An Empirical Study on Autonomous Learning of Non-English Majors

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ABSTRACT: *Firstly, this study is to obtain the first-hand information of non-English major college students' autonomous learning in the process of foreign language learning through questionnaire survey. Secondly, through the analysis of the collected data, find out the students' performance in eight aspects of independent learning, and compare their slightly strong and slightly weak items. The results of the study put forward feasible suggestions and elucidate the implications for English teaching, and provide a practical basis for the subsequent research on autonomous learning.*

KEYWORDS: independent learning; non-English major; learning motivation; learning attitude; learning strategy

INTRODUCTION

Research Background

This study takes sophomore students as the survey object. Because in the first year of school, it is the time to adapt to this change, and students are exploring their own learning methods. In the second year of enrollment, most students have already adapted and are consciously carrying out various forms of autonomous learning. The subjects of this survey are four classes who have passed CET-4 and have stronger English language ability. In this study, students from these four classes were randomly selected and questionnaires were issued for investigation.

Investigation and Implementation

The questionnaire was distributed and returned by the English teacher of my class in March 2023. 189 copies of questionnaires were distributed and 178 valid questionnaires were collected, among which 122 were filled in by boys and 56 were collected by girls. Liberal arts students filled out 96 and science students 82. The author used SPSS20.0 to make a statistical analysis of the recovered questionnaires. Two research methods were used in this study: questionnaire survey and interview. The interview method includes teacher interview and student interview.

The questionnaire combined the theories of Knowles (1975), Holec (1981), Wenden (1987), Dickinson (1992, 1993), Holec (1981), Works by Chamot&O 'Malley (1994) and Mc Garry (1995). The questionnaire defines autonomous learning from the following five aspects: teacher's teaching purpose and teaching situation; subject standard setting and learning plan formulation; the use of learning strategies; monitoring of learning strategies; monitoring and evaluation of the English learning process. The author assumes that autonomous learning can be embodied in the following five aspects: the choice of learning resources; setting goals and learning plans; monitor the learning process; the choice of learning situation; the use of learning strategies. Questions about these five aspects are designed in the revised questionnaire to test learners' performance in related aspects.

In this study, the reliability of the revised questionnaire is 0.9184, which is greater than 0.85, so the questionnaire is valid and reliable. We applied the five scores to five options, ranging from "A. It doesn't fit my situation at all" to "E. It fits my situation very well." For each item, if the respondent chooses A, then he/she will receive one point; If it's B, you get two points; If you choose C, you get three points. If it's a D, you get four points; If it's an E, you get five points. In this way, the original score for each item can be obtained. In most of the revised questionnaire options, the options are arranged in such a way that the higher the score, the assumption is that the subject is an autonomous learner.

SURVEY RESULTS

Autonomy and Motivation

In this survey, there are a total of five options in this part to detect learners' motivation for English learning. It is easy to identify two motivations for learning English: Mastering English can help me find a good job and I hope to communicate with foreigners freely. The former is extrinsic motivation and the latter is intrinsic motivation. In the survey, 47% of respondents admitted that they did not learn English to improve their understanding of the history of western countries. At the same time, about 63% of respondents believe that English

ability is necessary to find a good job. Therefore, learners have both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for learning English.

However, learners do not know what they can learn in the classroom. Only about 34 % of respondents believe that English classes are interesting and provide enough historical or cultural knowledge for people from English-speaking countries. This phenomenon can be attributed to teachers and teaching materials: Firstly, teaching materials themselves do not include enough knowledge of cultural background; secondly, teachers only pay attention to language knowledge, such as pronunciation, intonation, grammar, vocabulary, etc., while ignoring cultural input.

