

Self-regulated Learning (SRL) Activity Trials and Evaluations in an Overseas Fieldwork Program

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In our rapidly changing society, it is crucial that the education system adapts flexibly and appropriately to changing social needs. Higher education must educate students to acquire the competencies that they will require in the workplace. In order to help students to acquire those competencies, it is essential for students to have autonomy and “Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)” skills: monitoring themselves to identify problems or to recognize their situations so that students can reflect and assess themselves objectively after they graduate. This paper reports on an educational overseas training program conducted in Korea for nine days in 2015 to cultivate students’ autonomous learning attitudes by using SRL activities. During the on-site training in Korea, students completed a reflection activity with self-evaluations as a SRL activity. This paper analyzes participants’ self-evaluations to investigate the effectiveness of the program. It also discusses how SRL activities can activate participants’ meta-cognitive skills and influence their self-autonomy learning attitudes as well as learning attitudes.

Key words: Self-regulated Learning (SRL), Overseas Fieldwork, Evaluation, Generic Skills, Self-evaluation

1. Introduction

The world is still searching for educational systems and approaches that are appropriate for developing human resources required in the 21st century. Various transferable competencies and skills necessary in this era have been discussed over many years. Japanese higher education has begun to focus on the “ability to solve problems,” and in 2012, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) announced the “Plan for Implementing University Reform.” This plan specified that desirable talents are those people who can “continue lifelong learning, think independently, and take action,” “flourish in a global society,” “innovate,” and “communicate beyond differing languages, generations, and standpoints” (MEXT, 2012). In order to respond to 21st century needs, Japanese higher education must make dynamic changes to implement more active and hands-on education over conventional instruction models.

The authors have conducted an overseas fieldwork program to develop their transferable competencies and autonomous learning attitudes for two years since 2014. In the 2014 academic year, the program was evaluated via student self-evaluations prior to the study program, following the study program, and after the study program. The results demonstrate that it is essential to provide continuous footholds that support student learning (Lim & Morihara, 2015). By using this result, the 2015 program included reflection time as SRL activities, where students used a daily “reflection notebook” to increase their autonomous learning during the on-site training period.

In order to evaluate the program comprehensively, this study examines the following three questions: 1) How are participants satisfied with the program? 2) How long can students retain what they have learned in the program? 3)

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How does the reflection writing using the “reflection notebook”) activate students’ meta-cognition and influence their autonomous learning abilities?

2. Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)

“Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)” is intimately related to the cultivation of autonomous learning attitudes. SRL studies began gaining attention mainly in the field of psychology in the 1970s, and the focus has since shifted to learner autonomy and activities in the world.

According to Schunk and Zimmerman (2007), SRL is “a sequential active process for achieving goals.” This process includes learners monitoring themselves in order to identify problems or to recognize their situation, as well as to control and evaluate themselves (Hatano, 2010). In the SRL process, there are three stages: planning, conducting the plan and monitoring oneself, and reflection (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). During the planning stage, learners set their learning goals. In the following stage, learners take actions according to their plan while monitoring their own status and situation. Finally, at the reflection stage, they reflect on and evaluate their actions. In all three stages we examine learning motivation, metacognition, and learning strategies (Hatano, 2010). Furthermore, Pingtrich (2004) explains the four SRL features: (1) Viewing learners as active participants in the learning process, (2) learners have the potential to manage and control their actions, (3) learners use different learning strategies (depending on their purposes), and (4) SRL activities connect learners and learning contexts, such as achievement and outcomes.

For SRL research methods, Goda et al. (2014) reported that interviews and learning logs effectively increased learners’ SRL abilities. In another study, Schmitz (2006) used learning journals to investigate SRL effectiveness by comparing two groups of learners, one that kept learning journals for 40 days and one that did not. The author found that the first group studied for longer and had higher learning retention. Furthermore, the advantage of using diaries or learning journals is that they can measure learners’ state continuously (Schmitz et al. 2011; Goda et al. 2014), which makes it possible to capture individual changes. Therefore, diaries and learning journals are useful in understanding the individual learning process.

