, for the open-ended item in which I asked the students to set goals for the following week's journal assignment, I reviewed the students' textual responses, identified 21 themes, and coded them accordingly. Table 3 lists the 21 goals identified by the three students.

Table 3. *Goals Identified Over the 21-Week Period*

Goal	Hina	Maki	Yue
1. accent	1	2	1
2. change level	18	25	5
3. change website	1	2	0
4. comprehension goal	2	1	1
5. concentration	0	1	0
6. content focus	4	8	3
7. do my best	1	0	0
8. make no changes to process	16	12	11
9. increase time on task	28	23	21
10. increase variety	1	1	1
11. longer tracks	1	3	0
12. mid-task change	0	2	0
13. understand in one take	5	7	4
14. pass test quiz	4	0	0
15. repeat task	0	1	0
16. speed goal	2	2	1
17. change strategy	2	3	0
18. study grammar	2	2	2
19. transfer to other skill	1	3	1
20. understand without support	5	3	0
21. vocabulary	13	11	11

My Feedback

Following each submission period, I scanned the journals and noted any problems and goals, crafted individualized feedback for each student, and compiled my comments in an Excel file to upload into the school LMS. Each comment was in English and between 1–3 sentences long. I uploaded the majority of the feedback before the following week's submission due date to help students choose future resources. At the end of the project, I then downloaded all the comments from the LMS and affixed them to a printed version of each student's journal for analysis. During this stage, I was looking for evidence the students were reading and utilizing my advice to make changes to their listening strategies, and if so, how.

Interviews

At the end of the project, I invited the three target students to speak with me about their experiences. Two interviews were conducted on Zoom (Yue and Maki) and one was conducted in person on campus (Hina). The interviews were recorded and lasted about 30 minutes. The main language in each case was Japanese. The interview followed a semi-structured format to allow for some flexibility to discuss related ideas more deeply (Mackey & Gass, 2016). The core interview questions are listed in Appendix D. All three students were compensated for their time with a small gift. To analyze this portion of the data, after the interviews had been conducted, I reviewed the conversations, noted important points that illuminated the students' experiences with the journal, and translated their responses into English myself. An L1 Japanese speaker confirmed the accuracy of my translations. For this data collection method and all previously mentioned, I obtained the students' permission to use the data for research purposes.

Results and Discussion

In this section, I will narrate the results from the interviews I conducted with the three target students chosen for this research project.

Interview Participant 1: Hina

Of the 17 resources I recommended, Hina used 12 but favored Listen a Minute (22 entries) and Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab (15 entries). She wrote a total of 53 entries over the academic year, submitting a minimum of one entry a week but sometimes as many as seven. As far as how Hina coped with her chosen resources, it seems she encountered minimal difficulties with comprehension and reported *I had no trouble understanding the video* 39 times. She documented 11 problems in total throughout the period, with *I didn't understand the full meaning of the audio* (6 instances), *I didn't know a lot of vocabulary* (3 instances) and *The speed was too fast* (2 instances). As for goals, she reported 107 goals in total, spanning 18 kinds, with the following four being the most salient: She indicated a desire to *increase her time on task* 28 times, she decided to *change the level* of the video 18 times and *continue her current strategy* 16 times, and finally, she reported a desire to *study vocabulary* 13 times.

When cross-checking my written feedback with Hina's performance, and goal-setting practices, there was evidence that she seemed to be reading my comments and reflecting on her approach. For example, in response to her Week 4 entry, in which she recorded *no problems* with a Level 4 Breaking News English track, I replied, "If you thought Level 4 was too easy, please listen to a more difficult video." The following week, she listened to

both Level 5 and Level 6 videos and noted that the number of unfamiliar vocabulary items increased with the Level 6 video.

Another pivotal moment occurred in Week 8. She started using Listen a Minute (LAM) and recording her comprehension quiz score in the goal portion of the journal, often remarking that she hoped to improve her score the following week. In the interview, when I asked about her general goal throughout the LJ project, she mentioned that she wanted to speak English and improve her TOEIC score in order to get a job in the airline industry. So, it is understandable that scoring high on the LAM comprehension quizzes would be motivating for her to listen more and more, which she demonstrated by using the quizzes 17 times over the following 4 weeks.

In Week 11, I suggested to Hina that LAM might be too easy for her, as she had indicated time and time again that she had no trouble with the content. I encouraged her to try a different website to challenge herself. In the final week of the spring term (Week 12), Hina tried out two different websites, Storyline Online and Talk English. Her comment about Talk English showed strong metacognition about her listening process. She wrote, "This video is too short for me, so I try to watch longer videos. However, first time is with subtitles while second time is without subtitles. These are my favorite point" (Week 12 entry). At this point in the project, she could communicate her desire to increase time on task and also detail specific aspects of her approach to listening, both of which indicated she was aware of her needs and understood what tools she could use and how they suited her.

Upon returning to classes in the fall, Hina had another pivotal moment. During Week 13, she used LAM again but also commented in the journal, "I choose the more difficult website for improving my English skills" (Week 13 entry), demonstrating self-awareness that the LAM videos are not challenging. I corroborated this feeling and told her directly, "Perhaps Listen a Minute is too easy for you? You had no trouble with it three times .... Choose a more difficult website please." The following week, she started using Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab, tried three different levels, and reflected on her ability to comprehend all three in the "goals" section of the journal. Hina then settled on the advanced level by saying she thought it "suits [her]" and would use it the following week (Week 14 entry). In the interview, she explained a bit more about this process: "If I chose a difficult one [and decided] it was impossible, I lowered the level and continued. When I get used to it, there is nothing to listen to, so I reverted back to the higher level." When Hina stated that there was nothing to listen to, this possibly indicates that she had acquired the language; the fact that she then chose to increase the difficulty shows she understood that listening to tracks that are at or below her level would not help her with new acquisition. Finally, when asked if she had any advice for other students practicing EL with a journal, she said, "Try different websites, [and] find one that suits you. Continue to use that website and increase your level. If you use many websites, you will get confused so you should concentrate on one."

Interview Participant 2: Yue

The second student, Yue, wrote 62 entries in total and, like Hina, tended to submit one a week with occasional spurts of increased productivity. In the first week of the project, for example, she submitted 11 entries. She did not use a variety of sites and committed to only five of the 17 I recommended. She seemed to enjoy News in Levels the most, using

it two-thirds of the time (42 entries). She sporadically used Breaking News English (11 entries) and TEDed (seven entries).

As far as her experience with the aural texts, Yue reported *I had no trouble understanding the video* (47 times) most often. She mentioned having trouble with *vocabulary* (13 times), and then *problems understanding the full meaning* (2 times). She indicated nine kinds of goals, with 62 reported in total. *Increase time on task* was reported the most frequently (21 times), then *continue with my current strategy* and *study vocabulary* (both reported 11 times).

An examination of Yue's performance and goals compared with my comments revealed a few points of interest. First, I noted that she wrote she wanted to learn more words but never translated the words into Japanese in the journal or indicated in the goals section of the journal when or how she would tackle this task. In the interview, I asked her about her vocabulary study. Yue admitted she never studied the vocabulary directly. She simply said that "if they were words I might use in my daily life I decided to remember them." When pressed on this point, she could not explain any further.

I also noted that she tended to use News in Levels heavily and encouraged her to try out other sites. Her website choice for the following week was usually the same. For the most part, I felt my feedback was ignored except in one instance: I had noticed that she seemed to have copied a summary verbatim from the script on the website and told her so. In the interview, when I asked if she thought my advice was helpful, she enthusiastically agreed and mentioned this incident, saying she had made an effort to write the summary in her own words the following weeks. However, in the interview, when asked directly if she had used my feedback, of the three participants, she said that she reviewed my advice the most frequently. This was slightly surprising, since I had not seen any indication that she was reading or reacting to my written feedback in any way as I mentioned previously. The other two students admitted they read it immediately after it was posted on the LMS; however, Yue said she read the previous week's advice a second time before beginning the following week's assignment. She also said the "Problem-Solution" document I provided was helpful both for the journal assignment and other listening she did on her own. The fact that she did not seem to change her habits or write a specific goal to address a problem is a bit mysterious but perhaps indicates that she had a command of her listening practice that was internalized or unconscious.

Furthermore, during the interview, Yue was able to explain her listening process in detail. First, she listened to the track and then practiced saying the phrases. Her goal was to improve her speaking ability and become trilingual. (Her first languages are Japanese and Korean, and she wanted to add a third by joining the English department.) Yue stated that that goal was not necessarily related to any kind of career goal but instead, "If I can speak well it'll be a strength, and I'm in the English department so it's a good chance to speak properly, so that's why I am studying."

Finally, when asked what she would advise future students to do to succeed with this task, she said, "Don't do it once a week. If you do it more than once a week it affects your TOEIC score. My TOEIC improved. If you not only do the assignment but also make a daily habit of listening to English, you will improve." Yue's advice seemed to have paid off, as she announced her TOEIC score had improved by 200 points over the course of the year.

Interview Participant 3: Maki

The third participant, Maki, wrote 45 journal entries over the 21 weeks of the project, maintaining a consistent submission rate of twice weekly. When asked about this pattern during the interview, Maki said that she had made a commitment to this rate of submission. She also had a defined schedule for doing the task. She did one entry during the actual class time and then another at another time. Unlike Hina and Yue, Maki was very good about setting a time to commit to the task regularly. At the beginning of the project, she tried out in succession the websites I recommended, but in the end, used nine resources in total, favoring News in Levels (21 entries). She used English Listening Lesson Library Online (ELLLO) seven times and Breaking News English four times. Maki reported 43 difficulties when listening, with *I had trouble understanding the full meaning of the audio* (21 times), *I had trouble understanding vocabulary* (13 times) and *The speed was too fast* (two times) as the top three. She indicated *I had no trouble understanding the video* 69 times. She reported 112 goals (19 discrete kinds) in total. The most reported goal was to *change level* (25 times), then *increase time on task* (23 times), followed by *continue with her current strategy* (12 times), and finally, she felt she should *study vocabulary* (11 times).

Examining her LJ comments and my feedback, one unique point about Maki was that her level of listening comprehension seemed to fall between two different levels. For the first 10 weeks of the project, I responded to this issue by encouraging her to move up or down a level initially, but eventually suggested she mix the two by saying, "That's great that you noticed that the lower-intermediate video was too easy for you and so you tried a more difficult video. It seems you had trouble with the intermediate one, so perhaps continue listening to the lower-intermediate ones for a while and add in a few intermediate ones that you are interested in." In the fall, weeks later, she seemed to understand this advice and responded that she would "lower the level and gradually challenge difficult levels" (Week 14 entry). Exchanges of this nature continued for the remaining weeks of the project. During the interview, we spoke about my feedback and its usefulness. Like Yue, Maki seemed to have internalized the advice I wrote and the advice on the "Problem-Solution" document (Appendix C) and by the end of the project did not need to refer to the document to proceed with her listening practice.

Finally, in the same way as Hina and Yue, Maki also improved her score on the Oxford Online Listening Test from CEFR A2 to B1. However, when asked about any improvements in her TOEIC score, Maki said there was not a vast difference, but that it was gradually rising. When asked if this was due to the LJ assignment, she said that she listened to English more because of the assignment, so it was helpful. When asked about her listening process, she was able to explain her strategy immediately. She said she listened and took notes once, read the transcript to confirm its meaning, and then listened again, sometimes as many as five times. As far as advice for future students is concerned, Maki said, "If you only listen once, you won't understand a lot of the tracks, so you should listen to many repeatedly. If you only do the journal once a week you won't improve. Do it two to three times a week." Maki thus seemed to credit her success to this systematic approach.

Discussion

The main takeaway from examining the extensive listening practices of these three students is that learning to listen is not a universal process but rather a deeply personal one. Working alongside the teacher and building their metacognitive awareness, all three

students were able to shape their approaches and succeed in several ways, including but not limited to an improved TOEIC score. All three, aided by the LJ task, created a listening habit and seemed to understand how to manipulate the tools offered on the website to help themselves. All three could identify and explain their approach to choosing and utilizing videos and audio files. Each student used the resources in different ways that were unique to them. As demonstrated in their journal entries, my weekly feedback seemed to be helpful; however, I think that perhaps my advice confirmed their previous knowledge of strategies for choosing videos, or perhaps over time, the advice was internalized and eventually woven into their implicit knowledge. In any event, the Listening Journal project seems to have served its purpose and provided a reason for students to practice the skill of listening outside of the classroom, for the most part without teacher input, and to learn how to navigate choosing online resources in a purposeful way.

Future Considerations

While these three students seem to have each had a successful experience with EL using a digital journal, there are some issues to consider for future classes. First, using the LMS, manaba, to collect journal entries was effective because the LMS organized the journal submissions by each individual student and then kept them in the Cloud (i.e., saved online). The students and I could all access the journals easily and did not have to worry about keeping track of a paper journal, which we might have used in pre-COVID times. Also, feedback could be given quickly and easily by entering comments on an Excel spreadsheet and uploading it into the LMS system. Unfortunately, however, the Excel spreadsheet allowed for only one comment per student, so this meant there was one space to comment about the journal assignment regardless of whether the student had submitted one or seven entries. In this case, the feedback may have been entirely misconstrued by the student, as it was impossible to understand to which entry it referred. Finally, concerning the practice of giving feedback itself, regardless of the mode of execution, I found it difficult to keep up with the amount of feedback required per student per week. For this project, I had a total of 21 students, so providing weekly feedback for all of them was quite time intensive. In this case, it might be prudent to introduce a "peer" element to the project as suggested by several researchers, including Chen (2016) and Renandya and Jacobs (2016). Allowing students to support each other in their EL journeys via Zoom video conferencing might have provided more or different kinds of support that I, as their teacher, simply could not give due to time constraints.

Looking back at the students' experience with EL and Listening Journals, I feel that each student had ample opportunity to explore the vast range of online resources available on the internet and make good use of the time we spent learning during the unprecedented circumstances caused by COVID-19 pandemic. The three students I spoke with for this paper reported that doing extensive listening and using listening journals had been a largely positive experience, which was a satisfying outcome for me as their teacher.

Author Bio

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Review Process

This paper was open-reviewed by Jo Mynard and Ted O'Neill of the *Learner Development Journal* Review Network and by the Journal Steering Group. *(Contributors have the option of open or blind review.)*

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Appendix A

List of Websites Recommended Each Week to Students

Week	Resource	Format	Level	Features
1	News in Levels https://www.newsinlevels.com	Audio	Levels 1-3	Transcript, difficult vocabulary defined in English
2	English Central https://www.englishcentral.com/browse/videos	Video	Beginner A1 (level 1 & 2), intermediate A2/B1 (level 3 & 4), advanced B2-C2 (levels 5-7)	Personalized dictation exercises and vocabulary study, ability to pause after each line, speaking practice activities, speed controls, rewind/FF
3	TED-Ed https://ed.ted.com	Video	Advanced	English CC, other language subtitles, speed controls, rewind/FF
4	English Listening Lesson Library Online (ELLLO) https://www.elllo.org	Audio/Video	6 levels: low beginner (CEFR A1), mid-beginner (A1), high beginner (A2), low-intermediate (B1), mid-intermediate (B2), high- intermediate (C1), advanced (C2)	Transcript, grammar explanation, keywords with English definition and pronunciation, comprehension quiz; English CC, speed controls
5	Breaking News English https://breakingnewsenglish.com	Audio	6 levels, 1-6	6 speeds; online activities (e.g., dictation)
6	Learn English with TV Series YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKgpamMlm872zkGDcBJHYDg	Video	Advanced	Free PDF lesson with a transcript, vocabulary definitions, grammar explanation, cultural notes
7	The Fable Cottage https://www.thefablecottage.com	Audio/Video	Advanced	English subtitles, speed controls

8	Listen a Minute https://listenaminute.com/index.html	Audio	Easy	Transcript, games: dictation, word jumbles etc.
9	Voice of America https://learningenglish.voanews.com	Audio/ Video	Advanced	None
10	BBC English https://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/	Video	4 levels: low-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, advanced	Transcript, listening comprehension questions, vocabulary and grammar lessons
11	Talk English https://www.talkenglish.com	Audio	3 levels: basic, intermediate, advanced	Transcript, listening comprehension quiz
12	Storyline Online https://storylineonline.net	Video	Advanced	English subtitles, Japanese subtitles, speed controls
13	British Council Learn English Podcasts https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/general-english/audio-series/podcasts	Audio	Advanced	Transcript, listening comprehension exercises
14	Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab www.esl-lab.com	Audio	Easy, intermediate, difficult	Transcript, listening comprehension questions
15	BBC Learning English Drama https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02pc9s1	Audio	Advanced	Speed controls
16	BBC Radio 6-minute English https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02pc9tn	Audio	Advanced	Speed controls
17	BBC Radio The English We Speak https://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/features/the-english-we-speak_2022	Audio	Advanced	Transcript
18	Student recommendations			
19-21	None			

Appendix B

Model Listening Journal

Video title	
Coronavirus in Royal Family	
Video source / level	
News in Levels, level 1	
Video summary (1-3 sentences)	
This video is about Prince Charles and his family. The prince had coronavirus and was in quarantine in Scotland. His mother, the queen, stays at Windsor Castle to stay healthy.	
Did you learn any new vocabulary?	
Eldest: 一番上　　quarantine: 検疫 illness: 病気	
Why did you choose this video?	
I'm interested in news about the British royal family but also I'm worried about Coronavirus so I watch news about it every day.	
Did you have trouble understanding the video? Why? Write the number(s). 1) I had no problems understanding the video. 2) I didn't know a lot of the vocabulary. 3) I couldn't understand speaker's accent. 4) I could understand the words but not the full meaning of the content. 5) The speed was too fast. 6) I was not familiar with the topic at all. 7) Other (Please explain).	4, 5
What is your goal for next week?	
I want to listen to at least one video every day. Also, I think I'll try an elllo.org video next week.	

Appendix C

Problem-Solution Document

<table>
<tr><th>Number</th><th>Problem</th><th colspan="3">Gretchen's advice for next time</th></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td>I had no problems understanding the video.</td><td colspan="3">Choose a more difficult video.</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>I didn't know a lot of the vocabulary.</td><td rowspan="6">Turn on the closed captions/ English subtitles and …

Read and listen at the same time

Listen without subtitles.</td><td>Take a memo about new vocabulary, use a dictionary to look them up, and try to find another video about the same topic.</td><td rowspan="6">If you answered many options 2~6, choose an easier (lower level) video next time.</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>I couldn't understand speaker's accent.</td><td>Listen to another video by a speaker with the same type of accent (Possibly the speaker is the same nationality but not necessarily …)</td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td>I could understand the words but not the full meaning of the content.</td><td>Take a memo about difficult phrases and look them up in a dictionary. Try to find similar example phrases.</td></tr>
<tr><td>5</td><td>The speed was too fast.</td><td>Use the settings to slow down the tempo or use an app such as https://audiotrimmer.com/audio-speed-changer/.</td></tr>
<tr><td>6</td><td>I was not familiar with the topic at all.</td><td>Take a memo about content keywords/phrases, look them up using a dictionary and try to find another video on the same topic to listen to next time.</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix D

Interview questions

1. Did you practice listening in other classes? Which ones? How do you do it?
2. What is your favorite way to practice listening to English outside of class?
3. How did you choose a listening resource?
    a. Did you use only one listening format (video/audio)? Why?
    b. What was challenging about choosing the resource?
    c. Did you ever start a video and then stop and choose another? Why?
4. How did you use the video features or support features (example: subtitles etc)?
    a. Did you use the English subtitles?
    b. Did you use the Japanese subtitles?
    c. Did you adjust the speed?
5. Did you listen to the track more than once?
6. Did you do any of the games and quizzes included on the websites?
7. Did you ever talk about the journal with classmates? Why/Why not?
8. Did you read my advice? Why or why not?
    a. When did you read it? (as soon as I posted it/ before doing the next journal…)
    b. Did you refer to the advice I gave you in the past at all?
    c. Do you think my advice was helpful? How? Why/why not?
    d. How can it be improved?
    e. Did you refer to the "Problem-Solution" document in the final weeks of the project?
9. What was challenging about this assignment?
10. What advice do you have for future students who do the journal?

