

Autonomous Language Learning Perceptions and Practices in the Japanese Context

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Abstract

Sakai and Takagi (2009) argue that Japanese students are very keen to achieve high scores in exams, which often determine their future and, therefore, they study outside of class, as well as in class to acquire adequate English proficiency. Accordingly, Japanese students need to take responsibility for their own learning to succeed in an exam-oriented culture. Thus, students' success in language tests is related to learner autonomy. During the process of autonomous learning, students have more opportunities of experiencing significance, personal relevance, emotional engagement, and internalization. The purpose of this mixed methods study is to examine how Japanese students of English as a foreign language (EFL) perceive their own roles in autonomous language learning as well as their teachers' roles, how effectively they can make decisions while learning a foreign language, and what they do to acquire EFL outside the classroom settings. Quantitative data were collected and analysed from 148 college students who completed an online questionnaire. In addition, interviews were conducted with some of the participants. Students at higher levels of English as a foreign language assumed a greater share of responsibility for their education and were more driven than those at the intermediate level. Therefore, the study clearly demonstrates the necessity of incorporating autonomous learning into L2 language instruction.

Keywords: Autonomy, EFL, in class, outside class, proficiency