With regard to the above, the program in this study required participants to set aside time for daily reflection with a “reflection notebook” during the on-site training. This reflection activity was conducted as an SRL activity.

3. Research Method

3.1 Overseas Fieldwork Program Content and Participants

Yamaguchi Prefectural University (YPU) was selected in 2013 for MEXT’s “Go Global Japan Project Type B (Faculty/School Specific Type),” which runs 10-13 short-term, overseas training programs, including language programs. From the various programs, this study reports on a short-term overseas program in South Korea with the theme of “regional revitalization.” The training was carried out in Changwon, South Korea for nine days in the second half of September during the summer vacation. On-site learning activities included attending (1) regional flea markets, (2) a Japanese cultural experience booth, and (3) a Japan-South Korea cooperative seminar for two years. Details of the program can be found in Lim, Morihara, and Yoshida (2015) and Lim, Morihara, and Jung (2016).

This study discusses the analysis of the 11 students who participated in the program in 2015 (Table 1). All participants were students at YPU: seven from the Department of International Studies who study Korean as a foreign language and take Korean society classes, and four students from the Department of Culture and Creative Arts. Three out of these four students study design and one student was studying Japanese literature. One senior had studied in Korea for a year, and the remaining participants included three junior students, and four sophomores. According to the CEFR scale (2001) for Korean as a foreign language, two students were at a C1 (advanced) level, five students were at B1 (intermediate), and four students had never previously studied the Korean language. Regarding their overseas

experiences, all the students from the Department of International Studies had previously been abroad, while only one student from the Department of Culture and Creative Arts had previously been abroad.

Table 1. Program participants

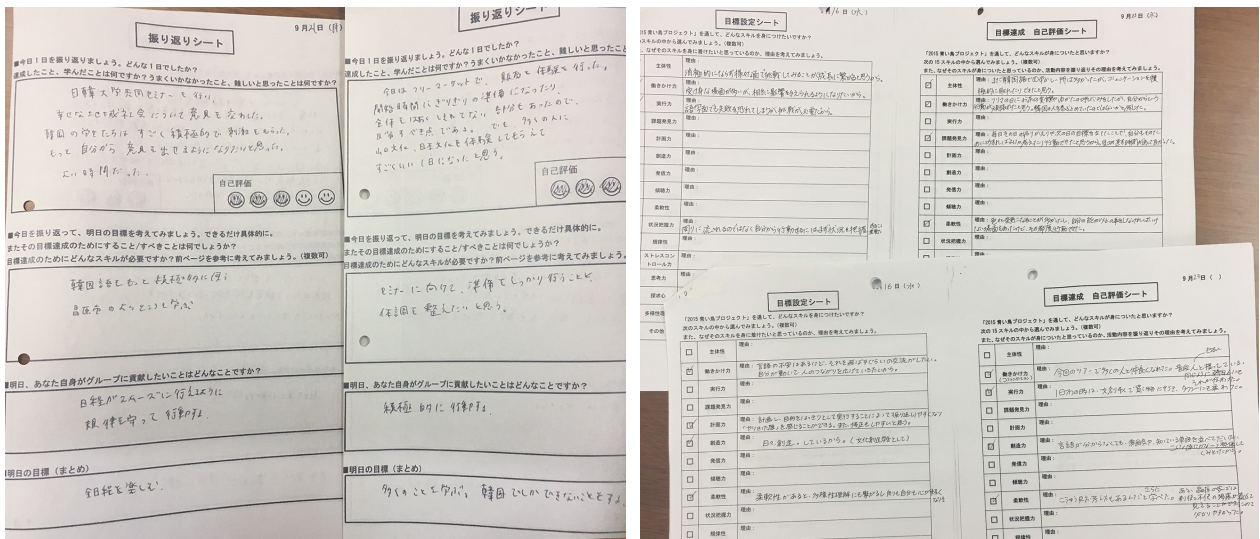
| Department | International Studies | Culture and Creative Arts |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Major | Korean language and social studies (7 students) | Design (3 students) Japanese literature (1 student) |
| Age | 1 senior, 2 juniors, 4 sophomores | 4 juniors |
| Language level (CEFR) | C1: 2 students, B1: 5 students | None |
| Experience abroad | All have | Only 1 has |

The method of SRL activity that cultivates learning autonomy attitudes, and the overall effectiveness of the program with comprehensive self-evaluations are discussed below.