PAPER

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 *Learn Independently* 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 Electrogenerated 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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Review Process

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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.
2.

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.		
2.		
3.		

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

PAPER

A Case Study of Collaborative Online International Learning Between Finnish and Japanese University Students: Learning and Using English Beyond the Classroom

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This paper aims to examine how a pair of Japanese and Finnish university students collaborate through an original Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project which was introduced as a completely out-of-class activity. Using a case study approach, I focus on the Japanese student's reflection for an in-depth understanding of her experience of the COIL project over 4 months. The analysis is based on the data collected through an interview and her actual interchange of email messages and letters with her Finnish partner student. The results show (a) that the Japanese student embarked on the project with both expectations of intercultural communication and anxieties about her English proficiency, and (b) that the two students co-constructed their own communication styles as they shared personal information and developed empathy and rapport with each other. I also found (c) that the Japanese student's obsession with formality and accuracy as well as recognition of her lack of communicative English contributed to the gradual decrease in the number of email messages. However, (d) this helped her to realize her needs and maintain, even enhance, her motivation to study English. The study also sheds light on the necessity of providing well-balanced opportunities for students to learn and use both formal and informal English in order to encourage better communication.

本稿は、授業外活動として独自に導入した「国際協働オンライン学習プロジェクト」に於ける日本とフィンランドの大学生ペアの協働の過程を探究する。ケーススタディの手法を用いて、同プロジェクトに4ヵ月間参加した日本の学生のインタビューと実際のやりとり（eメールと手紙）を分析した結果、(a)日本の学生は異文化交流への期待とともに、自身の英語力に対する不安も抱きながらプロジェクトに参加し、(b)日本とフィンランドの学生はお互いに個人情報を共有し、心を通わせ信頼関係を築きながら自分たちのコミュニケーションの形式を協働的に創り上げた。また、(c)日本の学生の形式と正確さへの執着および英語力の不安により、eメールや手紙の送信回数が徐々に減る傾向が見られたが、(d)同時にそれにより自身のニーズを認識し、英語学習のモチベーションの維持ひいては向上に結びついたと認識していることが明らかになった。さらに本研究の結果、より良いコミュニケーションを促すために、フォーマルに加えてカジュアルな英語表現の学習および使用の機会の必要性も示された。

Keywords

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), out-of-class learning, Japanese and Finnish university students, learner autonomy, case study
国際協働オンライン学習、授業外学習、日本とフィンランドの大学生、学習者の自律、ケーススタディ

The importance of collaboration has been emphasized in the field of education, and various types of collaborative learning have been widely introduced in the classroom at different institutional levels (e.g., Ashwell et al., 2014; Hmelo-Silver et al., 2013). Regardless of disciplinary subject area, a majority of the collaborative activities are carried out locally, mainly within the same class (e.g., Shibley & Zimmaro, 2002) and between or among several classes (e.g., Hayashi & Banno, 2019), while others are designed to integrate global perspectives enabling students to interact with peers in different countries (Takeda et al., 2022). Although tandem learning has been widely used in language teaching and learning for a long time (e.g., Menard-Warwick et al., 2013; Wakisaka, 2018), *Collaborative Online International Learning* (COIL) is a new pedagogical approach that connects students in different countries and provides opportunities for them to interact with peers. COIL

is generally embedded in the formal curriculum and has been introduced mainly at the university level (Ikeda, 2020). In Japan, an increasing number of universities (e.g., Kansai University, Nanzan University, and Sophia University) have introduced the COIL approach, and those universities have embarked on this global-oriented project. Many information and communication technology (ICT) tools such as Skype, Flipgrid, and email can be used for different purposes within COIL projects, but the primary purpose of COIL is to enhance intercultural competencies and digital skills while students are engaged in project-based learning. In many cases, COIL has been integrated as part of course activities in the formal learning environment, but it is seldom introduced beyond the classroom. In this research study, I focus on the introduction of COIL project in out-of-class settings. Using a case study approach, I examine how a Japanese university student and her Finnish partner collaborated over 4 months. I also analyze the Japanese student's reflection on her experience of the COIL project.

Defining Collaborative Online International Learning

COIL employs various types of ICT tools and enables learners to engage in collaborative learning across countries. It was first introduced at the State University of New York in 2004. In Japan, Kansai University was the first to participate in the COIL global network in 2014 and has since been appointed as the leader of COIL projects in Japan, where a total of 13 universities have been selected to introduce COIL to classes at their own institutions.

A number of research studies on COIL have been conducted in recent years. Kodama (2018) reports on her work with a COIL project at San Jose State University, California, where she incorporated a COIL approach into her Japanese course to provide opportunities for students to collaborate internationally with Japanese students in Kagoshima University to learn about Japanese culture. What was unique about this project is that it included synchronous sessions and was carefully designed so that students could develop their critical thinking skills as well. At the end of the project, the reflections of the students from San Jose State University were overall positive, and some students maintained close relationships with Japanese students even after the course ended.

Kato et al. (2020) conducted a project-based foreign language learning project between Shizuoka University and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. They had students communicate via Skype and collaboratively create their own homepages. Likewise, Sawasaki and Yokono (2020) introduced a similar project for their Japanese and American university students to give presentations in English (Japanese students) and in Japanese (U.S. students) based on the information they exchanged about their universities and university life. These two studies used both the students' output performance and questionnaires to analyze and compare student cognitive and affective variables before and after the project. The results showed that the students improved their speaking and writing skills (cognitive aspects), and their intrinsic motivation (affective component) was also enhanced.

Although various benefits of COIL have been identified in previous research, many of these studies have been conducted only in formal learning environments, and few studies have focused on out-of-class settings. Moreover, previous accounts have tended not to examine in detail the processes of interaction for pairs and groups of students. To fill this gap, the current research study was carried out within an original COIL project that was completely based on out-of-class activity. In this study, I examine closely the processes of

interaction between a pair of Japanese and Finnish university students who took part in the project.

Narrative Inquiry

This study looks in detail at the narrative of a Japanese university student (Yuki) together with her actual exchanges of email messages, a physical card, and a letter with her Finnish partner (Judy) to explore the following issues (both names are pseudonyms):

1. How did Yuki reflect on the feelings she had before joining the project?
2. How did Yuki and Judy collaborate on their mutual out-of-class learning?
3. What problems and challenges did Yuki face during the project?
4. What kind of change did the project bring about for Yuki, if any?

Methods

A Finnish and Japanese COIL Project

An original COIL project was designed by a Finnish colleague at the University of Helsinki and myself and introduced as a completely out-of-class activity in October 2019. The project's primary purpose was to provide both Finnish and Japanese students opportunities to interact with each other through whatever communication tools they chose. My colleague and I could easily imagine that students have different interests and expectations about these kinds of projects, so the purpose of the interaction was not specified at the beginning. Each instructor told the students about the COIL project, and those who wanted to participate in the project signed up for it. Students were encouraged to choose whatever activity they thought was best, such as book discussions, English chat time, or a pen-pal program. Participation in the project was voluntary, and 20 students (10 Finnish and 10 Japanese) showed interest. The students were paired based on their English proficiency levels and their preferred means of communication and activities. They were later informed of their partners' names and email addresses. Throughout the process, the instructors did not intervene in any of the communication between the student pairs, in order to understand whether and how students collaborate on their mutual out-of-class learning without scaffolding from instructors.

Participants

Purposive sampling was selected to examine the Finnish and Japanese COIL project. Out of the 10 pairs, the pair of Yuki and Judy, her Finnish partner, was selected because they successfully exchanged messages and engaged in the project over 4 months. Yuki was a third-year Japanese student majoring in economics. When she was a second-year student, she had enrolled in a special English program that the university offers exclusively for students who have high English proficiency levels as well as a strong desire to develop their English language skills and intercultural understanding. As a representative of the university, Yuki was also sent to Malaysia and stayed there for 1 week to participate in an internship program in summer 2019. Similarly, Judy was a third-year university student, and her majors were mathematics and biology. Although both of them were in the same year, Judy was 2 years older than Yuki.

In this study, my particular focus was on Yuki, who took my elective English course for one semester. Through looking closely at her interactions with Judy, I expected that I would examine the details of her out-of-class learning experiences. I also hoped to

understand better the relationship between her in-class and out-of-class learning through analyzing her reflections in the COIL project.

Communication Timeline

Their interaction started with Judy's email message to Yuki on October 21, 2019, and both Yuki and Judy communicated regularly until February 5, 2020. Their communication tools varied, but their primary means of communication was email. They also exchanged a physical card and a letter, and they had 14 exchanges in total (see Table 1 for details).

Table 1. *Interchange Between Yuki and Judy (October, 2019–February, 2020)*

No.	Date	Sender	Communication Tool	Word Count
1	October 21 2019	Judy	Email message	114
2	October 24	Yuki	Email message	161
3	October 30	Judy	Email message	215
4	November 21	Yuki	Email message	134
5	November 27	Judy	Email message	255
6	December 2	Yuki	Email message	134
7	December 3	Judy	Email message	83
8	December 5	Yuki	Email message with a photo of a Christmas light display	51
9	December 11	Judy	Email message with a photo of a Christmas light display	84
10	December 17	Yuki	Email message	52
11	December 20	Yuki	Letter	81
12	December 25	Judy	Email message with a photo of animals	202
13	January 8 2020	Yuki	Email message	118
14	February 5	Judy	Letter	227

Data Collection

This research was exploratory in nature and employed a case study approach. More specifically, it was designed as a single-case study "to gain in-depth understanding replete with meaning for the subject, focusing on process rather than outcome, on discovery rather than confirmation" (Burns, 2000, p. 460). With written consent from both Yuki and Judy, all of their actual exchanges through email messages, cards, and letters were used for the analysis.

In addition to the data from the exchanges between the two, in May 2021 I conducted an interview with Yuki to serve as a reflection point on her thinking and decision-making (see Appendix for the interview guide). There was a possibility that Yuki had continuously engaged in the COIL project with Judy even after the English course was over. The interview with Yuki was held online on May 8, 2021, one and a half years after the project had ended. By that time, she had already graduated from the university, and about two months had passed since she had started out her career path. The semi-structured 45-minute interview with open-ended questions was conducted in Japanese, and the

transcript of the data was translated into English by the author. With Yuki's agreement, the interview was video-recorded for further analysis.

Results

In this section, the results obtained regarding the narrative inquiries are explained with Yuki's comments extracted from the interview, as well as from her and her partner's actual interchanges.

Yuki's Reasons for Joining the COIL Project

Yuki had mainly two reasons to participate in the COIL project. One is that she wanted to go to Finland. She had had a chance to go to North European countries with her mother when she was a second-year high school student. However, the tour did not include Finland, but she had hoped to go there. The other reason was to improve her English skills. According to Yuki, she had started online English conversation lessons on her own and had taken the lessons on a regular basis for 1 year, but she had decided to quit in October 2019, which was exactly when the COIL project was announced:

> I could not enjoy the online English conversation lessons and was not motivated either, although I took the lesson only once or twice a week. I was about to hate English. I was about to be bad at and dislike English.… I had mixed feelings. I didn't want to quit, but the booking system for the online English conversation lessons was troublesome. Every time I took a lesson, I had to book in advance. The online English conversation lessons were conducted on a one-on-one basis, but it was like what we call a "formal class," and I followed a set of materials with a teacher.

In the above excerpt Yuki expresses her mixed feelings that she had motivation to learn English but was bothered with the booking system. Moreover, the lesson style, which she defines as a "formal class," indicates that it was not flexible nor open to improvisation, and it was set up as originally planned. Coincidentally, it was in October 2019 that I announced the COIL project between Finnish and Japanese students in some of my classes. It seems to have been good timing for Yuki, who was reluctant to continue the online conversation lessons that she had been taking.

Yuki's Expectations

Yuki acknowledges that her primary expectation was to make friends with her Finnish partner. When she talked about that, Yuki immediately referred to an international student from Indonesia that she met in her high school days:

> When I was a second-year high school student, one Indonesian student came to my high school as an exchange student. We got to know each other and I even went to visit her in Indonesia.… Also, I joined an internship program in Malaysia in summer 2019. Although I stayed there for just one week, I met many Malaysian people and even took a Malaysian couple I had met there around when they visited Japan for their honeymoon.

Given her intercultural experiences, it could be said that Yuki is confident when interacting with foreigners and can adjust herself to a new environment. She commented that she wanted to visit Finland and invite her Finnish partner from the project to Japan. She had a very clear expectation and could easily visualize that she would be able to maintain a close relationship with her Finnish partner even after the project, as she was

able to do with her other international friends. At the end of the interview, she briefly mentioned that she had wanted to improve her English skills through the project as well. However, her detailed explanation of intercultural communication clearly demonstrates that her expectations were focused more on the social aspects rather than the cognitive or linguistic ones. Thus, the COIL project would have been another chance for her to meet and get to know an international student from Finland.

Effect of the Lack of Confidence on Yuki's Formality

Yuki also had a concern that was based on her lack of confidence in her English skills:

> My main concern was about grammar, and I wondered if I could communicate with my partner with my limited knowledge of grammar. . . . As we had email exchange mainly, I focused on formality and tried my best to write messages formally.

Email messages are both formal and informal, and they are used differently according to the purposes and recipients. However, for Yuki, it is obvious that email writing is strongly associated with formality. Figures 1 and 2 show Yuki and Judy's interchanges in the first few exchanges.

As Yuki explains, the use of the title "Ms." and full name in the first few messages exemplify the formality that she was eager to seek. Although all the messages include emoticons, both the style and content of the messages demonstrate the formality that Yuki emphasized in the interview.

In the very first message, Judy took the initiative and started to negotiate with Yuki about how to proceed with the project by asking some questions. In response to this, Yuki answered the questions and also added her self-introduction at the end of her message. The inclusion of the self-introduction might have worked as an icebreaker for them, and their communication style gradually became less formal and more friendly. The formality was lessened in the fourth exchange when Yuki suggested that Judy address Yuki by her first name, and from the fifth exchange onwards, they were on a first-name basis with each other.

Moreover, another change is observed in Yuki's response to Judy's questions. Yuki separated her answers in a question-and-answer format rather than answering in paragraph form. Yuki clearly has considered her own answers as a formal and suitable way to answer Judy's questions, while in usual practice, this style would be considered to be awkward and unsuitable for an informal friendly manner.

According to Yuki, their initial contact started with the premise that they would send letters to each other. They had already had a mutual agreement and exchanged their home addresses at the early stage of their interchange, in the third and fourth entries respectively. Moreover, their questions became more personalized, and their interaction was intensified as their interaction continued. In the fourth entry, Yuki asked follow-up questions about Judy's future dream to be a teacher, and in response, Judy also connected Helsinki to Tokyo in the fifth entry. In this way, both Yuki and Judy gradually co-constructed their own communication style as they shared personal information, showed empathy, and their different life experiences resonated with each other.

【1】October 21, 2019

Dear Fukuda Yuki,

I'm writing to you because of my English course in university of Helsinki. I'm interested in penpal and I have heard that you are interested it too. Would you like to do this penpal via email or real writing letters? I think that letters could be nice and fun, but email is okay for me too. And second question is that what we want to discuss in these letters. I suggest that in the first letter we could tell something about ourselves like who are we and our hobbies, studies etc. What you think about this? 😊'

I'm looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Best regards

Judy Watson

University of XXXXX

【2】October 24, 2019

Dear Judy Watson,

Hi, My name is Yuki Fukuda.

I'm sorry for the late reply.

I was really looking forward to doing penpal.

I am really happy to contact to you.

I will answer the questions.

Would you like to do this penpal via email or real writing letters? I think that letters could be nice and fun, but email is okay for me too.

→I think so too. Letters are very nice

I have never sent letters to any other countries so I want to try it!

And next,

I will introduce myself.

I am 21 years old woman.

I am third year college student at XXXXX University.

My majoring is economics.

And my hobby is watching movies, cooking and doing KARATE.
I like MARVEL movies.
Recently, I watched JOKER.
My part time job is making cream puff.
I have doing KARATE for 6years.
Nice to meet you☺️

Could you tell me about yourself?🙂

Best regards

Yuki Fukuda

XXXXX University

Figure 1. First and Second Exchanges

【3】October 30, 2019

Hi Fukuda Yuki,

and thank you for your answer and it is nice to meet you too. 😊

I tell now something about myself:

> I'm 24 years old woman. I'm third year college student and I am completing my bachelor's degree this autumn. My major is mathematics and biology is my secondary subject. I'm studying in teacher training program so I'm going to be a subject teacher of math and biology. I'm interested in nature and I like to hike there. I like to watch movies and TV-series too. When I was a kid I played a piano and practiced cross-country skiing. Now I have a new hobby, horse riding. I also like sometimes go for a run or walk and sometimes I go to the gym.

I also give you my address, that you can write to me with real letters if you want to. So this is my name and address:

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

You can write to me for example what you want know about me or my country or if you want to tell me more about yourself and the topics you are interested in and ask questions and so on😊 I am so interested to hear you more! 😊

Best regards

Judy Watson

University of XXXXX

【4】November 21, 2019

Ms. Judy Watson

Good evening😊

Sorry late for replying.
I couldn't receive your mail😭

Please call me Yuki or Yukki.

I think it's easy to write my name.

Thank you for your introduction.
Will you became a teacher in the future?
That's so cool😳😳
Which age do you plan to teach?

And You have so many hobbies!
I like nature too.
My image is Helsinki has big nature!
I live in Tokyo so there are very little nature😢
I like to travel so I often go nature places.

I want to ask a lot of questions about your wealth of hobbies😆😀

Thanks for your address
I will send you a letter soon.

My home address:

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

I want to go Helsinki some day☺️

Sincerely,

Yuki Fukuda

Figure 2. Third and Fourth Exchanges

Yuki's Concern: Obsession With Accuracy

Both Yuki and Judy's first few interchanges demonstrate that they responded to each other within a few days and actively participated in the project. However, Yuki confesses that her obsession with accuracy remained strongly in her mind:

> It took time to write messages because I had to carefully check my English sentences again and again. I thought I should write proper English. . . . I felt sorry for Judy because I couldn't respond to her immediately. I even felt pressed.

The excitement and enjoyment that Yuki had at the beginning of the project were gradually transformed to pressure, and this affected the length of her messages, as can be seen in the eighth and ninth entries.

In the eighth entry, Yuki included a photo of a Christmas light display in Tokyo. In the same manner, Judy shared a photo of Christmas lights in Helsinki in the next exchange. Both of them seemed to increase a feeling of closeness by responding and even sharing the photos that they took; however, the length of their messages, especially Yuki's, started getting shorter from the seventh exchange onwards (see Table 1). It should note that Yuki wrote less than Judy in general, but Yuki's word count was 143 words on average from the first to sixth exchange. On the other hand, she wrote about 50 words in her eighth and 10th exchanges, which were the email exchanges. Yuki reflected on the interchange:

> I was getting busier because of job hunting. I was tempted to stop writing to [Judy]. . . . I said that the contributory factor was job hunting, but I might have been trying to make excuses for not writing to her due to job hunting. Because these were email messages, I thought I should write long messages. I have to respond to each question formally without any mistakes. That's why I took such an attitude.

As she talked through her COIL experiences, she admitted that she intentionally tried to attribute her infrequent contact with Judy to job hunting. However, her explanation revealed that she had a fixed image that her email messages should always be formal, lengthy, and error-free. Her strong consciousness of formality gradually forced her to lose enjoyment in communication, and her enthusiasm changed to pressure instead, resulting in her writing becoming shorter.

Yuki's Desire to Learn Casual Expressions

In spite of her strict consciousness towards accuracy, Yuki clearly said that she wanted to use casual English expressions that she had learned in class.

> I was thinking of using some expressions I learned in Prof. Hayashi's class [the author's class] like "It is freezing." I wanted to know those casual expressions. I didn't want to write each sentence carefully by checking, "What is the subject in this sentence?" and "What is a verb in that sentence?" every time I wrote the messages. . . . I looked for some sites on the Internet to learn some casual expressions because what I learned in the school is English for entrance examinations.

