A Study of College Students’ English Autonomous Learning in the Network Environment

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Keywords: Network Environment, English Autonomous Learning (EAL), Strategies.

Abstract. This paper analyzes the characteristics of autonomous learning and offers some strategies on how to promote college students’ English autonomous learning in the network environment. The autonomous learning in the network environment is characterized with purposiveness, selectivity, creative spirit, self-regulation, adaptability and intercourse. Five strategies are given to promote students’ English autonomous learning in this study. To promote students’ autonomous learning, the teachers should raise students’ independent consciousness, highlight their principal position in teaching, encourage the interaction of English learning in the network, take full advantage of individuation of network English and strengthen supervision in the learning process.

Introduction

Autonomous learning is one of an individual’s necessary qualities which could help to survive and develop in the society. The arrival of information age provides an environment for English autonomous learning with its incomparable advantages. The network environment, with rich teaching resources, reticular information presentation and openness of time and space, provides ideal conditions for creating the students’ autonomous learning environment, which makes the autonomous learning supported by the computer become one of the main forms of college teaching.

However, according to the study of Wu [1] in a survey of college students’ autonomous learning ability, college students in China are weak in autonomous learning and they don’t know how to learn and how to improve the ability of autonomous learning. Also quite a lot of college students are not able to make use of the powerful online learning resources. They have difficulties in using the network for autonomous learning. They don’t know how to choose material from huge database; they seldom use effective learning strategies, and they cannot monitor their learning process and evaluate their learning efficiency. Therefore developing and improving college students’ autonomous learning in the network environment is an urgent need for college English teaching reform in the information age.

1. Literature Review

The concept and definition of autonomous learning under the network environment has been introduced into foreign language teaching over twenty years. In spite of the various interpretations proposed by different research and scholars, even at different periods, they all insist that in autonomous learning, learners take more control over their learning in and outside the classroom. Learners take responsibility for their own learning. During the process of autonomous learning, the teachers could offer help for students if they need [2-5].

Pang Weiguo [6] pointed out that autonomous learning can be divided into three aspects: first, it is plan and arrangement in advance for one’s own learning activities; second, it is supervision, evaluation and feedback to one’s actual learning activities; third, it is adjust modification and control to one’s own learning activities. He thinks that the essence of autonomous learning is self-monitoring guided by the targets. Under the network teaching environment, English autonomous learning is beneficial to the cultivation of the students’ learning and language abilities,
but students have difficulties in using the network for autonomous learning. They don’t know how to choose material from huge database; they seldom use effective learning strategies, and they cannot monitor their learning process and evaluate their learning efficiency [1].

2. Model of English Autonomous Learning

Autonomous learning for itself is a dynamic process of a complexity. It is the reason why researchers can research from the angle of multiple. Cognitive constructivism thinks that autonomous learning, in fact, is a study under the monitoring of meta-cognition and meta-cognition plays a crucial role in autonomous learning process [7]. Information processing theory thinks that autonomous learning is a test process of testing and modifying with the cycle repeated. It also pays attention to the impact of result of autonomous learning from learners’ beliefs which is mainly manifested in the change of learning motivation [8]. Will theory emphasizes the role of learners’ self-regulation in the process of learning [9].

Zimmerman [10] pointed out that there are three tasks for autonomous learners about the process of autonomous learning. First, the learner should improve their auto-genesis and affective state step by step according to their learning process and result. Second, the learner should adjust their learning behavior using different strategies to meet the need of autonomous learning. Third, the learner should form a better learning environment and achieve one’s learning goal with the help of environment sources. Autonomous learning, therefore, could be consisted of planning stage, acting stage and reflecting stage. Each stage affected by different things has a lot of small stages. Planning stage is ready for the process of learning and plays an important role in the action or consciousness of learner. Reflecting stage is effected by acting stage and next planning is decided by reflecting stage which also could make arrange for the learner. That is the model of autonomous learning.


Through the analysis of autonomous learning model, we think that the process of college students’ autonomous learning under the network environment is mainly composed of six parts including learning program, accessing to resources and information processing, the results show, evaluation and reflection, and academic help-seeking.

During learning program, under the guidance and help of teachers, students will set a learning goal suiting themselves according to their interest and cognitive structure and make feasible plans in detail to realize the goal.

During autonomous learning process, effective resources are very important. If students hold the ability to master resource acquisition and evaluation, they will get the true useful information after accessing and judging the resources from the network environment.

Information processing is the process of meaning construction for students; they could take the way of independent learning or cooperative learning to finish it.

Results show prompts students to explicit expression of knowledge they hold, which could make students get clear knowledge structure and correct concept.

Evaluation and reflection is an objective evaluation for the learning process and learning result of learners on the current, and summarizes the experience and insufficiency. The results of evaluation and reflection directly apply to the stages of learning activities.

Academic help-seeking is the process of self-regulation during autonomous learning. Students could seek help when they encounter difficulties in the process of learning hard to solve independently.

