

**Integrating Learner Autonomy into English Speaking
class by a Senior High School Teacher in Taiwan with
the Observation Method**

英文科 林冠瑋老師

**Graduate Institute of English
National Changhua University of Education**

Introduction

This section provides an introduction relevant to learner autonomy on senior high school students. The first part offers the Literature Review on Observation Method that used in present study. The second part introduces the background and the importance of autonomy in Taiwan recently. The third part is concerned with a rationale of the study. The fourth part provides research questions. Finally, the significance of the study is expressed.

Literature Review on Observation Method

Observation method offers an investigator the opportunity to gather ‘live’ data from naturally occurring social situations. In this way, the researcher can look directly at what is taking place in situ rather than relying on second-hand accounts. Robson (2002: 310) says, what people do may differ from what they say they do, and observation provides a reality check. Additionally, observational data may be useful for recording non-verbal behavior, behavior in natural or contrived settings, and longitudinal analysis (Bailey 1994: 244). Patton (1990: 202) suggests that observational data should enable the researcher to enter and understand the situation that is being described.

Jorgensen (1989) pointed out that it is most appropriate to observe for certain minimal conditions such as the phenomenon is sufficiently limited in size and location

to be studied as a case; furthermore, “ Participant observation is especially appropriate for exploratory studies, descriptive studies, and studies aimed at generating theoretical interpretations (Jorgensen, 1989)”. Observation method is appropriate for qualitative research, and it can discover the progressing of human behavior, observe natural environment without side effect, and record the realistic situations. However, the collected data by observation method are difficult to be quantitative and the size of sample cannot be large. Also, the time of collecting data is longer than other researches and it costs more budgets; however, comparing to other researches, it is simpler to analyze the data.

Wang & Wang (2012) mentioned that the observer should be trained in order to eliminate intruder effects. Data from self-report may cause the biased information and misunderstandings if the interviewees or participants only provided the subjectively information. In order to solve these difficulties, the observation method was invented. The advantages of the observation method are cited as followed. For instance, the observer can explore the process of the research and record in order to access the holistic picture of the phenomenon. Also due to the natural setting, the researcher can conduct a longitudinal research record so as to elicit the comprehensive information. However, there are still some limitations to this observation method. For example, firstly, observation methods can only be limited to objective observation and recorded

behavior, and these behaviors are only part of the complex behaviors. Secondly, observes might cause some influences since the observer intervenes the process of the research. Thirdly, the observe method took enormous time, and it was extremely difficult to observe a large sample in order to elicit the reliable data.

The categories of the observe methods was divided according to the criteria. From the perspective of setting, the observe methods can be separated into natural settings and artificial laboratory settings. The second criteria is structure, which can be further divided into structured observation, and unstructured observation. These two can only be comparatively distinction not definitively distinction.

Chen (2011) conducted a mater thesis by two research methods for investigating EFL teachers' beliefs in questioning strategy use in industrial vocational senior high schools and one of the methods is Observation Method. "Classroom observations were recorded on what the teachers said and did in the English class (Chen, 2011)". Although it did not use in speaking instruction class, the advantage can be also generalized in observing speaking instruction class.

Background of the Present Study

According to Benson (2001), there is an increasing understanding of the intimate relationship between learner autonomy and effective learning. He pointed out that autonomy may ultimately result in greater language proficiency. It was also claimed

that effective language development depends on “extensive autonomous interaction with the target language” (Brody & Kenning, 1996, p.2) Furthermore, learner autonomy is especially essential for foreign language learning because it demands long-term efforts to attain a high level of proficiency.

Rationale of the Present Study

There are two reasons for the current study to observe the autonomous behavior and interaction between teacher and students. First, while much effort had been dedicated to the promotion of learner autonomy in language learning in many parts of Asia, such as Hong Kong and Japan (Chan, 2001a; Chan, Spratt & Humphereys, 2002; Miyuki, 2000), few studies have been done on learner autonomy in Taiwan (Chang, 1999; Yang, 1998). Second, most of the researches were conducted with the quantitative methods, such as survey methods. Few studies were conducted from the perspective of observation method.

Research Questions

In order to investigate the autonomous behavior during the classroom, the research questions are addressed as followed:

1. How does the teacher facilitate students' learner autonomy?
2. What are the autonomous behaviors of the students during the class?
3. What is the relationship between the autonomy supports and students' behaviors?