Autonomy and classroom input

According to Krashen's "i+1" language input hypothesis, learning is easier when understandable language input is a little higher than the original knowledge level, so the content and form of classroom input are also related to learner autonomy. This section consists of four options designed to examine whether the classroom input meets the different needs of the learner. In general, the average value of the four items in this part is also lower than 3, which indicates that learners are not satisfied with the knowledge gained in class. Only 8% of students felt they could express their opinions and ideas in English in class, while 15% had enough time to practice in class. We know from the interview that the most common thing in class is that the teacher constantly presents the language points in the text on the powerpoint, while the students are busy copying them into the notebook. According to the feedback of the students who participated in the survey, there are two main reasons for this problem: first, the teacher conducted 'duck-feeding' teaching in order to complete the teaching task, ignoring the need to give students more time to practice and ask questions in class. Second, most learners always lack self-confidence and dare not express their ideas bravely. Therefore, this limited time cannot allow students to penetrate and absorb the true knowledge, only 20% of students can absorb the classroom knowledge after the class.

Autonomy and attitude

Attribution theory of motivation links motivation to what learners believe makes learning successful. There is evidence that those who believe that success in learning depends primarily on a few fixed factors. Difficult learners have difficulty persisting after failure, such as ability or factors external to them.

In contrast, learners who believe that success in learning depends on individual effort are more responsible for their own learning and persevere even when they fail. The section on learner attitudes towards autonomy includes six items: Who should be responsible for

learning? What are the roles of teachers and learners in learning? If learners believe it is their responsibility, they will take action to learn better. If they believe that learning is the teacher's job, then they will rely on the teacher to give them tasks, control the learning process, and make all the decisions about learning for them.

Judging from the data, students' attitude towards independent learning is cumulative, believing that learning is mainly their own business. From the analysis of data, it can be seen that learners have a clear attitude towards independent English learning. Most of them believe that learners themselves, not teachers, should be responsible for learning.

62% of learners believe that it is their responsibility to improve learning efficiency; 75% of the respondents believe that learning English should rely on their own, just like other auxiliary tools, such as dictionaries, radios, etc., teachers can only help students in the learning process to give advice, but cannot replace students in the learning process to occupy the leading position. Taking responsibility for learning means that learners should set goals and make learning plans. 57% of students believe that knowledge is not just passed on to students by teachers. When asked who should evaluate learning outcomes, 38% of respondents said it should be teachers, while 41% said it should not be teachers. Now that learners are aware of themselves as subjects of learning, they have the right to evaluate their own performance.

Learners' Choice of Learning Materials
When we talk about the teaching process, we always focus more on two dynamic participants: the teacher and the student. Teachers, as planners, helpers, independent participants, advisors of needs analysis, and managers of group activities, use a variety of strategies to make their teaching successful and their content acceptable to learners. Students who want to learn from teachers and classroom teaching will rack their brains to process this information and absorb it. However, the role of teaching materials is often neglected. True autonomous learning materials should aim at learners' autonomy and be easy for learners to achieve. The forms of independent learning are varied. One is how learners find and use learning materials throughout the study period to help them achieve their personal goals. In order to cater to such a learning mode, teachers should provide learners with appropriate and easily accessible materials (Dickinson, 1987:106).

As the main carrier of knowledge, learning materials play an important role in learning. It provides learners with rich linguistic knowledge and helps them develop their language ability. From the traditional paper teaching materials to the present multimedia teaching, the types and contents of teaching materials are constantly developing. In this part, there are six

items to test learners' choice of extra-curricular learning materials. The mean value of the six items in this part is low, and it can be concluded that most students are not good at choosing learning materials for independent learning.

In this part, we make a distinction between extra-curricular learning materials and curricular learning materials. We found that the highest average is: I will often watch some movies, in the entertainment to learn knowledge. Only 12% of students regularly use synchronized learning AIDS to reinforce what they have learned in class. In our interview, the respondents reported that if the teacher assigned exercises or tasks, they would basically complete them. With the completion of their homework, their study comes to an end.

Among the learning activities they rarely choose, they prefer reading to listening and speaking. 72% of the respondents rarely or never participate in oral practice, 71% of the students rarely or never do listening training, and only 19% of the students often read English publications.According to the survey results, students are not good at actively looking for learning resources. According to the interview, most students watch English movies because they are attracted by the plot and tend to ignore the significance it brings to our study.