Yuki had the intention and willingness to use casual expressions that she had previously learned in a class that she took with me in the 2019 academic year. The interview demonstrates that Yuki still remembered some expressions that she had learned 2 years earlier. However, her exchanges did not include any expressions that she had learned in the class. In Figure 3, both Yuki and Judy wrote about winter in each country, so Yuki could have included "It is freezing" or other expressions related to

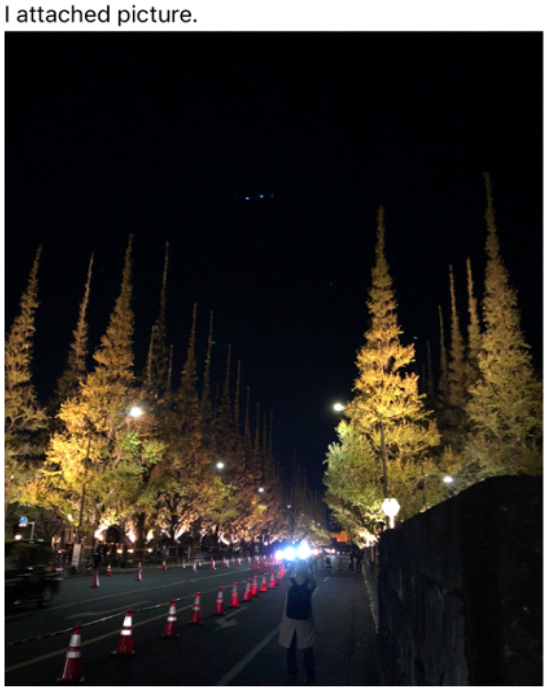
weather or seasons that she had learned in the class. Given the fact that no expressions were included in her own writings, it could be said that she had not fully developed her skills to apply what she had learned to a new context. Alternatively, her strong obsession with accuracy was overwhelming, and this might have prevented her from using the expressions in a different context.

【8】December 11, 2019

Hi😀

Judy ☺️

Tokyo was autumn until recently.
I attached picture.



Can you view the photo?

But now, it got colder as it approached winter🥶
Tokyo is not snowing, but other prefectures are snowing.☃️

Thank you so much☺️
I'll do my best😳

I see!
I can send you a letter😀

Sincerely,

Yuki

【9】December 11, 2019

Hi Yuki!

This is pic from city centre of Helsinki. We have Christmas illuminations here now. Unfortunately it wasn´t snowy on that day, when I took this pic. We have had only few snowy days in this month.

My English course is over soon. What about your course? What you are thinking about this penpal? Do you want to continue still after our English courses or not? I think that this have been nice so I could continue writing with you.😊

Best regards,

Judy

Figure 3. Eighth and Ninth Exchanges

Moreover, Yuki refers to the impact of university entrance examinations on English classes. In general, in their senior high school years, students in Japan have to study hard for university entrance exams, and this has major impacts on how both teachers and students approach English in class. Excessive emphasis on exam preparation can deprive students of chances to learn casual expressions. In light of this, Yuki's effort to search for informal expressions on the Internet showed her strong desire to learn and use those expressions in her writing.

Yuki's Changes and Her Ongoing Motivation After the COIL Project

Yuki reflected on changes that she had felt through the COIL project:

> Unlike TOEIC scores, there are no visible results, but I was happy with the fact that I could use English and communicate with [Judy] in English. The communication with [Judy] was different from that of online English conversation lessons. When it comes to online English conversation lessons, a partner is an adult and someone I do not know. Moreover, he or she is a teacher. However, my partner and I are in the same age group, and we have more things in common.

Comparing and contrasting online English conversation lessons and the COIL project, her focus was not on the product but the process, and she concluded that there was a considerable difference in enjoyment. As Yuki explains, she might not have expressed what she wanted to say or made herself understood as clearly as she wished, but the fact that she herself was using English enhanced her self-esteem.

Together with her pure enjoyment in the communication with Judy, Yuki's realization of her insufficient knowledge of English and her strong desire to learn casual expressions in English still helped her to maintain her motivation to study English and boost her determination to study English, and more specifically, casual English expressions.

> *Yuki:* I still continue to study casual expressions on my own even after the project.
> *Author:* Oh, you continue to study English at your own pace. That is great.
> *Yuki:* I've just started to work and cannot spare time as much as I want, though.
> *Author:* By the way, Yuki, if you had another chance to engage in a COIL project, is there anything that you would like to change?
> *Yuki:* I would like to communicate with my partner through Instagram, LINE, or Zoom. I thought I had to write a long message in email and letters and respond to each question that Judy asked me one by one. I put myself on guard, and it felt like a chore. But if I used, say, LINE, it would be easy to communicate.

Reflecting on her regret and frustration that she was unable to respond to Judy immediately, she came up later with the idea of using Instagram, LINE (a social media application widely used in Japan), or Zoom. Although Zoom involves video-conferencing, both Instagram and LINE are applications that would enable her to leave a message in just one or a few lines more quickly and casually without the pressure to respond to her partner. More importantly, she would be able to increase her knowledge of casual expressions by reading and responding to casual messages, which would consequently lead her to achieve her ultimate goal of enjoying intercultural communication.

Implications

The Finnish and Japanese COIL project was introduced as a completely out-of-class activity for two groups of university students. Holding both expectations of intercultural

communication and anxieties about her English language skills, Yuki embarked on the project with Judy and mutually engaged in the collaborative activity over 4 months. Their interaction started in a formal way, but they gradually changed their interaction pattern as they negotiated, responded, and related to each other. Without the teachers' guidance and intervention, both of them took responsibility for developing the process of communication between themselves.

Throughout the project, there were three challenges that Yuki had faced. Her desire to communicate with Judy, her lack of confidence in English, especially regarding casual expressions, and her obsession with formality and accuracy were intertwined intricately and gave a huge impact not only on the number of exchanges but also on the length, content, and format of her messages. Reflecting on my learning and teaching experiences in junior and senior high school as well as university in Japan (Hayashi et al., 2014), a majority of students face similar dilemmas and search for ways to overcome such difficulties. In order to maximize positive feelings, such as enthusiasm for intercultural communication, and minimize negative feelings that students tend to have in learning and using English, it is desirable to provide opportunities for them to learn casual expressions and to be aware that there are some differences between spoken and written English. As Yuki pointed out in the interview, informal English is less emphasized in formal education in Japan; students have few opportunities to learn and use casual expressions in a formal learning setting. Therefore, it is important to provide lessons or workshops for students to learn the difference between formal and informal email writing as an initial step. As for formal email writing, students tend to learn a specific format together with some formal expressions commonly used in a formal email message, such as "Dear," "Best regards," and "Would you please …?" On the other hand, shortened forms, such as "face-2-face," "BTW" [by the way], and "SMT" [sucking my teeth], that people use in daily digital communication can be dealt with as informal email writing. In this way, students would be able to maintain their awareness of both formality and informality and hopefully use them properly according to the situation. This would consequently enhance their communicative competence.

Another issue to consider is continuity. In this project, Yuki and Judy were considered to be the most successful pair of all the participants. However, as discussed previously, Yuki's written communication gradually decreased. In the interview, she said, "If there were an opportunity for an interim report, our interchange would have lasted much longer." For some pairs, intervention or monitoring by teachers could be effective, and it could work as a motivator, as some students work much better within a framework set up by teachers. On the other hand, others might prefer to construct their own project together as they establish their own communication styles with their partners. It is important for teachers to judge whether to intervene or not in a project by carefully examining students' personalities and motivation in order to maximize the possibilities for exchanges among students.

In addition, the results of this case study imply a potential for the COIL project as an alternative to conventional study abroad programs. Due to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic that started in 2020, most universities around the world were unable to send their students to their affiliated universities in other countries or to welcome international students from overseas. In many cases, students who had planned to study abroad before the pandemic started to postpone or change their plans, and in the worst case, they even had to completely give up their long-standing dreams. However, COIL projects can

enable students to experience intercultural communication even if they stay in their home countries.

Overall, this study was successful in filling the research gap by exploring in detail the process by which Yuki and Judy collaborated in an out-of-class setting. Given the nature of the case study, the results cannot be generalized, but they help us to understand Yuki's experiences and perceptions through her reflection. For further study, it would be interesting to have Judy reflect on her own experiences through interviews and analyze her reflections together with those of Yuki to fully understand the experiences that both of them jointly shared. Moreover, identifying both successful and unsuccessful factors that encouraged or discouraged the pairs of students who engaged in the project would help to identify the necessary support and appropriate guidance for future programs that prioritize out-of-class student activity and communication.

Conclusion

The original COIL project was introduced and carried out between two groups of university students in Finland and Japan. The focus in this case study on one Japanese student's communication with her Finnish partner student has let us understand the benefits of introducing a COIL project as an out-of-class learning activity to encourage learning beyond the classroom. Throughout the project, both Yuki and Judy took initiative and collaborated without intervention from the instructors; they jointly took ownership and responsibility for their mutual out-of-class learning. In short, the COIL project helped to foster collaborative learner autonomy across countries.

In addition, this case study sheds light on the necessity of learning and using both formal and informal English to foster better communication. In this project, Yuki's preoccupation with being formal and accurate in her writing, and her desire to be able to express her ideas fluently swung like a pendulum within herself. Yuki's realization of her insufficient knowledge of English gradually made her lose her enthusiasm for the project, which was consequently reflected in her increasingly infrequent participation and shorter messages. However, her strong determination to study casual English expressions increased, and this did not demotivate her or keep her away from English. Rather, it worked positively and drove her to make an effort to develop her English skills, which lasted for a further one and a half years after the project was over. Voluntary participation in the COIL project enabled her not only to be aware of her strengths and weaknesses but also to specify her needs in terms of English skills. Looking to the future, this will hopefully have long-lasting benefits for her continuing autonomous and lifelong learning.

Author Bio

Chika Hayashi is a professor at Seikei University in Tokyo. She holds a PhD from the School of Education, University of Nottingham. Her research interests include motivation, learner/teacher autonomy, teacher education, cultural influences on classroom language learning, and psychological aspects of second language learning in the classroom. Chika is particularly interested in exploring learners' affective components through visual narratives as well as different methods of scaffolding learner autonomy.

Review Process

This paper was open-reviewed by Alice Chik and Donna Fujimoto of the *Learner Development Journal* Review Network and by the Journal Steering Group. *(Contributors have the option of open or blind review.)*

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Appendix

Interview Guide

1. Tell me exactly why you decided to participate in this project.
2. How long have you been communicating with your paired partner?
3. How many times in total?
4. How did the exchanges take place?
5. Tell me the details of your interactions.
6. Are there any expectations that you had before participating in the project? If so, what are they?
7. Did you have any concerns before participating? If so, what are they?
8. Was there anything that left an impression on you during the project? If so, please tell me about it.
9. Did you have any concerns during the project?
10. Did you experience any changes as a result of the project?
11. Did you try to use or apply what you learned in class during the project?
12. What were your impressions of the project?
13. Is there any reason why you ended the project after 4 months?
14. If you were to resume, how would you like to do it again?

PAPER

Beyond the Classroom, Beyond the Track: The Role of English in the Transformation of Career Perspectives in Three Females in Rural Japan

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This study explores the process of perspective shifting among female English language learners who participated in an English project-based learning programme in rural Japan. In Japan, academic achievement and career aspirations are determined by socioeconomic status, gender, and region. However, in English language education in Japan, there has not been sufficient research addressing the learning experiences of individuals considering such social contexts beyond the classroom. Therefore, this study investigates the reality and potential of English language learning among women living in rural areas. Three female graduates of a senior high school in Kagoshima Prefecture were purposively selected, and a 90-minute semi-structured interview was conducted with each. Trajectory equifinality modelling (Sato et al., 2009) was used for data analysis. The findings revealed how the three women overcame different constraints, including lack of access to diverse role models and peers, few opportunities to make meaningful connections between English language learning and real life, and parental attitudes towards investment in language education and family financial situation. Given the current state of educational inequality, this study represents a proposal to further the debate on how English language learning can make a meaningful difference to an individual's overall life and subsequent career choices.

本研究は、日本の地方において、英語でのプロジェクト型学習プログラムに参加した女性英語学習者の意識変容過程を探索する。日本では、学力や進路希望は社会経済的地位、性別、地域によって規定される（松岡、2019）。しかし、英語教育においては、教室を超えたそのような社会的文脈を考慮した個人の学習経験について十分に研究されていない。そこで本研究では、地方出身女性の英語学習の実態と可能性を探った。鹿児島県内の高校を卒業した女性3名を合目的的サンプリングで選定し、それぞれに90分の半構造化面接を実施した。データ分析には、複線径路・等至性モデル (Sato et al., 2009) を使用した。結果として、3名の女性が、多様なロールモデルや仲間との接点の少なさ、英語学習と実生活を有意義に結びつける機会の少なさ、言語教育への投資に対する親の考え方や家庭の経済状況に関する課題など、様々な制約を克服した過程が明らかになった。教育格差の現状を踏まえ、本研究は、英語学習が個人の人生全体やその後のキャリア選択に意味のある変化をもたらすことをめざし、議論を深めることを提案するものである。

Keywords

learning beyond the classroom, project-based learning, gender, rural context, trajectory equifinality modeling
教室を超えた学習、プロジェクト型学習、ジェンダー、地方、複線径路・等至性モデル

Japan is a society with educational inequality by international standards: Not only an individual's academic ability, but also educational expectations (how far they want to go in education, such as going to university) and career expectations (what kind of job they want) are defined by the socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and region of the family in which they grew up (Matsuoka, 2019a). In particular, environmental factors such as the availability of learning opportunities beyond the classroom, as well as cultural and historical characteristics of the region and school, are thought to contribute to inequalities in access to and the quality of English language education (e.g., Matsuoka, 2010; Mori, 2018, Yamamura, 2021). Regardless of their own efforts, young people's career paths are oriented, or *tracked* (Oakes, 2005), within this system of reproducing inequalities (Kariya, 2012).

However, little is known about the mechanisms that enable students from such disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue their desired careers, including admission to top-tier universities. To build a society in which all people, regardless of background, can have hope

for the future and choose a career path from a diverse range of options, it is imperative to qualitatively examine the *why* and *how* of cases that have succeeded in overcoming the constraints of educational inequalities in a specific context. Therefore, in the present study, I aimed to gain insights into how to reduce regional gaps in educational and career opportunities for Japanese high school students by investigating the potential for language learning experiences to positively influence their career choices in a particular regional context.

Literature Review

Educational Inequalities: SES, Gender, and Region

According to Matsuoka (2019a), in Japan, SES, gender, and region are often cited as the three main factors for educational inequalities. In the sociology of education, the degree of educational inequalities is often discussed based on the 4-year university enrolment rate, which also accounts for the fact that those with higher education have higher occupational prestige and income due to such inequalities (Matsuoka, 2019a). Table 1 compares Kagoshima and Tokyo in 2018, the year when the participants in this study entered college. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2018), Kagoshima Prefecture has the lowest 4-year college enrolment rate at 38.85%, less than half that of Tokyo. It is also noteworthy that there is a large gender gap.

Table 1. *4-Year College Enrolment Rate by Prefecture*

	Female	Male	Gender Average
Tokyo	73.17	72.18	72.67
Kagoshima	34.11	43.44	38.85
National Average	50.14	56.31	53.30

Note. Adapted from *e-Stat. Tokei de miru nihon* [Japan in statistics], Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2018 (https://www.e-stat.go.jp/).

Inequalities in Academic Achievement and Educational and Career Expectation

In addressing the factors related to educational inequalities, previous studies have dealt with not only students' academic ability but also educational expectations, aspirations, and attitudes of students, parents, and teachers. For example, Katase (2009) investigated regional gaps in the determinants of high school students' academic motivation in four regions of Iwate Prefecture. The study showed that regional gaps in education exist not only by prefecture but also between prefectural capitals and other regions within the same prefecture. Matsuoka (2019b) revealed that regional gaps in people's attitudes toward education increased from the 1990s to the 2010s. Furthermore, according to Matsuoka, the gaps in cultural capital related to SES partially explain differences in attitude among individuals and regions. While it is vital to note that SES may be a cause of regional gaps, the issue of regional gaps is more than an economic one, and hereafter I would rather focus on identifying challenges and possibilities beyond the economic dimension in rural Japan such as gender roles.

Educational Inequalities and the English Language

In comparison to other subjects, the English language learning environment is particularly vulnerable to social inequalities. According to Terasawa (2015), the social and family

environments of Japanese people influence their English proficiency, and the English proficiency gap is also related to the gap in college opportunities (see also Terasawa, 2017). In terms of gender, Kitamura (2020) interviewed Japanese adult women who work in English to address the gap between the assumption that English can expand and "save" women's career options and the opposite realities in the Japanese context. Issues of social inequality surrounding English language education have received more attention outside Japan, including China (Hu, 2003), Indonesia (Lamb, 2012, 2013), and Hong Kong (Yung, 2020). Kubota (2011) cited previous studies that show how English education has disadvantaged the vulnerable around the world and argues that we should critically examine the state of English education today, when neoliberal ideas are more prevalent than ever. In today's volatile society, where educational inequalities threaten to widen even further, it is time for both researchers and practitioners of English education to reconsider whether the diversification of learning methods inside and outside the classroom is actually stratifying learning opportunities for young people.

It is also worth noting that many studies, particularly in Japan, appear to have separated the English learner aspect from the individual's life and focused solely on how to improve learners' language proficiency skills in the classroom (Kubota, 2015). This study, on the other hand, sees language learning as a social activity that influences and is influenced by factors outside of the classroom.

The Study

I first contacted Mr. Matsui (pseudonym), who was organizing "glocal" (global and local) education programmes for senior high schools across the country, in February 2020. He was especially enthusiastic about educating young people in Kagoshima Prefecture, where he was born. At first, I only had an obscure idea of what Mr. Matsui was doing. However, as I learned more about him and previous participants in his educational programs, I found out that many of the participants in the English-medium project-based learning programme (hereafter "English PBL") at Kokusai High School (pseudonym; hereafter KHS) in Kagoshima, particularly girls, had experienced a significant change in their career perspectives. In this study, I will focus on the trajectories of the participants who stated that they "achieved a more positive career path" as a result of participating in this English PBL. The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What trajectories did the three participants, who achieved positive career outcomes through the English PBL, take to reach their final career decisions?
2. Did any regional (and other) constraints affect their career decision-making process, and if so, what were they?
3. How did the English PBL help them to overcome such constraints?

Methodology

Research Context and Participants

Located in the southern part of the island of Kyushu, Kagoshima is one of the most remote prefectures from major cities in Japan. The participants of this research are from Kagoshima City, the prefecture's capital city. While Kagoshima City may be considered a relatively privileged environment compared to other areas within the prefecture, this study highlights the challenges that the participants overcame as high school students from Kagoshima Prefecture. In this sense, I position this study as a case study in one

of the prefectures most affected by regional and gender inequalities in educational opportunities.

The three research participants had previously participated in the English PBL at KHS in Kagoshima City. These three students were purposively selected as they self-identified as having changed their post-high-school career to a more positive one after participating in this PBL. To select the research participants, I asked Mr. Matsui, who had led this PBL, to introduce me to three past participants. The selection criteria were as follows:

1. The chosen participant changed their previously chosen career path after high school for positive reasons after participating in the English PBL.
2. From Mr. Matsui's point of view, each of the chosen participants' overall characteristics differed, including personality, academic ability, interests, and family background.

Table 2 summarises the profiles of the three participants in this study.

Table 2. *Profiles of the Three Research Participants*

	Name (Pseudonym)		
	Momo	**Yuki**	**Ai**
Age	20	20	20
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Major	Integrated Sciences	International Liberal Arts	Economics
Family	Father, mother, twin brother, younger brother	Father, mother, younger sister	Father, mother, younger sister
Prior overseas experience	Homestay in the USA (2 weeks, age 15)	None	None
Other characteristics (according to Mr. Matsui)	She was "academically high-achieving" and "a good role model to peers"	She came from a "low-performing junior high school" and was "out of touch"	Her parents were firmly against her going outside Kagoshima after senior high school

The three participants had several commonalities: All were female, born and raised in Kagoshima City (although all three attended elementary and junior high school in different districts), around 20 years old at the time of data collection, in their third year of university, and they had completed the English PBL at KHS and joined a study tour to the UK with the same group. It was after their enrolment into KHS that all three students learnt that the high school offered a short study tour to the UK. To join the study tour, they were required to complete a project-based learning programme in English as part of the integrated studies class. Then, upon selection based on document application and presentation, they could join the study tour. In their second year at KHS, approximately 40 students were selected to participate in this English PBL group while the rest of the students in the same grade completed their PBL in Japanese (around 300 students were enrolled in this grade at KHS); at a later stage, 15 out of these 40 students were selected to go to the UK.