Significance of the Present Study

This study investigates the autonomy among senior high school students, and the interaction between autonomy and effective English learning. It is hoped that this study can make the following contributions. First, through the investigation of senior high school students' learner autonomy from observation method, it is expected that this study could provide language educators in Taiwan with a more holistic and comprehensive picture of students' learner autonomy. Second, the result of the study might contribute to our understanding of the role of learner autonomy. This study would provide empirical base of interaction between autonomy and effective learning.

Literature Review

In this section will review research about learner autonomy from the following three perspectives: an overview of learner autonomy, and the studies on promoting learner autonomy in language learning.

An overview of Learner Autonomy

Researchers have indicated that the concept of autonomy in language learning is complex and multifaceted (Benson, 1996), and that it is difficult to define autonomy in a concrete and tangible way (Ho & Crookall, 1995). Therefore, a comprehensive and universally accepted definition of learner autonomy has not emerged in the literature review. One of the earliest and most often quoted definition is that of Holec

(1981), who described autonomy as ‘the ability to take charge of one’s own learning’ (p.3). He elaborated that to take charge of one’s own learning means to take the responsibility for the decisions concerning various aspects, such as determining the objects and defining the process. Later, Little (1995) claimed that autonomy is a capacity for ‘detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action’ (p.4). Moreover, Benson’s (1997) definition of autonomy in language learning involved three aspects: 1) the act of learning on one’s own and the ability to do so, 2) the internal psychological capacity to direct one’s own learning, and 3) the control over the learning content and process.

Studies on Promoting Learner Autonomy in Language Learning.

In Taiwan, several researchers have implemented projects which aimed to prepare learners for autonomous learning (Chang, 1999; Huang, 1999; Shen, 2002; Yang, 1998). For instance, Huang (1999) implemented learner autonomy instruction in a freshman English class. Learning strategy training and students self-planned English learning project were included in the study. The results indicated that the students’ attitudes toward English learning became more positive and that their strategies became more dynamic. The self-planned learning project also motivated students to learn English actively and raised their awareness of the learning process. Moreover, two studies were conducted to promote students’ autonomy in language

learning through the use of lists of learning activities and materials, learner contract, learning records, and teacher-student meetings (Chang, 1999; Shen, 2002). These researchers found that this kind of self-directed learning project is effective for learners' independent study. In addition, with an attempt to teach students how to learn and to help them become autonomous in language learning, Yang (1998) combined learning strategy instruction with the content course of second language learning. The results showed that the instruction raised students' awareness of language learning strategies and improved their strategy use. The students also experienced the process of goal-setting, self-assessment, planning, and evaluating their language learning.

Method

In this section, the participant of the study is defined. Then, the research equipments are introduced. Next, the procedure of data collection for the study is described step by step. Moreover, data analysis is provided. Finally, the coding system is used in categorization of qualitative data.

Participants

The participants include one senior high school teacher who has been teaching for 10 years in central Taiwan and two intact classes. One class with 15 students (1 male, 14 female) was assigned as the experimental group which received the

autonomy supports from the teacher in the speaking class, while the other class with 14 students (7male, 7 female) was selected as the control group.

Equipment

The equipment was a video-tape recorder in order to record the situation of instruction during the class. The researcher also used a notebook and pens to take note for what teacher said in class and wrote down in the blackboard.

Data Collection Procedure

Firstly, the researcher asked the observed teacher's permission for classroom observation, and video record. Secondly, there is a time table of speaking class in table 1, and the researcher followed the time table and arrived in the school for each English class, and then the researcher help to set up the video-tape recorder at the back of the classroom. The day of the data collection was October 21, October 28, November 4, and November 11, and all the classes were observed and recorded by video tape. Moreover, it was a complete lesson from beginning to the end. The researcher also took note during the observation and wrote down what the teacher mentioned in class and wrote down on blackboard.

