Self-regulated Language Learning and Proficiency:
A Quantitative Analysis

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between learners' proficiency and self-regulated learning (SRL). An effort was invested in comparing less proficient learners with more proficient learners.

The results revealed that learning strategic components in SRL were shown to be the influential factors on learners' proficiency. In addition, the significant differences were found for self-efficacy, intrinsic goal orientation, test anxiety, metacognitive strategies, effort regulation, and coping problems. Based on these findings, the characteristics of the low proficiency learners and the necessity of supporting self-regulatory language learning will be discussed.

Keywords

Self-regulated language learning, EFL learners, MSLQ, motivation, learning strategies

Introduction

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is the concept that emerged from the field of the educational psychology, and it has been increasingly discussed in the field of SLA. It is defined as "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals" (Zimmerman, 2000: 14).

1 Research background

1.1 Self-regulated learning

SRL incorporates both motivational and cognitive aspects, and follows the cycle with three phases as Zimmerman (2000) described. It contains forethought where learners set their goals or plan how they work before a task, performance or volitional control where learners control or monitor their current tasks or performances, and self-reflection which is the stage for learners to evaluate or ascertain their performance well. Each phase contains motivational and cognitive regulation.

1.2 Problem and purpose

In the field of SLA, the investigation of successful learners has been a major concern and few studies have been paying careful attention to the less proficient learners. Therefore, this study aimed to clarify the characteristics of low proficiency learners by comparing them with high proficiency learners.

2 Methodology

2.1 Procedures

Ninety-seven freshmen (69 = females, 28 = males) in a private university in Japan participated in this study. Based on their TOEIC scores, 67 learners were assigned to the L-group (mean = 394.3), and 30 learners were assigned to the H-group (mean = 644.9).

Learners' self-regulated language learning was evaluated by the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & MacKeachie, 1991). It has seven Likert scales (1 = not at all true for me, 7 = very true for me) and contains 81 items, which are divided into six motivational factors and nine learning strategies factors; and four learning strategies out of nine were resource management factors. MSLQ were conducted in Japanese, and some expressions were revised to adjust to learners' English learning environment.

2.2 Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis identified five motivational factors: self-efficacy, intrinsic goal orientation, extrinsic goal orientation, test anxiety, and control of learning belief. The

factor analysis further identified six learning strategic factors: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, effort regulation, task approach, peer learning in classroom, and coping problems. Multiple regressions and t-test were subsequently performed.

3   Results

3.1   The influences of Self-regulated language learning on the proficiency

A multiple regression for motivational factors revealed that these factors did not predict proficiency. Another multiple regression for learning strategic factors found that metacognitive strategies (β = .374, t = 3.53, p < .01), effort regulation (β = .270, t= 2.86, p < .01), and coping problems (β = .247, t = 2.67, p < .01) were the factors which sufficiently explained the proficiency.

Over all, the learning strategic factors explained 23.2 % of the variance in the proficiency (R^2 = .280, Adj.R^2 = .232), while the motivational factors accounted for only 9.1% of the variance in the proficiency (R^2 = .139, Adj.R^2 = .091). When both two categories combined, the SRL predicted a quarter of the proficiency (R^2 = .315, Adj.R^2 = .226).

Table 1: Summary of multiple regressions for motivational factors to proficiency

	β	t	r
SE	.210	1.625	.304**
IGO	.166	1.286	.263**
EGO	-.049	-.423	.037
TAnx	-.168	-1.535	-.193*
CLB	-.011	-.100	-.040
Adj.R^2 = .091			N = 97

Note: SE = self-efficacy; IGO = intrinsic goal orientation; EGO = extrinsic goal orientation; TAnx = test anxiety; CLB = control of learning belief.

Table 2: Summary of multiple regressions for learning strategic factors to proficiency

	β	t	r
MCS	.374**	3.53	.307**
CS	-.206	-1.93	.035**
ER	-.270**	2.86	.332**
TApp	-.188	-1.84	-.018
PL	.132	-1.44	.101
CP	.247**	2.67	.270**
Adj.R^2 = .232			N = 97

Note: MCS = metacognitive strategies; CS = cognitive strategies; ER = effort regulation; TApp = task approach; PL = peer learning in classroom; CP = coping problems.

3.2   The characteristics of low proficiency learners

T-test showed significant differences between the L- and H-groups for self-efficacy, intrinsic goal orientation, and test anxiety. It was found that the L-group obviously had lower self-efficacy, intrinsic goal orientation, and higher test anxiety, as compared with the H-group. Besides, the L-group seemed to use less metacognitive strategies, effort regulation and coping problems than the H-group.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for the SRL components of the L- and H-groups

	L-group (N= 67)		H-group (N= 30)		Difference (L-H)
	M	SD	M	SD	
SE	2.92	1.2	3.55	1.17	-0.63**
IGO	4.66	2.3	5.26	1.17	-0.60**
EGO	4.01	1.5	4.13	1.35	-0.11
Tanx	3.99	1.8	3.35	1.33	0.64*
CLB	4.61	1.0	4.49	1.21	0.12
MCS	3.69	.86	4.30	1.21	-0.62*
CS	2.96	.87	3.01	1.24	-0.04
ER	4.14	1.02	4.83	.88	-0.69**
TApp	3.71	1.13	3.57	1.04	0.14
PLIC	4.28	1.43	4.70	1.53	-0.42
CP	4.19	1.31	3.38	1.01	-0.81**

*p<.05, **p<.01

4   Discussion and conclusion

It can be said that the effective use of learning strategies should be prompted to enhance learners' proficiency. Furthermore, motivational components are likely to indirectly affect learners' proficiency. Compared to the H-group, the L-group's self-efficacy and intrinsic goal orientation were clearly low. Therefore, the reinforcement of self-efficacy and intrinsic goal orientation might be the key to encourage less proficient learners to carry out self-regulated English learning.

References

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