My Positionality

The data were analysed in consideration of the reflexivity of the researcher (Sultana, 2007). I am someone from Kagoshima Prefecture who experienced constraints as a senior high school student when choosing my own career because of my gender and the geographical location of my hometown. Thus, to some extent, I position myself as a researcher with shared identities with the participants, including being a female Japanese EFL learner who grew up in the same region as them, experiencing similar challenges. Until my final year of senior high school, I was planning on going to a junior college in Kagoshima, as it was something my mother had recommended. However, learning English greatly expanded my own educational and professional opportunities, and as a result, I went on to a competitive English-medium liberal arts college, which would not have been an option had I stayed in my hometown. This led me to continuing my studies in a master's program at a British university and, currently, in a doctoral program at a university in Tokyo, Japan. Space does not allow me to describe the details of my own story, but my motivation to pursue this research stems from the fact that my own life has changed dramatically as a result of my English learning experiences. At the same time, however, I was an outsider listening to these women as an external researcher regarding KHS and this English PBL programme.

Data Collection

I conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant in Japanese for around 90 minutes. When I reached them, all three participants were studying at universities in different parts of Japan. I interviewed Momo and Yuki face-to-face in Kagoshima City during their summer vacation. I interviewed Ai via video call on Zoom as she did not plan to return home during the summer. Both our cameras were on, and we could see each other's faces during the call.

The questions in Table 3 were prepared in advance as an interview guide. The life story questions were adopted from Irie's (2022) study on the role of English in older Japanese learners, developed from McAdams (1988, 1993) and the Foley Center for the Study of Lives (2009). To leave room for exploration of events that I was not aware of but that were important to the interviewee, I tried to give the interviewee more control over the content of the interview. I minimised the number of questions I prepared in advance so that the flow of the conversation would be natural, and the order of the questions asked in the actual interviews varied among the three participants.

During the interviews, I made efforts to confirm the meaning of the participants' narratives by paraphrasing or summarising what I thought was important. Later, I read the transcriptions of the recorded data repeatedly and coded significant events that may have led to divergent decision-making. A Trajectory Equifinality Modelling (TEM) diagram, which is explained in the Data Analysis section, was created by arranging the events, choices, and relevant social factors experienced by each participant in chronological order.

Table 3. *Interview Guide*

Self-Introduction
About your life from childhood until today • How would you divide your life so far into chapters? • What is the best thing that has happened to you in your life? • What has been the biggest challenge (difficulty) in your life?
About going to KHS • What brought you to KHS?
About the PBL • What motivated you to carry out your PBL in English? • What changes have occurred in you after participating in the PBL? • If this PBL had been conducted in Japanese, what changes do you think would have (or not have) occurred?
What do you envisage yourself doing in the future?

Data Analysis

For the analysis, I used Trajectory Equifinality Modelling (TEM; Sato et al., 2009). This analysis method is suitable for depicting the process of value transformation from the existence of actual choice behaviours and outcomes, as well as other theoretically possible but unchosen alternatives. In the framework of TEM, the participants and researcher jointly draw the participants' trajectories. In this study, the *obligatory passage point* (OPP; the point that all the participants go through), the *bifurcation point* (BFP; transitioning point), and the *equifinality points* (EFP; final points reached) were set as in Table 4.

Table 4. *Obligatory Passage Point, Bifurcation Point, and Equifinality Points in This Study*

Obligatory Passage Point (OPP)	Bifurcation Point (BFP)	Equifinality Points (EFP)
Entry to KHS Participation in the English PBL	Perspective shifting	Going to the university of their choice

In addition to the points mentioned above, I also indicated in the TEM diagrams the past trajectories and prospects that seemed to be notable turning points in each participant's career decisions.

Findings and Discussion

Participants' Trajectories

First, I attempt to answer the question, "What trajectories did the three participants, who achieved positive career outcomes through the English PBL, take to reach their final career decisions?"

Momo's Case

Compared to the other two participants, Momo had the most exposure to English language learning between kindergarten and starting high school. She was also the only one of the three participants who had travelled abroad before entering high school.

According to Mr. Matsui, who introduced her to us, she was an "honours student" type with very high academic ability and had served as head of a sports club. A TEM diagram of Momo is shown in Figure 1.

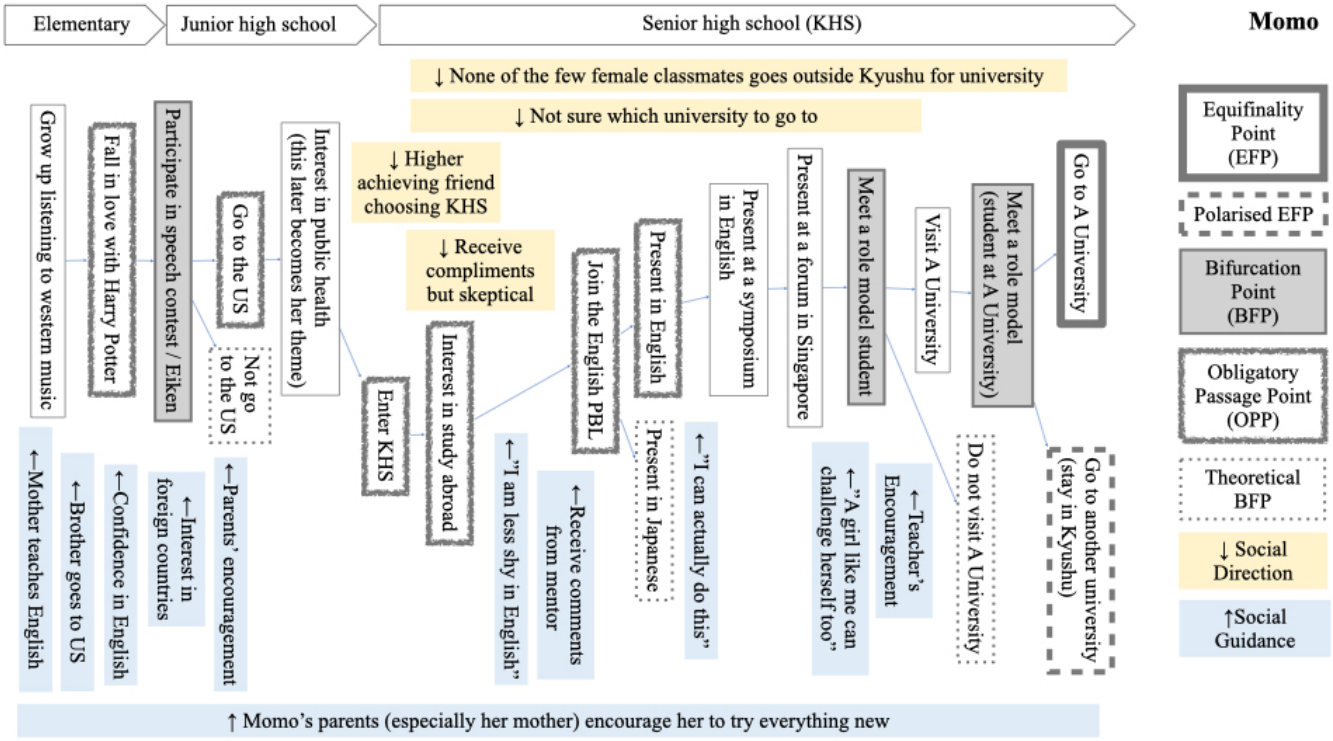

Figure 1. Momo's TEM

Momo had been keen on all aspects of learning, including English, from an early age. Her mother was an English teacher, and she grew up listening to Western music. When she was in primary school, she became obsessed with the Harry Potter books in the school library, and this is where her fascination with the UK began. It was also during this period that her older brother went to the USA for a short period of study. She challenged herself in speech contests and English tests and gained confidence in English. When she was in junior high school, she, like her brother, participated in a short-term homestay programme in a sister city of Kagoshima City in the USA. Her parents were supportive of what she wanted to do. Momo enrolled in KHS largely because she liked the atmosphere at the school, where students worked hard not only in their studies but also in club activities, and because her friends with better grades than her applied to KHS. She was dedicated to both her studies and sports, and her teachers and friends often praised her for her hard work. However, she was skeptical that they really meant it. Momo was in a science-track class, where there were very few female students. Momo told me that none of the female students aspired to go to universities further than the Kyushu area regardless of their academic potential, while the male students wanted to go to more academically challenging universities in Osaka, Tokyo, and other major cities, all of which are geographically far away, so it would normally cost tens of thousands of yen by air or *shinkansen* (bullet train) just to get there. Even though Momo was very likely to be accepted into a top university in Tokyo, she originally had no desire to go there. She was somewhat reluctant about her career prospects and did not have a clear vision for the future.

Interestingly, there was an unexpected positive effect from completing the PBL in English. She felt that although she was hesitant to express her opinions in Japanese, she was able to "aggressively" seek feedback and make improvements when preparing her presentation in English. She also realised that she could express herself more freely in English. Furthermore, her success was not limited to the classroom. She presented her work in English at an international symposium for high school students to showcase findings from their PBL in Kagoshima and won a prize, which even led her to take part in a larger symposium in Southeast Asia. It was during this time that she made friends with people with similar goals in other rural areas of Japan and felt that she could challenge herself in something she could not have previously imagined herself doing. Being recognised for her scientific research at this international symposium and meeting other female students devoted to science with similarly high goals from other rural areas in Japan convinced her that "it was okay for me to aim higher." Momo told me that doing this PBL in English had broadened her network of contacts and vision for the future. She said that if she had done the same thing in Japanese, this learning experience would not have had such a significant impact on her life.

Yuki's Case

Unlike Momo, Yuki used to dislike studying in general, with little interest in English, until she entered senior high school. According to her, Yuki came from a "low-performing" junior high school and was "out of touch [グレていた; *gurete-ita*]." Although public junior high schools in Japan are based on location, not on performance, this context might partially reflect the result of the regional difference in people's attitudes toward education as in Matsuoka (2019b). Yuki's life story is arranged in chronological order using TEM as in Figure 2:

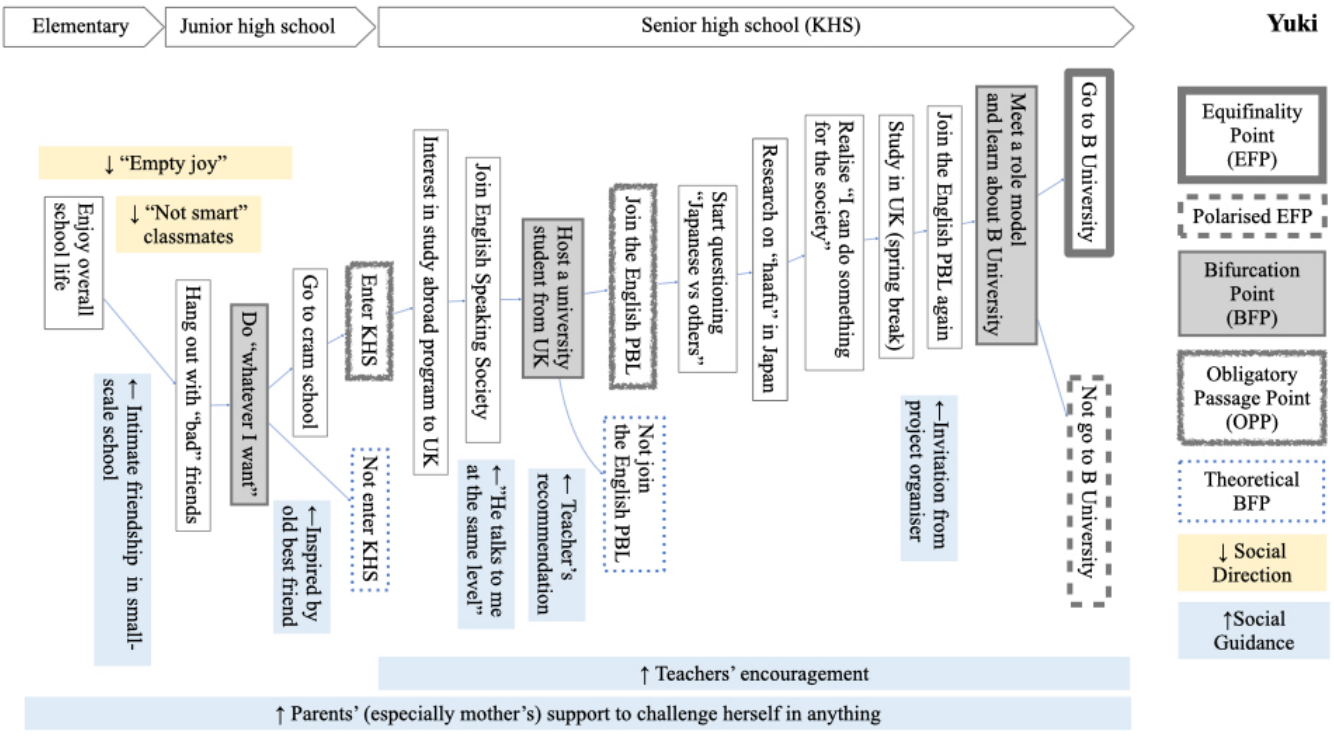

Figure 2. Yuki's TEM

From an early age, Yuki was "given a lot of freedom" to grow up in a carefree environment, under her parents' (especially her mother's) educational policy of letting her do whatever she wanted. She says that the fact that her primary school was very small may have been another significant factor in her building a free and open-minded personality. (There are many small-scale schools in Kagoshima Prefecture, including in the city.) However, taking the Eiken Test in Practical English Proficiency was one of the few things Yuki was strongly encouraged to do, as her mother believed in the importance of investing in foreign language learning from an early age. While she is very grateful for this "free" environment, the freedom she was given led her to hang out with "bad" friends when she entered junior high school. She calls her experience of those years "empty joy." At this stage, Yuki had nothing she wanted to do and was thinking of finding a job as soon as possible rather than going on to higher education. However, she started attending cram school because she admired her former best friend's enthusiasm for studying, and as a result, she chose KHS, where many students aim to go on to high-ranking universities.

It was out of curiosity that she convinced her mother to let their family become a homestay host for an international student visiting KHS from a top university in the UK. This experience made her feel especially close to the English language and university students. "I thought overseas university students were people from a distant world," she said, "but I was glad that they spoke to me as fellow human beings and from the same point of view" (my translation from Japanese). This encouraged her to join the English PBL and carry out a research project for people with foreign roots staying or living in Japan. She then started interacting with communities of international students. In this process, she came to realise that "there might be something I could do for society: to support people from international or mixed ethnic backgrounds who are having difficulties in Japan." This realisation, in her words, was "meaningful joy." Beyond that, she met a role model who studied at a Japanese liberal arts college where all lectures were conducted in English, which she thought was the place for her.

Ai's Case

According to Mr. Matsui, Ai differed from Momo and Yuki in that her parents were initially opposed to her going to higher education outside Kagoshima Prefecture due to the family's financial situation. However, as the interview revealed, after all her efforts to convince them, Ai's parents even allowed her to spend an extra year studying as a *ronin* [浪人] after graduating from KHS, and in the end, she went to a private university in the Kansai area. *Ronin* refers to students who, after graduating from junior or senior high school, are unable to enrol in the next stage of schooling and study independently towards future enrolment. Ai's TEM diagram is shown in Figure 3.

Ai was the only one of the three who had never really been exposed to English language learning until she started studying it as a compulsory subject in junior high school. She has a bright leader-type personality and spent her time in the jazz band in primary school. She was not good at English in junior high school, but she gained confidence when she was "very much praised by her teacher in an English recitation competition" in which everyone at school had participated, including her friends who had been taking private *eikaiwa* (English conversation) lessons outside school. Here, she decided that she might have a talent for English and that "it might be worth committing to it." Although Ai was "not academically outstanding," she had a strong sense of responsibility, was highly trusted by her teachers and friends, and was elected student council president at her junior high

school. This enabled her to enter KHS through a recommendation from her junior high school [推薦入試; *suisen nyūshi*], rather than through the general entrance examination [一般入試; *ippan nyūshi*].

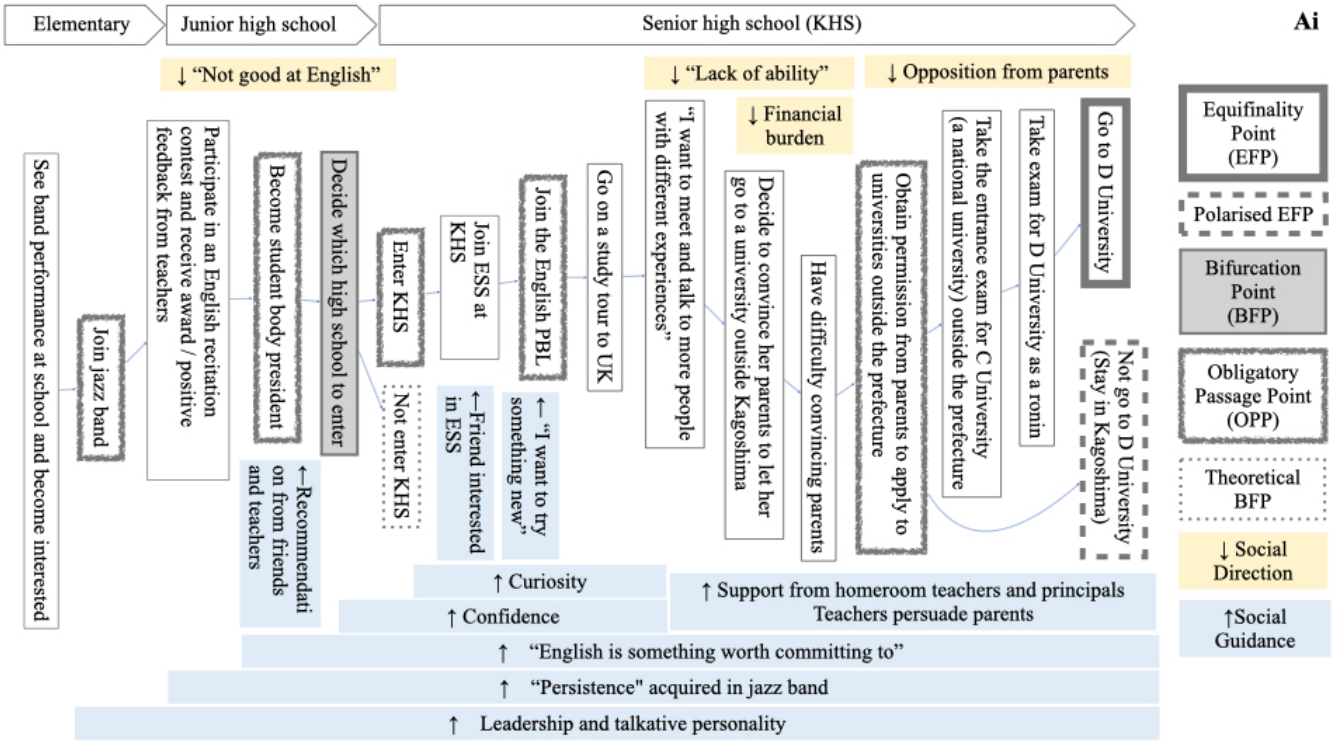

Figure 3. Ai's TEM

Ai had worked hard in music up to secondary school and wanted to try something new at KHS. She joined the English Speaking Society (ESS) because she had been praised for her English pronunciation in junior high school and because she liked speaking. As for the English PBL, she said, "I simply wanted to go to the UK, and I also wanted to challenge myself in various ways as a high school student, so I thought I'd like to take advantage of the opportunity I had." Then, she took on the challenge of the English PBL and chose a research theme of "revitalising tourism in Kagoshima." She had the opportunity to talk to people from various backgrounds, including foreign tourists in the city. Below is Ai's enthusiastic reaction after I introduced myself and explained the purpose of this research at the beginning of the interview:

> In my PBL, I had many opportunities to try things I had never thought about before or things I had thought I could not do. As I did these things, saw many new things, and learned new things, I felt that I didn't want to stay in Kagoshima. I wanted to know more. I wanted to know more, and I met people who knew a lot more than I did, and I really felt that I was growing up more and more. I suddenly felt that I needed to think more about my career path, that I wanted to go out more and think about something more and expand myself. I feel that my experiences in senior high school were the catalyst for me to finally get outside Kagoshima and go to university and make a big move in that way. So, I'm very interested in what you're doing, Hayasaki-san [the researcher].