Table 1 The time table of English class

Class	Time	Mon(10/21)	Mon(10/28)	Mon(11/04)	Mon(11/11)
	07:00 – 08:15				

1	08:10 – 09:00	English	English	English	English
2	09:10 – 10:00				
3	10:10 – 11:00				
4	11:10 – 12:00	English	English	English	English

Data Analysis

The data from classroom observation by video tape was transcribed into verbatim in order to analyze, and the transcription convention was adapted the convention of transcription by Chen (2011) and it is attached (Appendix A). Also, the researcher described how and when the teacher facilitates students' learner autonomy and categorized what activities that the teacher adopts in class.

Categorization serves the purpose of building a system of the coding categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Patton, 1990); therefore, for all the relevant instruction of promoting learner autonomy was categorized, after the description and categorization, the researcher interpreted the results, explained for research questions, and made conclusion for the present study. The model of category was adopted by Reeve's (2004), the *Student's Engagement Categories* and *Teacher's Autonomy Support Categories*.

Coding Category System

The speaking instruction by observed teacher in the present study was categorized from the perspective of both teacher and students. *Teacher's Autonomy Support Categories Identification* (Table 2) includes nurturing inner motivational resources, informational language, acknowledges and accepts students' negative affect. *Student's Engagement Categories* (Table 3) include dispersed attention, focused attention, passive, slow, minimal effort, active, quick, intense effort, verbally silent, verbally participating.

Table 2

Teacher's Autonomy Support Categories (Johnmarshall Reeve, 2004)

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Code</i>
Nurtures Inner Motivational Resources	NM
*Interest, Enjoyment, Sense of Challenge	
*Create Opportunities for Initiative	
Informational Language	IL
*Informational, Flexible	
*Provide Choices, Use, Benefits,	
Importance of Requests	
Acknowledges & Accepts Students' Negative Affect	AA
*Listens Carefully, Openly, Understandingly	
* Accepts Negative Affect, Complaints are OK	

Nurturing inner motivational resources

Nurturing inner motivational resources refers to the teachers avoid regulations such as incentives, rewards, directives, deadlines, assignment, and focus on intrinsic

regulation dealt with students' preferences, interests, sense of enjoyment, competencies, and choice making, the teacher might help students' being autonomous in their own learning processes.

Relying on informational Language

Instead of using controlling language which pays attention to only activities (e.g 'Study hard, Do your best!') in language classrooms, an autonomy-supportive teacher might use noncontrolling language or informational language (e.g 'Today your performance was very good, by trying to speak a bit slower and using some conjunctions, your fluency can be more promising!').

Acknowledges and Accepts Negative Affect

There are some classroom rules, requests, and instructional agendas which sometimes do not match with students' preferences. In such conflictive cases, instead of opposing student opinions, the autonomy-supportive teacher recognizes and accepts student's expressions of negative affect. An autonomy-supportive teacher should care students' feelings and look from students' perspectives in some cases.

Table 3

Student's Engagement Categories (Johnmarshall Reeve, 2004)

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Code</i>
Dispersed Attention	DA
Focused Attention	FA
Passive, Slow, Minimal Effort	PS
Active, Quick, intense Effort	AQ
Verbally Silent	VS
*Students Don't talk	
Ask Questions, Discuss	
Verbally Participating	VP
*Students talk	
Ask Questions, Discuss	

Dispersed Attention

Disperse Attention indicates that students did not pay attention to the teacher during the class. (e.g. Students are sleeping, or chatting with other classmates)

Focused Attention

Focused Attention shows that students concentrate themselves during the class, and pay attentions to teachers. (e.g. Students listen to what teacher said)

Passive, Slow, Minimal Effort

Passive, slow, minimal effort indicates students' low engagement and reluctance towards learning.(e.g When teachers asked students to read one paragraph, students read it passively and slowly.)

Active, Quick, intense Effort

Active, quick, intense effort shows students' high engagement and willingness to

participate in the class. (e.g. students made efforts during the class or quick and active reaction.)

Verbally Silent

Verbally silent refer to students' low engagements during the class. Students do not talk, discuss with classmates or response to the teachers. (e.g. When teacher asked a question, no one answered.)

Verbally Participating

Verbally Participating indicate the active participation during the class through initiating questions, discussing with classmates, sharing opinions, and response to teachers.

Results

Discussion and Conclusion

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Appendix A

Conventions Used for Transcription

T	Teacher
S	Single student
Ss	Some of the students
As	All students in chorus
Sn	The number of the student