From the angle of teachers’ support on students’ autonomous learning, teachers mainly promote the students’ autonomous learning from the design of learning objectives, design of learning resources, design of learning activity, design of learning evaluation as well as academic help-seeking. The information processing and the results show are two links of learning activity design.
4. Characteristics of Students’ English Autonomous Learning

With the analysis of autonomous learning above, we know that autonomous learning is not a learning organization but a kind of the concept. Though the concept is defined by different researches, it still has some commonality: characteristics of autonomous learning.

Purposiveness: have a very clear aim, rectify the learning attitude and have a proper cognition about autonomous learning values.

Selectivity: be able to select learning contents precisely, have the sharp sensibility, intelligence and discernment about autonomous learning information, and be able to perceive, gather, tackle and generate information efficiently.

Creative spirit: be not satisfied with the extent answers or results, ponder over the learning content independently, expand one’s thoughts, be able to understand the same thing from different aspects, be good at applying the summary to explore new cases, finally broadening one’s horizon continuously.

Self-regulation: have the concept and ability of self-control towards one’s own learning motivation, interests, strategy, consequences etc, have a sensitive response to the problems in the process of autonomous learning.

Adaptability: have the competence to adapt the group and community lift, observe discipline consciously, and master a trait that could be accepted by the group and community members.

Intercourse: have the willingness and competence of people communication, assume responsibility voluntarily and change the role in the light of the group’s needs, be able to learn in the group activities.

5. Strategies of Promoting Students’ EAL in the Network Environment

In order to improve students’ autonomous learning ability in the network environment, five strategies are put forward.

5.1 Raising students’ independent consciousness

Wenden [11] points out that in the process of learning language, students play an active role in the learning process for themselves. What teachers could do is helping them build foundation and master methods and skills of English autonomous learning. The key to the success of English learning is up to students themselves. Only students realize their subject stage in English learning, will they take the initiative, positive attitude and consciousness, and put them into action, which is the key to get rid of the bondage of teachers and textbooks.

5.2 Highlighting students’ principal position in teaching

Putting students in the principal status could promote them to learn and inspire them to study with interest in the learning process. At the same time, it will arouse the enthusiasm of English learning. When students begin to study with thinking, they will slowly form a good habit to think when they meet problem. That is the first step to cultivate self-regulated learning and that is why teachers should highlight the principal status of students in learning. After that, student will realize the importance of learning by themselves and they will study harder. When a difficult problem appears, what they first do is thinking how to resolve it by themselves and slowly learn to analyze the problems, eventually resolve them. That is autonomous learning.

5.3 Encouraging the interaction of English learning

Interactive way of English learning is between teachers and students, between students and students as well as between man-machine interactions. English learners could make themselves in a real language environment at any time through network and communicate with another using words or voice. With the platform of network, English learner has been provided a broad learning space and rich learning resource, created a good language environment and visual environment. As we all know, Internet could be used wherever you are. English learner could enjoy the resources from all over the world. If there is anything hard for them to understand, they could contact with one who...
could understand it from Internet or they could communicate face-to-face by way of Internet. It is good for those who have no time to ask teachers for help when they are in troubles during the process of autonomous learning, because the Internet could provide them everything they need even more than the teachers could offer.

5.4 Taking full advantage of individuation of network English

The personalized network English learning emphasizes the differences between different students. Different students have different characteristics. The levels and methods of study, the ability and speed to master new knowledge, the interest of study and even the foundation of learning are different from each other. Teachers should pay more attention to their differences and guide them to learn according to their interest, specialty and learning style, at the same time, make different learning plans for different students so that each student could study according to their ability. Only every student has a good plan suiting for himself or herself, could he or she truly enjoys the fun of learning and makes more progress in a short time.

5.5 Strengthening the supervision of teachers

Under the multimedia network, autonomous learning should be controlled independently and cooperated with others. The autonomous learning of college students should be guided by teachers, course-ware and network management. According to the monitoring function of teachers and course-ware on the network, different learning plans should be suitable for different students. With the potential and individual differences of students’ autonomous learning, the degree of guidance from teachers should be followed with the learning abilities of students.

When students realize the advantage of autonomous learning, they will choose the appropriate learning methods and techniques, inspire and cultivate students’ interest and confidence to learn English by themselves, as well as help students endure learning motivation and encourage students to think independent. Network resources are a kind of treasure which could cultivate students’ self-management and the ability of learning English. In a short time, they could adapt the new learning environment and really know how to form the habit of self-regulated learning.

Therefore, under the network environment of autonomous learning, teachers should make full use of the existing network resources. Maybe not every problem in study could be resolved with the help of teachers, but with the network, the students could resolve any problems by themselves which is full of sense of achievement and confidence.

Conclusion

With the development of college English teaching reform and further research on autonomous learning at home and abroad, traditional teaching model has been replaced by autonomous learning. However, quite a lot of college students lack adequate understanding of autonomous learning and the capacity is not strong under the network environment. Although network environment has brought more opportunities and resources for students, it demands of greater autonomous learning ability. Therefore, more work should be done to explore how to improve the students’ autonomous learning in college English teaching and research.

References