In the opening 2 minutes of the interview, Ai revealed how encounters with people who showed her new worlds and various discoveries during her high school activities made her realise her potential. At the same time, she developed a certain sense of crisis ("I need to

think more"), curiosity about her future career, and a desire to become a more proactive learner. This increased willingness to independently choose her future led her to step "outside Kagoshima."

My Reflection

After interviewing the three participants, my first impression was that they seemed to be more powerful and have more access to various resources than I had imagined. In the first place, these three participants were lucky enough to have the academic abilities and/or experience in extracurricular activities to be accepted to KHS, which is one of the highest-level senior high schools in Kagoshima Prefecture. As for my own experience, I am from a much smaller city, approximately 40 km away from central Kagoshima, and my parents believed it was a "waste of money" to pay for me to attend a cram school. This idea seemed to be partly for financial reasons (I had two younger siblings that they had to support.) and partly because my mother especially believed that "girls don't need to go to a 4-year university." She also did not want me to move outside Kagoshima, much less overseas. In this sense, I found my situation closest to Ai's. Fortunately, in the end, Ai and I were able to convince our parents to let us follow the paths we chose. Should we think we are just fortunate?

At the same time, the data show some barriers that even these fortunate women had to break, which they might not have needed to had they been learning in a different context. I will elaborate on this in the next section.

Undergoing Constraints and Overcoming Them

This section answers RQ2 ("Did any regional (and other) constraints affect their career decision-making process, and if so, what were they?") and RQ3 ("How did the English PBL help them to overcome such constraints?") simultaneously. There were various constraints on the trajectories of these three participants, three main ones of which are discussed below.

The first is the lack of encounters with diverse role models and peers. For example, Momo was in a science class and had no female classmates with similar goals, so she could not consider going to a university outside Kyushu. However, Momo's participation in the English PBL broadened her scope for action. As a result, at an international symposium abroad, she met high school students from other rural areas of Japan who wanted to go out into the world and test their potential. This encouraged her to believe that she too could aim high. Interestingly, her role model was not from Tokyo or other urban areas, but "a girl from another rural area." This may not be directly related to language learning and use, but it does speak to the importance of near-peer role models as advocated by Murphey and Arao (2001). Similarly, for both Yuki and Ai, the English PBL provided opportunities to expand their social network, which stimulated their curiosity. Furthermore, it meant a lot to Momo that experts listened to her seriously and gave her constructive feedback on the topic of her science project. In this sense, she also felt emotionally closer to *distant* role models. Momo's case shows that even highly capable learners can find it difficult to take action with a clear vision if they do not have a model to aim for. The English PBL was the igniter of her positive challenge.

Second, few opportunities were available to meaningfully link English language learning with real life. This concerns the quality of the learning environment provided in and outside school and extended communities and has a strong link with the current issue's

theme, "Learner Development Beyond the Classroom." For example, when Yuki set out to take the high school entrance exam, she originally received an "E" grade, meaning that her chances of entering KHS were very low. Yuki's junior high school was in a "rough" area where her classmates smoked cigarettes, and she said that her life would have been different in many ways if she had not been inspired to study by her former best friend. At KHS, she had opportunities to get to know students from overseas universities, who spoke to her amicably in Japanese, which they were learning. This made her feel closer to university students and people from other countries, and she also wanted to speak to them in their own language, English. With this experience and her open-minded personality, she was able to take advantage of the English PBL as a place to develop her interests and deepen her understanding of culture and identity.

A third vital factor, as evident in Ai's stories, is parental beliefs about investment in education and about the economic situation of the family. Her parents were concerned about both financial issues and her academic ability, but she continued to strive for a university outside the prefecture, despite their opposition. Through the English PBL, Ai examined the revitalisation of local tourism (utilising the region's unique resources) by interviewing foreign tourists visiting Kagoshima and visiting local businesses. She wanted to get to know the outside world as she began to wonder what she could do for her hometown of Kagoshima. Eventually, Ai's teachers at KHS helped to persuade her parents to give her a chance to try for a more challenging target university.

Pedagogical Implications

This study has shown that English learning opportunities in the form of PBL, both in and out of school, can be a driving force in changing the career paths of high school students. English PBL may be a useful tool to make English language learning more personalised for individual interests. Of course, it makes sense to do PBL in the students' first language, but the significance of doing this in English can be found in Momo's narrative. Expression in a foreign language has the potential to liberate the self more than that in the first language. Of course, it should be considered that the reverse could also be true, as discussed in the foreign language anxiety research (e.g., Gkonou et al., 2017; Horwitz et al., 1986). There is no doubt that conducting PBL in a foreign language is more challenging than in a first language. However, that is why PBL in a foreign language (for the participants in this study, English) made them feel more challenged and ultimately more accomplished. Another advantage of PBL is that, in principle, students can choose the topic according to their own interests, which is not necessarily so in conventional classrooms in the Japanese educational system, even in English-medium classrooms. This freedom of choice allows for greater student autonomy and makes learning and using English more meaningful and accessible.

Limitations and Important Emerging Questions

The data and discussion of the three participants in this study are not representative of Kagoshima Prefecture or the project participants but are only a subset of many cases. Although this study was an exploratory comparison of three individuals with different profiles, I hope to collect and analyse data about the learning experiences of more students on a municipal, school, or project basis in the future. Furthermore, at this stage, only one interview was conducted for each participant. In future studies, two more interviews will be conducted with each participant to further refine the TEM diagrams.

Many further questions also arose and remain unanswered: Are the students satisfied with the outcomes of attending university? Are they satisfied with the career options they are offered upon graduation? What makes a context "rural"—is it something definable, or should we leave it up to individuals' interpretation? Ultimately, what constitutes success for language learners in this context? Is pursuing more challenging educational and professional opportunities always the best option? What other forms of transformation could language learning bring about? These questions will lead to a deeper understanding of under-researched *rural* or, in a broader sense, *local* contexts in English education in Japan and will in turn provide suggestions for learning in broader contexts. It is significant that this interview-based research, in which learners revisit their past learning experiences and explore with the researcher social factors behind their decision makings, has led to such important questions for the future.

Conclusion

This study explored how high school students in Kagoshima prefecture, which has one of the lowest rates of students entering 4-year universities in Japan, changed their perspectives on their post-high school career paths through participation in the English PBL and what sociocultural factors were involved in this process. The findings revealed how the three women experienced changes in their perspectives on their interests, abilities, and future visions through re-telling their life stories. The constraints these women overcame had both similarities and differences, including lack of access to diverse role models and peers, few opportunities to make meaningful connections between English language learning and real life, and parental beliefs about educational investment that were incompatible with students' beliefs. Reflecting on the findings and discussion in this study, I recommend that schools and stakeholders should consider, in accordance with the characteristics of the region, connecting students with diverse role models, developing learning programmes in which students with diverse academic abilities and language skills can play an active role, and providing equitable guidance and intervention if necessary, regarding further educational and career opportunities after their learning. We, as researchers, should continue to inquire how English language learning can make a meaningful difference in an individual's overall life and subsequent career choices and conduct comprehensive studies that look beyond the classroom.

Author Bio

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Review Process

This paper was open-reviewed by Simla Course and Colin Rundle of the *Learner Development Journal* Review Network and by the Journal Steering Group. *(Contributors have the option of open or blind review.)*

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PAPER

Learning Beyond the Classroom in an EFL Malagasy Setting: Two Student Teachers' Experiences

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In this paper, the three authors—a teacher and two student teachers (STs)—highlight the importance of learners' agency in learning beyond the classroom (LBC), drawing on the STs' LBC experiences as EFL learners in Madagascar. Through narrative accounts in the form of vignettes, the STs share their language learning histories (LLHs) beyond the classroom, identifying their purposes and drives for learning English, as well as their difficulties, strategies, and successes. The STs' LLHs underscore the significance of interests that fed into their intrinsic motivation to continuously improve their English language skills and indicate that they were capable of creating learning opportunities and resources in a learning environment that can be considered as "under-resourced" (Smith et al., 2018, p. 8). The implications drawn from the LLHs include the idea of integrating into the classroom learners' interests and strategies beyond the classroom to boost their motivation and the relevance of using LLHs in teacher education to help STs reflect on their learning experiences and existing knowledge about learning, as well as understand the importance of considering and responding to students' genuine needs and interests. This paper breaks new ground in exploring LBC and LLHs in that two of the authors are current students identifying themselves as both EFL learners and future EFL teachers in a Malagasy context. It also sheds light on how to promote LBC in a context where resources can be seen as scarce.

本論文では、教師と2人の学生教師（ST）からなる3人の著者が、マダガスカルにおけるEFL学習者としてのSTの教室を超えた学習（LBC）経験をもとにLBCでの学習者のエージェンシーの重要性を強調する。STは、教室外での言語学習の歴史（LLH）をヴィネット形式の物語で語り、英語を学ぶ目的や動機、困難、戦略、成功などを明らかにする。彼らのLLHは、英語を継続的に向上させるための内発的動機につながる興味の重要性を強調し、「リソース不足」（Smith et al., 2018, p. 8）とされる学習環境において学習機会やリソースを作り出す能力があることを示している。LLHから、学習者のモチベーションを高めるために、教室を超えた学習者の興味や戦略を教室に取り入れるという考え方や、教師教育におけるLLHの活用の妥当性などが示唆された。本研究は、マダガスカル語の文脈の中でEFL学習者と将来のEFL教師を目指す学生が共同執筆しているという点で、非常に独自性の高いものである。この論文は、マダガスカルにおけるEFL学習者と将来のEFL教師である在校生の共著であり、彼ら自身の言葉によって、その声を直接的に伝える。また本稿では、資源が乏しいとされる状況において、LBCをどのように推進するかについても光を当てている。

Keywords

learning beyond the classroom (LBC), language learning history (LLH), agency, intrinsic motivation, interests
教室を超えた学習（LBC）、言語学習史（LLH）、エージェンシー、内発的動機づけ、興味関心

Vola, Fanaperana, and Olivia, the authors of this paper, have three common points of reference: our home country, our love for English, and the desire to teach it. That love and desire brought us together in a university in Madagascar in 2018, where Vola was teaching a course on reflective writing to first-year student teachers, among whom were Fanaperana and Olivia. At the time of writing, Vola was living in Japan while Fanaperana and Olivia were entering their third year of teacher training in Madagascar. Despite the

distance, we have kept in touch through email and social media. We decided to write about learning beyond the classroom (LBC) together because we believe that LBC was the key to our mastering English in Madagascar, where English classes mainly focus on grammar, reading, and writing, and where learning resources can be seen as limited. We also believe that it is especially beyond the classroom that learners can develop and exert their learner autonomy or their "capacity to take control over [their] own learning" (Benson, 2011, p. 2), as they are the decision-makers of what and how to learn. Therefore, for us, promoting learner autonomy necessarily involves LBC.

Our first aim is to give insights into LBC in an EFL Malagasy context, using the language learning histories (LLHs) of Fanaperana and Olivia (referred to as "student teachers" or "STs"). By doing so, we give voice directly to students, as this is to our knowledge, the first paper co-authored by students in this context. The second aim is to highlight what we can gain from the LLHs in terms of ways to help learners learn beyond the classroom and maintain their motivation in and outside class. Our final aim, which is related to the second, is to better promote learner autonomy in the Malagasy context and beyond.

We first describe the context followed by a brief background of the STs. Then, we give some theoretical background and explain the method used for this paper. Next, the STs discuss the necessity and challenges of LBC in the EFL Malagasy context before describing and reflecting on their EFL language journeys beyond the classroom through their LLHs. In addition to their LBC experiences, they reflect on their own future teaching, as they prepare for their teaching practice. Drawing from the STs' learning experiences, Vola finally provides some practical ways in which LBC can be promoted.

Theoretical Background: LBC, LLH, Agency, and Context

LBC is necessary for learners to succeed in their language learning, as the affordances for learning in the classroom can be limited due mainly to time constraints and the non-flexibility of the curriculum (Richards, 2015). It can even be argued that most learning takes place outside the classroom (Benson, 2017). When researching LBC, areas that can be addressed are the affordances and constraints of the settings, the processes involved, including learners' experiences and strategies, and the teacher's role in supporting LBC (Reinders & Benson, 2017). One way to research learners' experiences and strategies is through LLH writing.

LLH writing benefits both learners and teachers. It enables learners to reflect on their learning and to reveal some of the causes of their motivation and attitudes towards the language (Reinders & Benson, 2017). Additionally, LLHs allow both learners and teachers to know learners' perceptions and beliefs related to their language learning and their "seeds" of agency (Murphey & Carpenter, 2008), the latter being an important factor in LBC.

Agency is a significant dimension of learner behavior (Mercer, 2011). In language learning, it is viewed as a starting point for the development of autonomy (Benson, 2007) or as a component of learner autonomy. Gu (2009), for instance, includes learner agency in his conceptualization of learner autonomy, which also includes volition, proactiveness, and self-initiation. Self-initiation is identified as the combination of initial motivation to learn and effortful behaviors (Nguyen, 2008). Agency is, thus, the characteristic that enables learners to make the decision to learn and to pursue the learning regardless of their context. It is undeniable that the context or learning environment influences learners (Benson, 2021; Benson et al., 2018; Lamb & Murray, 2018), as "all learning is

socially situated and culturally constrained" (Little, 1999, p. 16). However, learners are not only reactive to the context; they can also shape their learning environment (Bandura, 2008; Benson, 2021; Carter & Sealey, 2000; Mercer, 2011), i.e., they can contribute to improvements of their own learning environment by exercising their agency, which explains the importance of agency in LBC. As agency involves self-initiation prompted by motivation, it can be argued that agency is related to interest. Interest is a positive emotion integrating affective and cognitive components; it is said to be the cause of self-initiation and persistence (Mynard & McLoughlin, 2020). In LBC contexts, finding and developing interest is an effective way to maintain and regulate learners' motivation (McLoughlin, 2020; Mynard & McLoughlin, 2020).

Context: Resources, Languages, the Place of English, and Background of the STs

Madagascar is among the poorest countries in the world (Osborne, 2016; UNICEF, 2018; Venart & Reuter, 2014) and can be referred to as "under-resourced" (Smith et al., 2018, p. 8) regarding education. Basic resources in pedagogy and infrastructure are considerably lacking. Beyond the classroom, libraries (with books) are mostly the only resources provided by schools and institutions in urban locations. Resources that may be taken for granted in schools in other countries, such as self-access centers, ICT resources (e.g., computers, CD players, unlimited Wi-Fi), or simply any human resources outside class are generally scarce in the Malagasy context. In order to use the Internet, most people, even those at universities in big cities, go to cyber cafes and pay for limited connections. However, many Malagasy people can use Facebook, as it is possible to use it on cell phones at a cheaper price than other Internet services. Nevertheless, such connections are limited.

Malagasy and French are the official languages, and English is a foreign language. While French is mainly used as a language of instruction at school and in most administrative areas, Malagasy is used in everyday life outside school and workplaces. Both languages are used on TV (e.g., news), and most foreign movies and documentaries are dubbed in French. In general, English is taught as a compulsory school subject from the beginning of secondary school. What is taught in class throughout the 7 years consists mainly of grammar rules, reading comprehension, and writing on given topics (e.g., sport, environment); these skills are also what is assessed at school and in national examinations (at the end of Grades 9 and 12). Teachers often predominantly focus on forms and use grammar drills. For example, when they teach the passive voice, they only teach about how to turn the active form into the passive and vice versa but not about when to use them. English is thus taught as a subject that students must learn for exams, but not as a means of communication. As a foreign language, its use is mainly confined to the English classroom.

At university, English is still a mandatory subject but generally remains an academic subject (consisting of reading and writing) among others that students study to pass exams in departments other than English (e.g., French, law, physics). In English departments like the one where the STs studied, all English skills are taught separately along with literature, civilization, and other subjects.

Beyond the classroom, private tutoring and English language centers may exist in some cities, but they are not typically affordable for the general Malagasy population. English clubs created by volunteers (teachers or students) can be found within language centers

and in a few schools in cities. The aim of such clubs is mainly to enable learners to practice speaking. However, there are very few of them, and their existence and functionality heavily depend on the availability of the volunteers leading them, which does not guarantee their consistency (see Vignette 9).

Prior to university, the two STs, Fanaperana and Olivia, had 7 years of English in secondary school, like most Malagasy students do. Having lived in the capital, they have been more fortunate than students in other areas in terms of learning resources, as they can still have some limited access to the Internet and are more exposed to different media, such as social media and television. Also, they had opportunities to join English clubs and register at English language centers.

The STs were entering their third year at a teacher training college in Madagascar at the time of writing this paper. Although they had not had practical teaching experience yet, they had learned about theories of different teaching methods and approaches. In their first 2 years at college, they also attended different courses aiming to help them improve the four language skills.

Methods

Our aim is to enable readers to hear the voices of actual learners on LBC in their context and to learn directly from them. We thus chose to use Fanaperana and Olivia's LLHs in an autoethnographic approach (Ellis et al., 2011) or "self-narratives" allowing readers to "understand the ways in which individuals situate themselves and their activities in the world" (Barkhuizen et al., 2014, p. 2).

To help Fanaperana and Olivia write their LLHs, Vola provided them with prompts about activities, settings, times, and views on the effectiveness of their LBC activities. That first step served as a brainstorming activity in a shared Google Docs document. Secondly, Fanaperana and Olivia collected evidence of their LBC from several years of learning English. The evidence included items such as translations of song lyrics, a poster for a play, and diary entries. While collecting evidence and gradually writing their LLHs, we had back-and-forth question-and-answer exchanges within the same Google Docs document for further elaboration and reflection. When Fanaperana and Olivia were satisfied with their LLHs, we divided them into vignettes to make them easier to read. We were aware that autobiographical vignettes are said to enable teachers to reflect on their teaching practices (Ambler, 2012). Though Fanaperana and Olivia were not teaching yet at the time of writing this paper, writing the vignettes allowed them to reflect on their learning, link them to their future teaching, and develop their reflective practice, which is considered "a crucial element of education" and "an essential skill that needs to be nurtured in all teachers" (Farrell, 2019, p. 5). We, thus, believe in the value of LLHs in relation to LBC and to teaching.

The STs' Views: Necessity and Challenges of LBC in the EFL Malagasy Context

From our own experiences as students, we can say that LBC is necessary, especially regarding speaking and listening skills. What students learn in class is quite limited, as previously described. As English is taught as an academic subject and is assessed only through reading and writing in exams, speaking is neglected in class. Students are used to seeing the language rather than speaking it. Teachers do not even speak English most of the time, as they think explaining in the mother tongue or in French helps the students

better than using the target language. That is why most students are not used to listening to English or using it as a means of communication.

LBC is necessary but also challenging for EFL Malagasy students. The first challenge is to find time. Students have class from early morning to evening, and at home, they mainly have time only for their homework and lesson reviewing. Furthermore, LBC requires a huge amount of independence, which implies that they should be capable of managing their time. The second challenge is the lack of materials. What they can find in libraries are mainly grammar books and dictionaries. Most students do not have access to the Internet, which would provide them with different listening resources. Additionally, the rarity of resources such as English clubs makes it difficult to practice speaking. The third challenge is to keep motivation. This may be related to the lack of practice opportunities for students who want to be able to speak English. Also, in LBC, students may feel demotivated, as there is no one to encourage them and no deadline to push them. They may give up easily if they do not have the patience and willingness to make constant effort. Despite these challenges, LBC is possible if students are determined to learn and to improve their English skills, as demonstrated in our LLHs in the following section.