Setting learning goals and plans

Setting learning goals is an integral part of independent learning and an important internal factor that can influence individual independent learning (Pang Weiguo, 2003:214). First of all, objectives provide the direction for learning, so that all learning activities are related to the goal, so that learners can avoid many detours. Secondly, the goal can be used as a standard for adjustment, and learners can adjust their efforts based on the difficulty coefficient of the goal. Third, a clear goal can make learning more continuous, especially to study without time limits. The disparity between the learning process and the goal can make learners constantly strive to achieve their goals. Finally, goals can also be used for evaluation. When we judge whether the learning task is completed, we always refer to the learning goal, because it can be judged by whether the predetermined learning goal is completed, which is a constant scale. Learning is individual, learners may have their own ideas, and they may have individual plans that vary from person to person.

In the survey, 31% of the students can often have their own ideas about learning goals, about 22% of the respondents have their own learning plan rather than assigned by the teacher, and 33% of the students have certain requirements for improving their English. For these students, learning is carried out in accordance with the current plan and behavior is consistent with it. They know where they want to go and set learning goals. In their study, they keep working hard to achieve their goals, at least getting closer and closer to the goal. Although they have a

systematic learning schedule, they are not sure what they are going to do. In this survey, only 16% of the students clearly know the requirements of five language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. Most of the students only know that they should strive to learn English well, but they have no idea how well they should learn to reach the standard of judging the language level.

Monitoring and Evaluation of the Learning process

Self-assessment is a prominent theme in both the autonomic and language testing literature. As an autonomous learner, you should monitor and evaluate your own learning from time to time to diagnose your weaknesses and use your strengths to improve your learning efficiency. Self-monitoring is a kind of observation and reflection carried out by learners themselves. It helps learners take control of their learning in the following four ways. First, it trains learners to evaluate the effectiveness of their own communication. Second, it can increase learners' awareness of the learning process and motivate them to consider the course content and make critical assessments. Thirdly, it increases the diversity of knowledge in language learning. Finally, it expands the scale of the evaluation criteria to include areas where learners have special abilities, for example, the assessment of their own needs and the assessment of the emotional dimension of the learning process (Oscarson, 1989). None of the values are very high. Only about 12% of students seek opportunities to practice their English in and out of class. This is consistent with the data from Part B, the input part of the class, which shows that few students are able to speak in class (about 8%) and have sufficient practice time (about 14%). They are affected by some emotional factors, such as anxiety, low self-esteem, shyness, etc., and rarely or never initiate a conversation in or out of class. Only 28% of students can overcome some emotional factors that affect their learning, 28% of students can apply the newly learned knowledge to practice, 24% of students can realize their own mistakes, only 21% of students can find reasons and correct mistakes in time when they are aware of mistakes, 44% of students sometimes do so. In item 25 of Part E, 22% of the students have a very clear English learning plan, which is basically the same as the survey result in item 34 of Part F, that is, only 19% of the students can detect the completion of their pre-determined plan. An independent learner should find a suitable learning method to improve learning efficiency, but according to the survey results of item 33, only 28% of students can do it.

CONCLUSION

Most college students have an internal and external drive to study. They are enthusiastic about learning English and have high expectations for input in class. However, to their disappointment, teachers' teaching still accounts for most of the time in class, so students

have little time to get the opportunity of classroom practice. They believe that the current classroom activities alone can not improve their listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating abilities in general. This single classroom activity is far from satisfying their need for knowledge acquisition, so it is necessary for them to study independently. From the survey, we know that students have a positive attitude towards independent learning, but in the actual implementation process is not satisfactory. Most students do not do exercises that are synchronized with classroom teaching to reinforce classroom knowledge. They will not read some extracurricular materials to broaden their horizons or actively participate in English related activities. About 50% of students have clear learning goals and plans. But unfortunately, these do not match the curriculum standards. At the same time, they are unable to consciously reflect on the learning process and refine their plans in time to identify deficiencies and act accordingly. On the contrary, they always wait for the teacher's help, passively waiting for others to find their problems or even help them solve them. Students have strategic awareness, but because of the lack of systematic training on strategies, students cannot freely choose from various strategies when they encounter different tasks.

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