The Two STs' LBC Experiences

In this part of our paper, we share extracts from Fanaperana and Olivia's LLHs in the form of vignettes so that readers may directly learn from them about their experiences of LBC. Six vignettes from Fanaperana are first presented, and these are followed by seven vignettes from Olivia. The vignettes are included in this section without commentary, so that readers may directly encounter the voices and experiences of Fanaperana and Olivia.

Fanaperana's LLH

Vignette 1: Learning for the Test

If someone asked me how long I have been learning English, I would answer 7 years. That was when I started to learn English outside the classroom. In school, English was learned like some other subjects such as math and history. What did I learn at school? English grammar rules, some vocabulary, and expressions related to given themes, such as sports and the environment, which I had to memorize for tests, but which I did not use at all outside the classroom. What I learned at school aimed exclusively to help me pass exams, without considering my understanding and the usefulness of such content in my life. I did not have the opportunity to practice speaking English, which is crucial when learning a language.

Vignette 2: Westlife

It was in the first year of high school when I started to learn English beyond the classroom. My mother bought me a mobile phone with many English songs preloaded in it, such as Westlife's. I loved their songs as I felt they had some kind of depth. Their voices were so nice to hear, and the songs reminded me of my childhood when I often listened to them. However, I did not understand what the songs meant. At that time, I thought if I could meet Westlife one day, I would like to be able to talk to them. That was when I decided to get two notebooks: one for the lyrics and one for the translation (see Figures 1 and 2). At that time, I did not have access to the Internet. Therefore, to have song lyrics, I had to buy them from a store near my school. Then, I began to translate them into French by using a bilingual dictionary. Doing the translation activities triggered my motivation to learn

English. Though the quality of my translation still needed a lot of improvement, it made sense somehow. Translating was particularly useful in terms of learning new vocabulary. As the vocabulary items were included in songs I enjoyed listening to, it was easier to memorize them. Furthermore, after the translation, I started to understand what the songs were about. It was great because I started to sing with the correct words and at the same time, I felt what the lyrics meant.

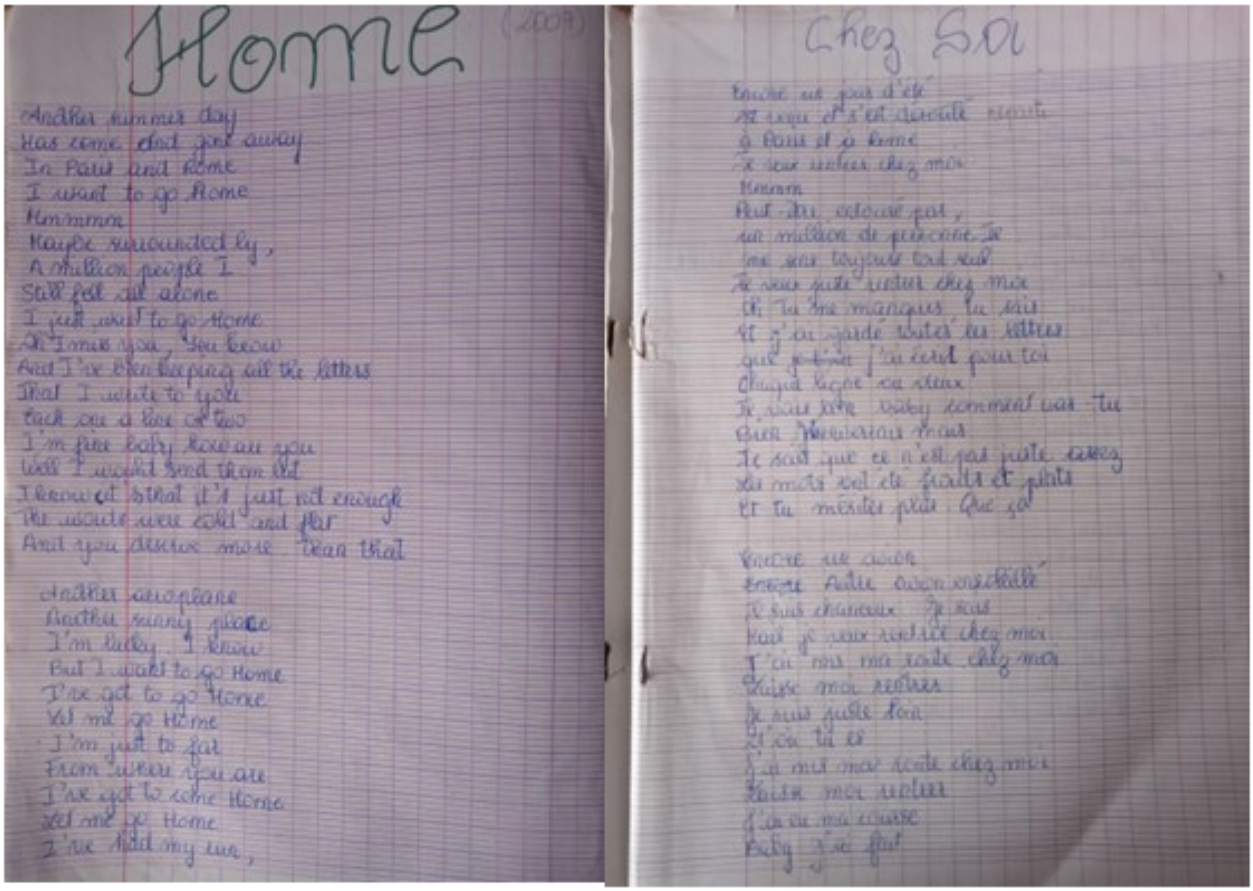

Figure 1. Fanaperana's First Song Translation

Vignette 3: Learning While Having Fun

In the second year of high school, my mother installed the Internet on my mobile phone, and I started to watch videos on Youtube, particularly Westlife's interviews on talk shows (for example, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4DaYeeEl_A). Frankly, I did not understand anything, but I just liked watching them having fun. I downloaded many of their interviews on my phone. The urge to understand what they were saying resulted in the willingness to learn more to improve my English. I thus decided to engage in other activities. From my experience translating lyrics, I understood that I learn best while having fun. Therefore, I began to read comics in English on MangaToon (a free application for reading manga and comics) on weekends. Through pictures, I was able to guess the meaning of the dialogues. Furthermore, reading the comics improved both my reading skills and my vocabulary. I was able to learn simple English expressions that I could use in daily life.

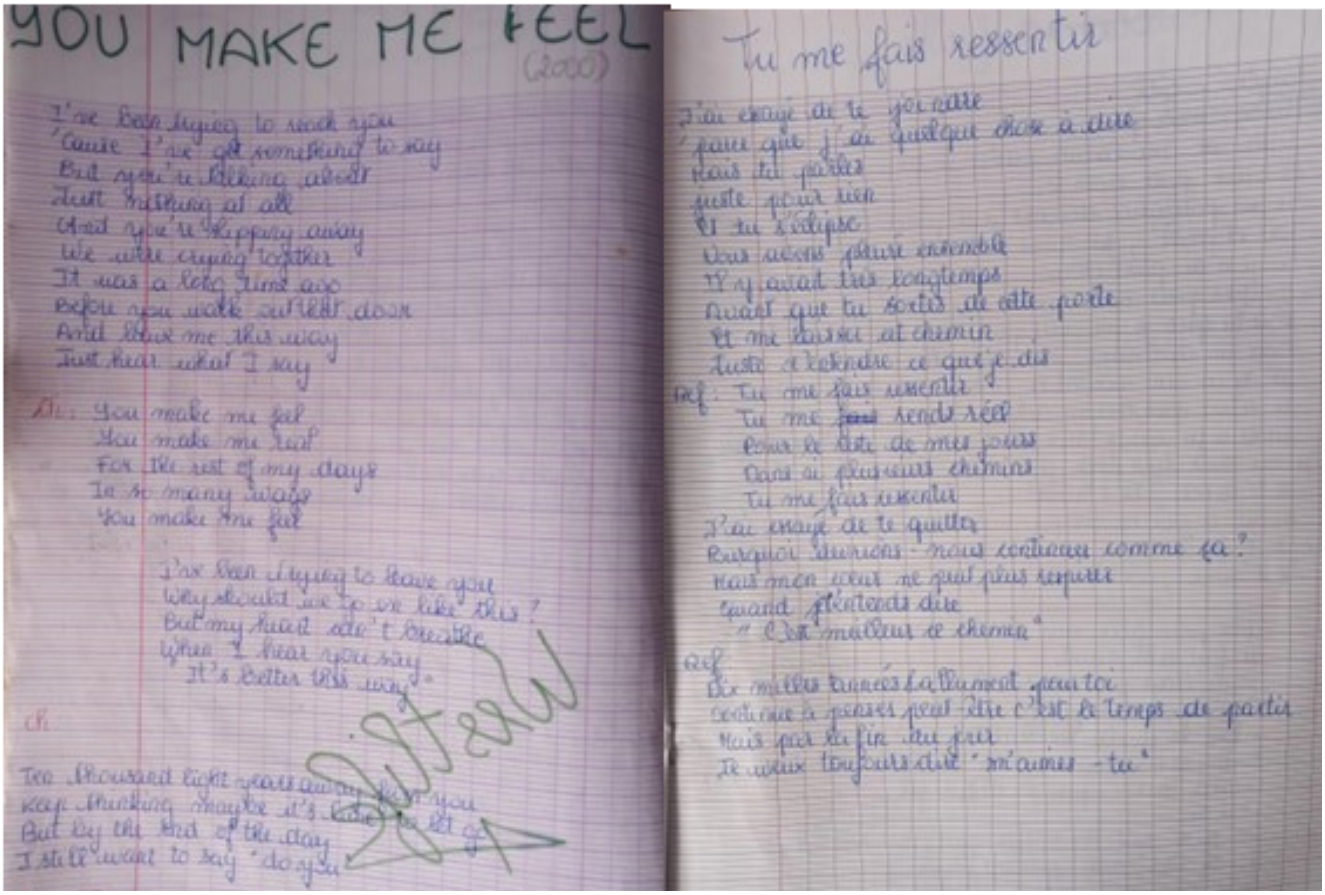

Figure 2. Fanaperana's Third Song Translation

Vignette 4: Creating More Learning Opportunities

I discovered that English is an international language. Therefore, I started chatting with foreigners on Facebook to get opportunities to practice English and learn new expressions. I also started practicing speaking by myself and with my sister. Then, after graduating from high school, I decided to attend an English language center because I thought I needed improvement in my English learning in general, and I would be able to meet some friends to speak to. I realized that my effort to improve my English speaking paid off when I was able to enter the center as an intermediate student (after a speaking placement test). Attending classes at that center influenced my LBC. First, I had friends with whom I could practice speaking. We decided to speak to each other in English after class when we went home. We did not choose to talk about any specific topics, but we just had free conversations in English. Second, my teacher recommended different websites, in which I was able to read books in epub formats (e.g., https://english-e-reader.net/) and practice listening (e.g., https://www.esl-lab.com/).

Vignette 5: Willingness to Become a Teacher of English

It was from my improvement and my love for English that I decided to study at the Teacher Training College to become a teacher of English. Due to the fiercely competitive examination, I had to study English even harder. Therefore, at home, I watched English programs, such as BBC News and English movies, which are available on paid TV channels. I read English books, and I often practiced speaking to myself in order to improve my English speaking skills.

In college, we rarely had class and hardly spoke in English. Once more, LBC has been a necessity. To improve my reading skills, I read many books. Fortunately, I had an acquaintance who used to be an English teacher, and she was very pleased to give me some of her English books (see Figure 3). Reading the books has improved my reading skills, as one book is about reading many texts with comprehension questions. Other books, such as classic and detective novels, have enabled me to learn a wide variety of vocabulary.

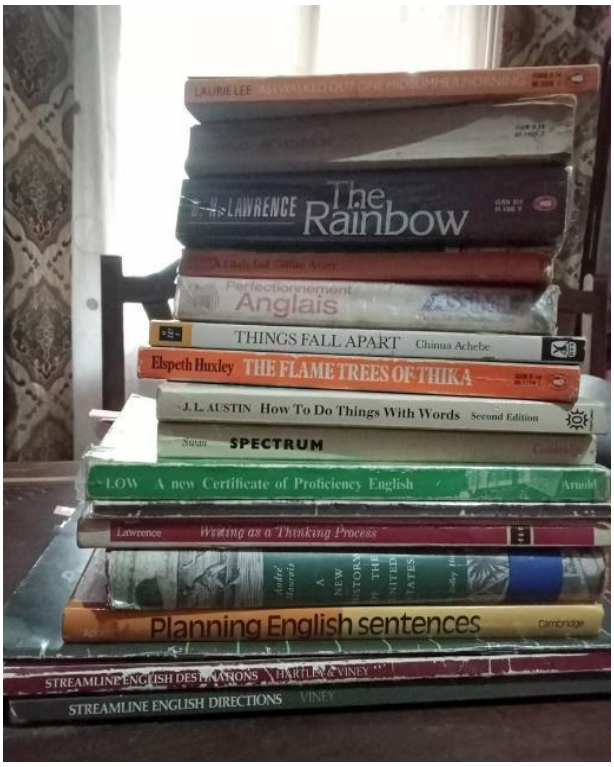

Figure 3. Fanaperana's Book Collection

Vignette 6: Back to Westlife

One day, during the lockdown, I looked through my old downloads, and I watched Westlife's interviews again. I was amazed to see how much I was able to understand compared to 6 years ago, when I first downloaded the videos and had just enjoyed watching them speaking and laughing without knowing what was funny. At that time, I had just said to myself that I would understand someday after hard work and a lot of time, and I was right! I realized that thanks to all the listening practice I had done, I was able to make considerable progress.

To sum up, most of my English learning happened beyond the classroom. The simple desire to understand song lyrics became a great desire to pursue my studies in an English-speaking country.

Olivia's LLH

Seven vignettes (Vignettes 7–13) follow from Olivia below.

Vignette 7: "How to Master English Within Just 10 Minutes," a Lie!

Excelling at English has always been my goal since I was in junior high school. I used to admire those English singers and motivational speakers on TV and radio with their

accent and fluency. For me, the fact that they could speak English so fast that I could not understand anything meant that they had mastered the language. However, I did not know the steps and challenges the people went through before becoming who they are. I thought that learning a language would be easy due to the unreal brilliant-sounding straplines I saw on the Internet saying how to master English within just 10 minutes. It was once I committed myself to it that I realized the time and effort required. I will put forward all my processes during my experiences about learning English beyond the classroom.

Vignette 8: "Practice Makes Perfect"

I am best known as a talkative girl, and I am sure that this behavior has helped me throughout my study. The first time my love for English appeared, I chatted with English speakers on Facebook. I always bore in mind what my former teacher taught me, that practice makes perfect, and it worked. I could apply what I was taught in class, learned new lexical items, and had my grammatical mistakes corrected. So, I can say that it was a useful opportunity. At first, I was afraid that they would not agree to text chat with me, but I pretended to be interested in their stories. Unfortunately, it did not last long, but I was not discouraged.

When I was home, I tried to simultaneously interpret what my siblings said from Malagasy to English, and I continued doing that though they were angry. They thought that I was mocking them, and they treated me like a silly girl. I did not care because I only focused on my goal. I was not good at translating or interpreting at that time, but I have been trying my best. It allowed me to increase my vocabulary.

Vignette 9: Motivating English Club

In my high school, our teacher created an English club, which I joined. The club met once a week and we had activities such as games, songs, and debates in English. Later, I became one of the English club leaders and was responsible for creating and leading the activities. We had opportunities to have native-speaker guests from time to time. Talking to them was challenging, as I was afraid to make mistakes in front of them, but it was motivating because I was dazzled by their accents. I said to myself that I shall master this language at any cost. One lesson I learned from those experiences was to never be ashamed of making mistakes. I knew that none of us was born bilingual and making mistakes was normal for everyone.

Leading the club was not an easy task, as I constantly had to find new enjoyable activities to keep the club members interested. Also, I was still a high school student and had to focus on my studies. Therefore, I had difficulty managing my time. There were times when I had to cancel club meetings, which resulted in members leaving the club. Nevertheless, leading the club was helpful in many ways, and especially as a future teacher, the greatest benefit for me was learning how to talk in front of many people.

Vignette 10: Learning Vocabulary Through Comics and Song Lyrics

Apart from practicing speaking, I read comics on the weekends. I found them funny and attractive, as the pictures were close to reality. I could also learn new vocabulary. The more words I learned, the higher my desire to learn became. I tried to remember at least one word a day and used it when I was speaking at the club and in class. I had to make that effort because I wanted to make a good impression, and that contributed to my self-improvement. My wish to improve my English skills became more and more intense.

As I like English songs, I checked the translation of the lyrics of my favorite songs on the Internet, not only to understand the songs but also to know more words and expressions. Though it was an effective way to learn vocabulary, I did not always have the chance to use them, and sometimes, I was not able to use some words appropriately since the meaning of one word could vary according to the context. From then, I started to double-check before using a word to make sure that I used it correctly.

Vignette 11: The Hard Work Paid Off

As I began to gradually refine my skills, I started to watch English cartoons and movies with subtitles to consolidate my listening skills and to acquire the accent, since I have indelibly dreamt of sounding native. The big struggle was the fact that I could not focus on the subtitles and the image at the same time. I was not even able to concentrate on what the characters were saying. My goal was not achieved then, but I carried on watching English movies.

Later, when I watched videos of motivational speakers on Facebook, I felt that something had changed as I began to understand what they were saying even without subtitles. I appreciated their amazing accent and their fluency, and the messages they conveyed were crystal clear. I realized that all my hard work of translating, practicing speaking, and learning vocabulary had paid off. And these were all due to the fact that I like the language itself.

Vignette 12: "Vakivakim-piainana" *[hardship]*

I recognized the impact of attending the English club when I volunteered to perform in a play (see Figure 4) with my classmates at the university. I had to articulate and speak aloud. I also learned new vocabulary because my classmates and I had to translate the scripts from Malagasy to English, as the original book, *Vakivakim-Piainana*, is in Malagasy. From the collaboration with my classmates, I learned other ways to translate ideas. As we only had about one month and a half to get prepared, we rehearsed almost every day. It really contributed to the improvement of my speaking skills because every mistake we made was corrected by the teacher, whether it was grammar or pronunciation. I learned to speak clearer and louder and to use body language as well as facial expressions, which are necessary skills I need as a future teacher. Preparing for and performing the play was an effective way to improve my English and to have fun at the same time.

Vignette 13: Learning on My Own for Self-Satisfaction

As an EFL student, I understand the importance of and the difficulty with autonomous learning. There were times when my motivation was low, especially when I saw people younger than me speaking fluently with an American accent. However, I said to myself, "If I stop now, all my efforts will be in vain, and I will bitterly regret it." Rather than seeing the younger people as a barrier, I should view them as a source of motivation to enhance my strong determination for learning English. Now, I can see the benefits of my devotion in the past through all the improvements I have made. I know the significance of learning with friends. It took me so many years to be able to speak English. I learned from my experience that I can be what I want to be, but I must be patient and persevere beyond the classroom to achieve my goal.

Figure 4. The Poster for the Play

What to Implement in Our Future Teaching

In the previous section, we described our LBC experiences, including our goals, activities, resources, and feelings by means of the vignettes. Taking our experiences into consideration, we will briefly discuss what we would like to implement in our future classes.

Fanaperana's Plan

LBC was crucial for my English learning. That is why I will encourage my future students to learn beyond the classroom. I will give them assignments requiring personal research, for example, a reading assignment requiring them to look for unknown vocabulary. I will also share resources with them where they can learn English effectively, such as useful websites. Lastly, from my experience, I believe that motivation is very important. Therefore, I will do my best to enhance my students' motivation by integrating topics that interest them into my lessons. Moreover, I will help them discover their own motivation to learn English by asking them questions about their interests and future goals and talking about opportunities they may have if they master English (e.g., future jobs or scholarship opportunities).

Olivia's Plan

Just as I did with my own LBC, I will give my students opportunities to link their learning and their interests so that they do not consider LBC as a burden. I will ask them to work in groups and to present topics of their interests for which they have to do some research and acquire new knowledge using the target language. Moreover, to demonstrate that English is a means of communication, not just an academic subject, I will create speaking opportunities allowing for LBC, such as English clubs, drama clubs, or even singing clubs. Once they master the language, creating opportunities for contests with awards is also a way to raise their motivation.

Implications and Conclusions: Vola's Contribution

The STs' vignettes remind me of my LBC experiences related to English when I lived in Madagascar. Like Fanaperana, I translated songs from French into English and vice versa. Also, I valued every resource I could use to improve any of my language skills. For instance, I remember I had to run home every day so that I could watch the BBC News on the national television network at 5 p.m., which was one of the very rare TV programs in English in those days. Like the STs, I agree that those LBC activities were crucial for my language development.

Believing in the importance of LBC and drawing from the STs' descriptions of and reflections on their LBC experiences, I will present three significant implications in this section that include ideas on how to promote LBC and learner autonomy to learners and to help learners maintain their motivation in and out of class. As reflection is essential to develop learner autonomy (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; Little et al., 2017), each implication includes written and/or oral reflective activities.

Raise Students' Awareness of Their Interests Related to Language Learning

In writing and reflecting on their LLHs, both Fanaperana and Olivia emphasized that their interests pushed their willingness to learn and to seek different ways to improve their language skills beyond the classroom. They also linked their interests to their learning, which motivated them more. This mirrors the literature on interest as an enhancer of motivation and performance (e.g., McLoughlin, 2020; Mynard & McLoughlin, 2020; Silvia, 2008). Therefore, it is important that learners are aware of their interests related to the language they learn.

Not all learners have a clear idea of their sources of interests or their language-learning goals. Apart from the need to pass exams, they may not have any interest in English and may not realize the potential benefits of knowing English in their lives unless they are prompted to reflect on them. One way to help them reflect would be to have them discuss and write those benefits down in class along with activities they are doing or can do outside class to improve their English. Having students create posters like the one in Table 1 is recommended by Little et al. (2017), as posters serve "an indispensable awareness-raising function" (p. 28).

Table 1. *Poster on "Why and how do I learn English"*

Why do I learn English?	How do I learn English?
• talk to people in other countries • for education / a "must" • main language / nearly everybody can speak it / international language • need it when I grow up / pilot • I like English.	watch English / American films read English (books, newspapers) speak English when I have to and when I want to. via projects by doing grammar exercises

Note. This table was adapted from Little et al. (2017, p. 28).

Use Available Resources and Create Learning Opportunities

With the STs' strong motivation driven by their interests, they developed their agency by using available resources and creating learning opportunities. They understood their responsibilities to seek learning opportunities in a context where "the target language is a

scarce resource . . . and the learner must go out and construct an environment in which it is present" (Benson, 2021, p. 97). As they were aware of the lack of speaking opportunities in class, they looked for ways to practice speaking outside, such as speaking to themselves, siblings, classmates, and even strangers on social media. Furthermore, they used any resources they had at hand. Fanaperana, for instance, made use of her favorite songs to learn vocabulary and to develop her interest in English. Olivia used her siblings as "interpreting resources," though they might not be seen as obvious resources and apparently did not want to be used as such. The STs thus demonstrated that language learning resources in various forms can be created or adapted by learners themselves.

The implication would be to help learners think of possible resources around them and share those resources along with strategies they already use. They can be asked not only to consider accessible resources at school (e.g., library, books, and other materials) but also to reflect on their interests and hobbies, their daily activities, the people around them, and the places where they usually are, and then, to try to connect those resources beyond the classroom with their learning. An adapted version of the poster in Table 1 can be used as a brainstorming tool, which might result in an initial checklist of resources, strategies, and activities. Later in the academic year, time to share and reflect on learners' LBC resources and strategies in class is necessary. Sharing can be done through group discussions or peer interviews making use of the checklist. Learners should be reminded that their peers are valuable resources.

Teachers can also help learners create learning communities (e.g., speaking clubs) and projects allowing them to engage themselves. However, teachers should ensure that students make decisions about and feel ownership of the communities and projects. An excellent example is staging a theater performance, as mentioned by Olivia, in which she and her peers were responsible for the translation of the play and most of the organization of the performance.

Integrate Learners' Own Interests and Activities Inside and Outside Class

The third implication is related to the first two and to the promotion of learner autonomy. To foster learner autonomy in the classroom, learners' prior knowledge should be considered and integrated (Dam, 2019). This concerns not only their knowledge about the language itself, but also learning strategies and activities they already use to improve the language. As Little et al. (2017) state, "Engaging the knowledge, interests and skills that learners bring with them is a prerequisite for getting them involved in their learning. . . . It is also central to inclusive pedagogy" (p. 161). Encouraging learners to share their interests, goals, and existing LBC activities with the class and continue using them outside class and giving them opportunities to use the activities in class are ways to acknowledge learners as whole beings and enable them to "bring their other portable selves into learning experiences" (Magno e Silva, 2018, p. 221). In other words, besides being a language learner, a student is composed of different "selves," such as a Westlife fan, a tennis player, a theater performer, and others. If these selves are integrated in their language learning experiences, learners will find their learning more meaningful, and their autonomy will be more enhanced (Magno e Silva, 2018).

There are different ways to integrate learners' interests. One option is to enable them to present the latest news about their favorite singers, sport teams, actors, or anything they are passionate about once a month. That can be used as a warm-up activity and does not take much class time. Another option is to allocate time to talk about their interests

in groups. If learners like translating songs, they can do that as homework along with paying attention to some specific grammar points, for instance. Also, asking learners what activities they would like to do (as a warm-up or closing activity) from time to time can be highly appreciated.

Help Learners Maintain Motivation Through Reflection

Fanaperana and Olivia's LLHs demonstrate that their engagement to the LBC activities came from their intrinsic motivation. However, motivation can fluctuate (Dörnyei, 2020), and not all language learners have strong motivation. Even Olivia admitted that her motivation was not always high, especially when she compared herself to other fluent speakers. To increase her motivation, one way was to think about how much her persistence had paid off through all the progress she had made. Fanaperana also mentioned her tremendous listening improvement as the fruit of her persistence. As Dörnyei (2020) puts it, "the tangible sense of progress has a potent energy-yielding capacity" (p. 144). It is thus necessary for learners to notice and acknowledge their improvement and the outcomes of their persistence so they can maintain motivation.

One way to help learners notice their improvement and effort is having them regularly reflect on their learning via journal writing and discussions. The checklist mentioned above can be helpful. Then, a few times a year, there should be opportunities in class to discuss improvements, other positive points such as enjoyment vis-a-vis language learning, and updates on sources of motivation or demotivation. Additionally, teachers should help students highlight their own improvements by giving them individualized positive progress feedback (Dörnyei, 2020), indicating specifically the effort made.

Writing LLHs in Teacher Education

Through their LLHs, Fanaperana and Olivia were able to identify their purposes and drives for learning English and notice their difficulties, successes, and strategies and approaches to overcome the difficulties. They participated in what Nelson and Bishop (2013) refer to as "conversation about teaching and learning to improve [their] practice and concrete responsive pedagogy" (p. 19). Though Nelson and Bishop refer to collaborative action research with learners in this statement, it can also be applied to collaborative narrative writing, involving retrospective reflections and plans for future teaching. Writing the LLHs also raised the STs' awareness of the constraints of the classroom; of their self-empowerment, which they gained from LBC; and of practices they would like to implement in their future teaching. I would like, therefore, to conclude this paper by offering a suggestion related to the relevance of writing LLHs in teacher education.

In addition to the introduction and practice of different commonly used teaching approaches and methods, teacher education should also build on student teachers' existing knowledge and experiences. Student teachers have rich language learning experiences, which should be explored and used as resources. Gregersen (2022) states when referring to student teachers, "Take a look at what people can bring and make the best of what they brought." Integrating STs' learning experiences and existing knowledge about learning in the planning of their future teaching is a way, firstly, to empower them and help them understand the importance of considering genuine student needs, such as the establishment of the connection between learning and interests and the provision of communities and spaces to practice the language. Secondly, such integration will raise their awareness of their LBC and their own learner autonomy. Thirdly, their experiences

can serve as personalized and localized resources for future teachers and learners, as Everhard (2018) eloquently points out:

> In order to move forward, it is important to look back, to re-read what others (including students) have said, for quite often with the passage of time and with our own added experience, their words take on new meaning and resonance and inspire and impel us to act. (p. 287)

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Review Process

This paper was open-reviewed by Andy Barfield and Vivien Shu Hua Kao of the *Learner Development Journal* Review Network and the Journal Steering Group. *(Contributors have the option of open or blind review.)*

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Some Thoughts on Implementing a New Teaching Approach: A Review of Clarke's "Exploring Autonomous Learning …"

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This practice-based book review looks at Donna Clarke's (2019) "Exploring Autonomous Learning: A Teacher's Experience and Learners' Perception" in *Autonomy in Language Learning: Getting Learners Actively Involved* (Menegale, 2019). This chapter in the book is a reflection on her first attempt to make her class, at the Japanese School of Brussels, more student-centred. In reviewing the chapter, I reflect on my experience of my first attempt at teaching a semester-long project-based course in relation to some of the key ideas discussed by Clarke. In doing so, I discuss the concerns, successes, and challenges that we shared and faced in incorporating a teaching approach that was new to us both. I also take a close look at the methodology that she used in her study. Finally, I conclude this book review by considering how I would respond to Clarke's four questions that she frames her action research with.

本稿はAutonomy in Language Learning: Getting Learners Actively Involved (Menegale, 2019)に収められているDonna Clarke (2019)の"Exploring Autonomous Learning: A Teacher's Experience and Learners' Perception"の書評である。本書のこの章は、ブリュッセル日本人学校でのClarke自身の授業をより学習者中心にするための初めての試みについての考察である。この章を振り返りながら、Clarkeが論じた重要な考え方に関連して、筆者が初めて試みた1学期間を通してのプロジェクトベースの授業の経験を振り返ってみた。私たち双方にとって新しい教育アプローチを取り入れる際に共有し、直面した懸念、成功、課題について論じる。また、Clarkeが研究に用いた方法論についても考察する。最後に、Clarkeがアクション・リサーチの枠組みとして掲げた4つの質問に対して、私ならどう答えるかを考えてこの書評を締めくくる。

Keywords

Japanese university students, learner-centred approach, out-of-class learning, project-based learning, reflection
日本の大学生、学習者中心のアプローチ、授業外学習、プロジェクトベースド学習、リフレクション

Donna Clarke's (2019) "Exploring Autonomous Learning: A Teacher's Experience and Learners' Perception" in *Autonomy in Language Learning: Getting Learners Actively Involved*, edited by Marcella Menegale (2019), is a reflection on her attempt to make her class more student-centred. Reading it reminded me of when I first taught a semester-long project-based course in the English Language Programme (ELP) at a university in central Japan. Like Clarke, at that stage of my career and without a background in education or TESOL/TEFL, I was unfamiliar with the concept or practice of learner autonomy.

This practice-based book review is an extended reflection on my first attempts to implement a more learner-centred approach in the classroom, in relation to some of the key ideas discussed by Clarke. The students' comments I refer to in this review were collected on the last day of classes with their consent for the data to be used in any future research or publication. My notes were recorded on the lesson plans that I prepared in my notebook for each class and included my classroom observations with comments on how I might do things differently in the future.

Clarke's Study

Clarke conducted action research when she first attempted to switch from a teacher-centred classroom to a more learner-centred one. Her study took place at the Japanese School of Brussels between April and July in 2011. It was an immersion-style class in which she spoke in English only, and the curriculum focused on English for travel purposes. The students were aged between 14 and 15 years of age and met three times a week for 45 minutes. She had a Japanese support teacher in each class, whose role is not specified in the chapter.

Data for Clarke's study comprised a diary she kept during her year teaching, learning journals her students were required to keep, a questionnaire, and several interviews she conducted with students based on gender and ability. The questionnaire used a 4-point Likert scale and was submitted to the author by the last day of the term. Clarke writes that the students were given one week to return it to her. The learning journals were kept throughout the year, but how frequently they were kept and when they were submitted are unclear. The interviews were conducted before the questionnaires were collected at the end of the semester.

Clarke's discussion is focused on two main concerns she had incorporating autonomous learning in her classroom: first, the novelty and unfamiliarity of the practice, and secondly, her concern not to impose upon her students a Western form of learning. These two concerns are elaborated in terms of four central questions that frame her reflections:

1. Could the approach be implemented successfully?
2. If she encountered problems with implementation, would she be able to find solutions?
3. Would the students' cultural backgrounds inhibit their autonomous learning engagement?
4. Would the students see the approach as advantageous to their learning?

Clarke's second concern, that she not impose on her students a Western form of learning, is based on the notion that autonomy is a concept "central to European liberal-democratic and liberal humanist thought" (Pennycook, 1997, p. 42). Her concern was founded in personal observations and literature she had read which stated that Japanese students, often coming from traditions of obedience to authority, see teachers as figures who convey knowledge rather than as mentors who facilitate learning (Liu, 2008). However, Clarke was also guided by other researchers that discussed the possibility of succeeding with autonomous learning within a Japanese educational context (e.g., Dias, 2000; Sakai et al., 2010).

Clarke's two concerns can be related to Dam's (2019) discussion (also in the same volume edited by Menegale) regarding the teacher's role in the classroom. In a teacher-centred classroom, the teacher's role is clear, as they are positioned at the front instructing the students. However, with a learner-centred approach, the teacher's role may be more ambiguous. How much they get directly involved with the students, and to what extent they address or approach the students, is very much a negotiated practice. This is challenging for instructors as well as students, although perhaps particularly with Asian students, who are generally perceived to be more passive and to expect teachers to simply tell them what to know (Littlewood, 1999; Liu, 2008).

Clarke does not specify how she organised her classes, nor the methods she used to implement more autonomous learning, what the students were assigned to do in each class, or how this was all different from what she did before. The reader however can infer from her questionnaire results that the students were able to direct their classroom learning, for example, choosing which units of the textbook to study, what activities to do, and which expressions to remember. The students also seem to have been able to choose their own homework.

Details aside, Clarke found implementing her new learner-centred pedagogical approach challenging, but her students responded positively. For example, the questionnaire results showed that 85% of the students either disagreed or strongly disagreed that teachers should be responsible for choosing classroom activities, 78% of the students appreciated being able to choose which units from the textbook to study, and 69% found choosing their homework to be useful for their learning.

On the other hand, she also discovered that students found working in groups to be a challenge. The questionnaire did not ask for feedback on group work, but responses from all four interviewees showed that they did not have positive impressions. Clarke speculates that part of the reason for this may be that students did not have enough time to experience the benefits of support and feedback from others in their group work.

Clarke's Action Research Methodology

Clarke's data collection is unclear on two points, which, if clarified would give more insight into the strength of her methodology. First, she mentions that her students had one week to complete and submit the course questionnaires and that the interviews took place before the questionnaires were due. Therefore, the interviews took place before the semester had fully ended. Thus, although the students were told that participating in the interview would not affect their grades, one wonders whether they were comfortable sharing their thoughts on their teacher's pedagogy, especially if their feedback may have been critical. Furthermore, the questionnaire was administered on a 4-point Likert scale (i.e., *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, *strongly disagree*), which may have influenced some students' response as it did not provide a neutral option for those who neither agreed nor disagreed. If Clarke had chosen to use an even number of options on the questionnaire, so as to force the respondents to choose a particular position or perspective, some explanations might have been helpful for understanding why she did this.

The second point regards whether the students' learning journals were included in their grade assessment. Clarke says she asked her students to keep learning journals "throughout the year" (p. 26) but does not specify how often the students were required to keep them, nor whether she collected them before the end of the semester. These points are important because keeping a learning journal might seem like a lot of work for students if it is not part of their grade, which, in my experience, would discourage many students from writing their learning journals regularly. The content of the journals might also turn out to be superficial and not reflect students' real views. If the journals were not collected or checked on a regular basis, some students may even have completed all their reflections in a short time before submitting them.

A related concern regarding students' journals is that they were asked to make their entries in the target language. Citing Dam and Little (1999), Clarke emphasises the value and appropriateness of using the target language as a way for students to develop their skills. However, she also writes that her students struggled with their journals because

of difficulty expressing themselves in English. While I agree with Dam and Little on using the target language to develop language skills, one wonders what perspectives or insights the students may have shared were they permitted to write in their first language. Clarke does of course mention the difficulty she would have had reading the journals in the students' first language, but her comprehension may have been prioritised at the cost of the content and quality of the students' feedback.

My First Attempt at Student-Centred Learning

The class I taught involved first-year advanced-level students, who were classified as "advanced" based on the university's classification. They were aged 18 or 19, and most of them had spent some of their earlier years living and studying outside Japan or came from a culturally mixed background. Only a few students, three out of 20, had not experienced any schooling whatsoever outside Japan. From previous teaching, I was familiar with having students work in groups for discussions and presentations, but this course was different in two ways. First, unlike most of the 90-minute-per-week, one-semester courses I had taught until then, this course was held twice a week for 90 minutes, and I was teaching the same group of students for two successive semesters. Second, most of the course design was open to my determination including whether to use a textbook and, if so, which textbook. The only instructions issued by the ELP were that students in the first semester were to learn reading skills and writing skills, and in the second semester they were to practice those skills through project-based learning.

Accordingly, I had more control of the content and schedule in the first semester, given the students' need to develop particular skills, and the students had more control in the second. Thus, in the first semester, students were directed to complete assigned tasks on reading, writing, and presentations in each class. In the second semester, by contrast, students decided which topics they would study and how they would use the time in each class. Apart from a few deadlines I set for submissions, including a project schedule and weekly progress reports, groups were free to decide how they would manage their learning. My role in the second semester was focused on tracking how well they were completing their projects, providing support for identified issues, and occasionally offering advice to the whole class if a group was encountering difficulties.

At the beginning of the second semester I did not share Clarke's concerns, as I assumed that a more learner-centred approach would be welcomed by the students. This confidence, however, was somewhat misplaced. Although most students actively communicated with each other and participated in group work, my classroom observations and the students' end-of-semester reflections showed some were clearly lost in their classroom autonomy.

For example, Ayaka (pseudonym) showed a considerable change in behaviour from the first semester to the second. In the first semester, she actively responded to my instructions and was never late handing in assignments. She was also usually first to respond to questions I would pose to the class. In the second semester, I kept my instructions to a minimum to allow groups to expand their ideas in their own ways and only ask for guidance when they felt necessary. Ayaka's work fulfilled the minimum of my instruction but did not go beyond, and she was far less active in the classroom and in group work. In the end-of-semester reflection she wrote, "In the first semester, I felt I was learning something new from the teacher every week. I don't feel like I learnt anything new in the second semester."

On the other hand, and similar to Clarke's findings, there were also pleasant surprises. Kosuke (pseudonym) was a quiet student who rarely interacted with other students in the first semester. Initially, I had concerns about how he would cope with the second semester's student-centred approach. Kosuke, however, not only actively worked on the group project, but also pursued his interests and asked lots of questions, both during class and via email. In his end-of-semester reflection he wrote how much he had enjoyed working on the project with his group and that he understood why the first semester had been taught as it had: to provide him and his fellow students with the necessary skills for the following semester.

Ayako and Kosuke demonstrate that not all activities or teaching approaches are welcomed by all students, an issue that most teachers probably face. Dam (2019) discusses how "letting go and taking hold" (p. 96) is an ongoing challenge for teachers trying to allow more autonomy for students in learning, both inside and outside the classroom. Students need leeway to learn in their own ways, but still need guidance in how to do this: Teachers cannot be completely hands-off. How much teachers should let go seems even harder when considering work outside the classroom. With group work in particular, if work is assigned for outside the classroom, then teachers need to monitor how each individual is contributing, or students may be treated unfairly. One way of dealing with this is to "let go" of homework assignments and allow students to manage their course workload themselves.

Clarke's findings revealed that 69% of her students were happy to be able to decide on their own homework. Assigning homework or out-of-class learning was not something I considered in my second semester. Throughout the course, groups worked at their own pace, managing their project schedules, and deciding what work to do in or out of the classroom. The amount of homework they chose to do was therefore an uncontrollable factor for me. Even mentioning work outside of the classroom was not something I wanted to do, since it might have come across as interference or made some students feel I did not see them as responsible.

At the end of the semester I found that all groups had managed their projects successfully and independently. Moreover, one student went far beyond the first semester's standards, teaching himself how to make a website to better present his group's findings. I had expected students to make slides for their final presentations on the basis of the first semester presentation skills they had studied. The student explained in his end-of-semester comments that he had suggested creating a website to his group and the group had collectively agreed to it. Making the website may not have helped the student improve his English language skills, but the opportunity to discover new interests and pursue them was invaluable.

This case may be a clear example of how "taking hold" and "letting go" at the right time can be effective regarding outside-the-classroom work. Indeed, looking back at the student reflections I collected, no one referred to the amount of homework they had given themselves. Reading Clarke's chapter made me consider, however, whether I should have considered asking the students what they thought about having control over their own homework. Given the case of Ayaka, for example, I wonder if I sometimes let go of the students too much, and whether I should have sometimes held on more.

Final Reflection: Considering Clarke's Four Questions

In closing, I return to the four central questions that Clarke uses to frame her reflections on her action research. In so doing, however, I should note that whilst Clarke's reflections are central to her study, mine are speculations based on my notes and the comments I received from my students. Clarke's first and second questions concern the instructor's discomfort or anxiety in transitioning from a teacher-centred approach to a more learner-centred approach and embracing the idea of instructors "letting go" (Dam, 2019). Her third and fourth questions concern the students' discomfort in becoming more autonomous in their learning. In order for a new teaching method to "work" in the classroom, a certain amount of confidence is required from both the teacher and the students, in themselves and each other. Instructors need to have confidence in their ability to use the teaching method and in the students' capacity to engage with it. Students, on the other hand, need to have confidence in themselves and in the value of learning in a way they are unfamiliar with.

For my own part, when designing the course for the second semester, I had confidence both in the course structure and the students' ability to autonomously learn. I was also not concerned about imposing a Western concept on the students nor with finding solutions if problems arose. This was due to my experience in the first semester, because most of the students had schooling experience outside Japan, and because I assumed any problems that arose would be minor.

Kosuke proved that the course could be successful, and his work in the second semester rewarded my confidence that the students could autonomously learn. Ayaka, on the other hand, was one of the students who had studied abroad, so my assumption that she would be prepared for autonomous learning was misplaced. Moreover, my efforts to help her and other struggling students may not have been enough. The question then is whether my overall confidence in the course was too strong or not. It could be that some students need more preparation before being able to fully benefit from autonomous learning, or it could also be that some may only recognise the benefits of a learner autonomy approach afterwards when they later reflect back on their learning experiences. Conversely, another possibility is that some students may just not be interested in autonomous learning.

In autonomous learning, students need to take initiative in solving their own inquiries. As the process itself is a learning opportunity for them, it is my continuing hope that my students will eventually move away from the teacher-as-guru model to see learning as an engaged and participatory effort between themselves and me as their instructor. Therefore, I conclude, as Clarke concludes, that for instructors to organise a more autonomous classroom, communication with the students so they understand and appreciate the methods used may be required.

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Review Process

This paper was blind peer-reviewed by members of the *Learner Development Journal* Review Network and the Journal Steering Group. *(Contributors have the option of open or blind review.)*

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Space Matters: Language Learning Environments Beyond the Classroom in the Post-COVID World

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Phil: Mayumi, we have known each other since 2015 when you came to Macquarie University for your higher degree research. You completed a Master of Research (MRes) thesis on students' conceptualizations of in-class and out-of-class learning and then a PhD on teachers' conceptions of students' learning environments. It was a privilege for me to be able to supervise your work and I learnt a lot from it. Without meeting you, I don't think my ideas on language learning environments would have developed as they did! I have a long association with the JALT Learner Development SIG (dating back to a one-day symposium in Shizuoka in 1995), and you are now working at Kanda University of International Studies. I am sure you agree that it is an honor to be asked to write a commentary on this issue of *Learner Development Journal* and entirely appropriate that we should write in the form of a dialogue. The theme of this issue—learner development beyond the classroom—is "right up our alley," as they say in Australia. But if we are to begin by commenting on the theme, I think I would say, first, that learner development takes place both inside *and* outside the classroom and that it is difficult to separate the two. But at the same time learner development beyond the classroom is often neglected so the focus on out-of-class learning in this issue is justified. Would you agree?

Mayumi: I can't agree with you more, Phil! It's a great honor to be invited to write this commentary with you. I truly appreciate the editorial team for giving me this opportunity. When I started my MRes, your work on the concept of learner autonomy was particularly inspiring to me as I was curious about how teachers (including myself) can support learners to develop their degree of autonomy, especially by connecting in-class and out-of-class learning experiences, and how teachers can help learners make use of the ample learning opportunities and resources that they actually have outside of the classroom. Therefore, language learning environments beyond the classroom and teachers' awareness of them have become a major research interest for me, and I was very lucky to be supervised by you! Your immense wisdom and insights guided me throughout my journey to complete my degrees. As you said, learner development beyond the classroom is often neglected; in particular, the connection between in-class and out-of-class learning has not been given much attention. We should

remind ourselves of not only the richness of resources and the value of what the students can do for their learning outside of the classroom, but also that learning is seamlessly taking place both inside and outside of the classroom for individual students. The COVID-19 pandemic actually has reminded us of such a realization when physical classes were canceled.

In this dialogue, I would like to ask you about your views on the current world, more specifically, about language learning environments beyond the classroom in the post-COVID world. Hopefully this will contribute to the further discussion on language education in the field. Also, the work from the contributors in this issue shows that our continuous inquiry into language learning environments beyond the classroom is invaluable and should be paid more attention to, now more than ever. (It should be noted that we will use first names to refer to the authors in a friendly manner just as this dialogue-format commentary itself aims to create an open café-like atmosphere. Please prepare yourself a nice cup of coffee!)

First of all, I'm wondering how you would describe the current post-COVID world. In your book (Benson, 2021), you say, "For all of us, it has been a sharp reminder of just how much space matters" (p. 140) by pointing out "a very different world" that we live in now. Indeed, we have all experienced the global COVID pandemic, and a growing number of researchers have pointed out the struggles that language learners and teachers faced when classes were turned to exclusively online (Tao & Gao, 2022). Now, how do you perceive the influence of the pandemic on the concept of language learning environments beyond the classroom?

Phil: That's an interesting question, because although I wrote most of that book during the COVID-19 lockdowns in Australia in 2020, most of the ideas for it were already laid out by then. The comment that you have quoted was really an afterthought, and I was very conscious that the spatiality of language learning was changing around me in ways that I was too busy to think about at the time! I guess I thought that everything would go back to normal after the pandemic. But although we are now more or less "back to normal" in Australia, I have noticed two longer-term effects. The first is that video conferencing has been normalized—meeting by Zoom is now a matter of convenience, rather than necessity. The second is that remote learning has also been normalized for many students. Universities are doing their best to get students back on campus, but 10 percent attendance has become normal and lecturers now have to adapt their teaching methods to "hybrid learning," where some students are in class while others are online and some are not there at all. In a broader sense, COVID-19 has made me think that there are three "worlds" in language learning. We need, perhaps, to think of the online world as being additional to, and somewhat independent of, the worlds of in-class and out-of-class learning.

Mayumi: The idea of three "worlds" in language learning makes me think of another research possibility (of ours), of exploring learners' perceptions of and engagements with their language learning environments while traversing these worlds! I also experienced hybrid teaching, and it was a really hard task to deliver a lesson to the students in two different worlds. However, I found it interesting to see individual differences in attitudes and behaviors towards such

classes! That was the time I felt that the idea of our "language classrooms" is now different and challenging as a teacher.

When considering that we now have an additional world of online learning, how do you see this change of our recognition of language learning and teaching environments in the so-called "post-COVID" era? Van Lier's definition of a language classroom, which is "the gathering, for a given period of time, of two or more persons (one of whom generally assumes the role of instructor) for the purposes of language learning" (1988, p. 47), sounds okay, but if "the gathering" refers to a particular physical space where a teacher and students meet face-to-face, it would be no longer applicable since we now have more choices and flexibility in ways of learning, for example, online/remote and on-demand lessons, in addition to face-to-face classes. When the physical location does not matter for formal language learning, and the border between a language classroom and outside of the classroom is less clear, the definition of language learning beyond the classroom becomes more complex.

Phil: Exactly! I don't think van Lier was making a contrast between in-class and out-of-class learning in his definition; he just wanted to be as inclusive as possible, and I feel sure he would have welcomed online spaces into his definition of the classroom. Van Lier's definition has always been important to me, though, as a starting point for thinking about how different settings (for him, different types of classroom) influence learning. For example, I recently taught an online class where the students watched a video recording of a mini-lecture and then discussed the content with me. But most of the students watched the video recording in their own time; some may have discussed the content with other students, and some would not have discussed it at all! So, the students only logged in to the class during class time if they wanted to talk to me, or perhaps wanted to have that social experience of attending class! Before the pandemic, I would have presented the content "live" in class, all of the students would have been there, and I would have orchestrated the discussion. I could have done that in the online class, but there has been a kind of deconstruction of the physical classroom that made me feel that I should not be imposing that on students in the online setting.

Mayumi: The complexity of online/digital learning environments is now obvious; formal learning can even take place in students' bedrooms while they are browsing their Instagram stories or watching YouTube videos at the same time. It seems that students have experienced a lot of challenges both physically and emotionally. I believe that teachers have also found it challenging to adjust their working styles since their workplaces were not classrooms—it could be a living room or a café. But still, we had to make our online teaching "engaging" for students so that the quality of teaching could be maintained. As such, both students and teachers had to co-construct some particular "space" in the physically limited environments. Technology was a great survival kit for both students and teachers. In terms of teaching, Gretchen Clark in this issue demonstrates the use of digital resources for extensive listening as well as promoting learner autonomy of university students in Japan during remote teaching. Teachers' navigation of efficient use of technology has provided students with support and in turn self-directed learning beyond the classroom.

Phil: Yes, this has actually been a challenge for teachers and Gretchen's paper is a great example of how teachers have been meeting that challenge. What her paper shows me, especially, is how online teaching can give teachers an entry point into students' online learning. We may think of online extensive listening as one of the main out-of-class activities that students carry out independently of teachers, but here is an example of how teaching can reach out into that part of students' worlds. This would be much more difficult, for example, in relation to offline extensive listening out in the city.

Mayumi: It's an interesting point that students' out-of-class learning has become more visible to teachers, while it used to be less visible. I believe that teachers' guidance in practicing extensive listening can also have a positive outcome, in that students' out-of-class learning can be perceived as the *extension* of their in-class learning. As such, teachers' creativity in utilizing technology to connect in-class and out-of-class learning experiences seems to enhance the development of learners! Chika Hayashi's innovative international online project collaborating with Finnish schools appears very energizing for the learners, which allows the students to realize the true meaning of learning a language through experiencing real communication in English. Her study also shows positive outcomes in increasing learners' motivation to learn English further. I think that this innovative online project demonstrates a great potential and through its implementation could create a new dimension of "a language classroom" at many schools around the world.

Phil: I think that we can learn a few things from Chika's project. It seems important to me that Yuki was a voluntary participant and that she had several motivations for joining the project. It also seems important that the two participants were collaborating on a task that they were both committed to.

Mayumi: Having said that the conceptualization of language learning settings and environments has become more complex, it seems that out-of-class learning for students means a lot: from something they do for their own goals and purposes (e.g., preparing for the TOEIC test, using mobile applications which suit their learning purposes) to informal and implicit learning such as watching movies in English, and formal classes. Since it seems to be happening at the same place and the same time, I feel that the locus of control, or how students engage with the space, seems to be the key to defining their space. In other words, learner agency plays a crucial role more than ever for individuals to manage a meaningful learning environment in order to survive the uncertain, changing, and complex world.

Phil: Well, you could say that teachers should not interfere with students' learning beyond the classroom, that they should leave that to the students themselves. But many students do not engage in learning beyond the classroom to the extent that they might because they lack knowledge of what is available in their environments or the capacity to use resources productively. The important point about Chika's COIL project is that it creates opportunities for learning beyond the classroom that learners might not be able to set up themselves. That is one thing teachers can do. But there needs to be a balance between the teacher's role and the students' agency. Jon Rowberry's paper in this issue also identifies selection of resources as a key area in which there needs to

be space for learner agency—if learners select their own resources then they will also need to make their own decisions about how they use them, what they will learn from them. But this also calls for skills that we associate with autonomy: Students will develop these skills in the practice of learning beyond the classroom, but teachers can also help. Here, I like Jon's idea of "scaffolding" learning beyond the classroom. This is another thing that teachers can do.

Mayumi: I also really like Jon's paper as it highlights the (new) role of teachers in supporting students to be able to have better control over their own learning. Nowadays, the learners have ample (or sometimes too many) resources out there, in particular, the rapid and seemingly endless development of new mobile or online applications. The students seem to be constantly updating or changing learning applications while not always having certain learning outcomes in mind. We cannot catch up with all those new learning materials; however, the learning skills, to select suitable learning resources for their learning purposes and needs, should be reconsidered, guided, and followed up on by the teachers in the course of language learning.

Another aspect of a teacher's role beyond the classroom can be support for the learners' emotional challenges. At my university, I've witnessed many students who struggle or fail to continue their learning or nearly lose (or have lost) their future career visions mainly because of this world change. I've heard students' struggles firsthand with comments such as, *"Online classes simply demotivated me," "I cannot focus on class if it's online,"* and *"I couldn't adjust myself when university switched back from online to face-to-face classes, and I could not communicate with people well. I kind of fell into depression, and it was hard just to come to university."* Due to the cancellation of study abroad programs, some students had to give up their precious opportunities to experience studying and living abroad, which also forced them to change their future career plans. Aya Hayasaki's investigation into the experiences of three female learners in rural Japan also argues that language learning outside of the classroom is certainly connected or is at least part of the learners' life process. When students face an environmental change, in this case, a change of learning environment from a face-to-face, traditional sense of the language classroom to online learning in an isolated place due to the world pandemic, I think it's fair to say that the majority of students experienced emotional difficulties in learning. The adjustment involves significant emotional challenges, and it seems to highlight the importance of social and emotional support (from peers and teachers) for the development of learner agency.

Phil: The need to adjust *conceptions* of in-class and out-of-class learning, and the relationship between them was really the original contribution of your Masters research, which we also highlighted in Kashiwa and Benson (2018). There you were talking about the transition from "study at home" to "study abroad," but I agree that the changes in teaching and learning during COVID-19 represented another kind of transition, and it is interesting to think about what that transition involved. You make a good point here that this is an *emotional* challenge. In fact, this takes towards the heart of what we mean by a "learning ecology." Space is one dimension—we can think of how a person's language learning is distributed across a range of in-class and out-of-class spaces—but

then there is also the time of longitudinal dimension, which Aya captures in the notion of *trajectory*. When we use the term "ecology," we are often thinking about the ways in which things fit together. So, in the case of language learning ecology, we are thinking about how spaces of learning fit together in the context of individual lives, but also how events and processes fit together over time, how one set of actions in space shapes not only the next set of actions but also the spatial field in which they take place. I find Aya's paper especially valuable because it shows us how language learning can be transformational for the learner. In my view, language learning "widens horizons" in the literal sense that it transforms spaces of learning and opens up new spaces of possibilities for the learner.

Mayumi: That's right. Such changes do show the dynamics of learners' language learning ecologies; adjusting to changes in any aspect of a learning environment can result in a change of conceptions and lead learners to engage with resources they perceive. It reminds me of the importance of being a reflective practitioner/researcher who is aware of the fluid and constantly changing nature of the language learning environments. Mizuka Tsukamoto's practice-based book review, in which she reflected on her own teaching practice by relating to Donna Clarke's (2019) classroom action research on a learner-centered approach to foster learner autonomy, is one example of reflective practice that we can do for our ongoing professional development. Also, as you pointed out, students' engagement with resources in the environment matters for the learner's development. This talk with you has made me realize that we have to be more mindful that our students are not experiencing one simple shift/transition from offline to online, rather, they are traversing multiple learning worlds, experiencing both benefits and constraints, and also figuring out how to make their learning more meaningful.

In terms of research design, the use of the learners' own reflections proves to be a great data source for an in-depth investigation as well as a powerful tool for learner development. In this issue, the students' engagement with resources, and how learners develop their agency beyond the classroom are examined through students' self-reflection. For example, Dominique Vola Ambinintsoa, Haingoarinjaka Fanaperana Rajaonaritiana, and Volatiana Olivia Rasoanindrina (two of them are students as well as future EFL teachers) employed language learning histories written by the authors themselves as research participants. They highlighted the importance of learner agency in creating their language learning environments beyond the classroom and the capacity of utilizing opportunities and resources in the given environment. They suggested implementing innovative classroom activities by linking students' interests and learning strategies beyond the classroom, which, in turn, would boost the learners' motivation. Ann Flanagan employed journal writing as a tool for high school students to self-reflect on their learning outside of the classroom. She points out the value of critical reflective practice among learners for raising their awareness of learning beyond the classroom so that they will be more responsible for their learning. Do you have any recommendations on designing a new research project?

Phil: Yes, these two papers take us into the area of learner histories in different ways. The first thing I want to say about Vola, Fanaperana, and Olivia's paper is that we really need more autobiographical writing of this kind in learner development. There is a certain kind of conservatism in academic writing and publishing that favors third-person research and writing and, therefore, a certain kind of perspective and insight. We need more experimental writing of this kind because it gives us different kinds of insights, coming from the multiple perspectives of co-authorship as well as the learner-teacher-researcher perspective. We also gain a vivid picture of the development of both a collective and individual learning ecologies over time in the Malgasay context. Ann's paper is an interesting one because it shows us how journal writing can be both learning beyond the classroom and a source of data for research. But beyond that it highlights the crucial roles of reflection and critical self-awareness in this view of language learning as a spatio-temporal process of "widening horizons." In fact, one can spend a lot of time learning a language at school without very much changing at all. Development comes from outside stimuli—and this is why a widening experience of language learning *beyond* the classroom is so important—but it also has to be driven from within. As Ann puts it, it is a matter of learners becoming "more involved in their language learning," and as learners become more involved, the spaces of their learning are also likely to expand. Critical reflective writing journals are an excellent tool to foster that kind of development. This is yet another thing that teachers can do.

Mayumi: The discussion with you, reflecting on the current language learning and teaching environments and our experiences over the past years, has inspired me to explore more about *space*, which both the learners and teachers co-cultivate in the process of language learning ecologies. I believe that we should keep in mind that learning involves both positive and negative emotions. It is also the fact that the learners are traversing complex learning environments, and their engagement with the resources is crucial in order to adjust themselves to the changes. In addition, it is necessary for the learners to reinforce reflective practice, and also our continuous inquiry into supporting the learners' engagement in learning is needed. I'd also like to ask your views about the points for a research agenda in the field of language learning environments beyond the classroom and learner development.

Phil: Well, this issue of *LDJ* points to a few directions for a research agenda on learner development and learning environments. The two main directions that I see are concerned, first, with what teachers can do in relation to language learning beyond the classroom, and, second, how we can move beyond a narrow observational view of learning environments. On the first question, I find that the papers in this issue are sensitive to the potential problem of "interfering in" students' out-of-class learning. As a matter of perspective, I believe we need to decenter our point of view as teachers. Language learners are not just the people we meet in our classes, and these classes are not necessarily the focus of their learning either in space or in time. On the contrary, we are people that learners meet at certain points in wider spaces of learning, and at certain points in their development over time. Language learning is also deeply embedded in their lives—lives about which only they can speak authoritatively. Too much

academic research treats the learner that we see here and now as the whole of the learner; if we shift the center to the spatio-temporal perspective of the learners, we will understand that our influence is limited. The contributors to this special issue understand, I think, that we can nudge learners in certain directions in language learning beyond the classroom, but the rest will be up to the learners themselves. On the second question, I welcome the range of perspectives, research methods, and writing styles in this issue and, especially, the willingness to experiment and explore new areas and dimensions of language learning. This is what the Learner Development SIG in JALT has always been good at, and long may it continue!

Mayumi: Finally, I'd like to thank you again for sharing your views and experiences. Having the opportunity to write a commentary with you has been a real honor! I really enjoyed the chance to exchange ideas in this format, and I appreciate your contributions to the field! I really hope to see you in person (and work with you) soon!! I also look forward to your future publications!

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