3.2 Activity to Promote SRL

SRL is related to learning motivations, metacognition, and learning strategies (Hatano, 2010). In this study, during the on-site training in Korea, students completed the reflection activity with self-evaluation. Specifically, they engaged in 15 minutes of reflection time daily to ensure that they reflected on their own actions and thoughts for that day, made actionable goals in line with the following day’s activities and schedule, and noted these goals in order to allow them to objectively and independently grasp a sense of “what I am able to do.” For the reflection activity, they used the reflection notebook (Appendix 1).

There are four main questions — the reflection of the day, skills they want to work on the next day, things they want to contribute to the group and goals for the next day. Students were allowed to write their opinions freely. For the second question (i.e., “what skills do you want to work on?”), students chose skills from the 15 skills list (Appendix 2). As mentioned previously, since the students majored in different subjects, their focus and learning goals in the program might also differ therefore, students could select more than one skill.



Self-Reflection Sheet

3.3 A Comprehensive Assessment for the Overseas Fieldwork Program

In order to assess the program comprehensively, the study conducted three participants' self-evaluations with surveys before and after the study. Students rated themselves on a five-point scale, where 5 = strongly agree and 1 = strongly disagree.

(1) Comprehensive Evaluations for the Program Overall

First, reflecting on the program overall, students evaluated whether they were satisfied with it and whether they would like to participate in the program again in the future.

(2) Learning Retention

Next, the study looks at students' learning retention. The perspectives of portability, dependability, and sustainability are essential for setting learning goals. According to Miyake and Pea (2007), portability refers to learners' ability to transfer their learning outcomes into real-world situations when required. Dependability refers to their ability to consistently and appropriately use their learning outcomes, while sustainability refers to their ability to develop their skill sets by adjusting learning outcomes to suit current situations and needs.

(3) Evaluation of SRL Activity

The study included a question on whether the reflection time (with reflection notebooks) as an SRL activity was effective.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1 Self-evaluation and Satisfaction of the Overall Program

Regarding satisfaction with the program, 90% answered positively: three (27.3%) answered "very satisfied," seven (63.6%) answered "satisfied," and only one student answered "neutral."

Their reasons were as follows: "I was able to make each day fulfilling by having daily reflection time" and "I was able to widen my perspective about Korea through participating in the program with students from different departments." These comments indicate the program's effectiveness in using reflection time and recruiting participants from different departments. Other comments included: "I was able to go to a special place and communicate with people that I wouldn't have been able to experience if merely sightseeing" and "I was able to participate in the program and experience something special." Participants therefore seemed satisfied with the overseas project.

For the question, "if similar programs occur in the future, would you like to participate?" 45.5% (n=5) answered "strongly agree," 27.3% (n=3) answered "agree," and 27.3% (n=3) answered "neutral." The students' reasons were as follows: "the preparation was difficult, but it was great to be able to interact and see people's reactions," "I feel I was able to gain critical thinking skills by considering what I can do for the group through reflection time. I would like to apply this skill to a similar program," "I would like to develop my language abilities more and participate in the program again," and "through participating in the program, I became more interested in learning about regional revitalization. It was a great learning experience." These comments indicate that the participants would like to deepen their knowledge and skills gained through the program.

4.2 Learning Retention

As mentioned above, the study analyzed students' learning retention based on portability, dependability, and sustainability; their respective averages were 3.64, 4.73, and 4.64 (Fig. 1). Since the average of dependability and sustainability exceeded 4.00, this indicates that students applied what they had learned or felt that they could expand on what they had learned. The highest average was on dependability. Some comments from participants included: "In

order to understand others, I need to know myself first. That fact will be applicable for anyone or any situation, so I want to use them for the future”; “At the workplace, I can apply what I have learned: judging my capacity and role in the group to take appropriate actions, and building relationships with group members”; “When interacting with people from different cultures, I paid attention to how to deliver my message clearly. I would like to use this skill in communications and in presentations.”

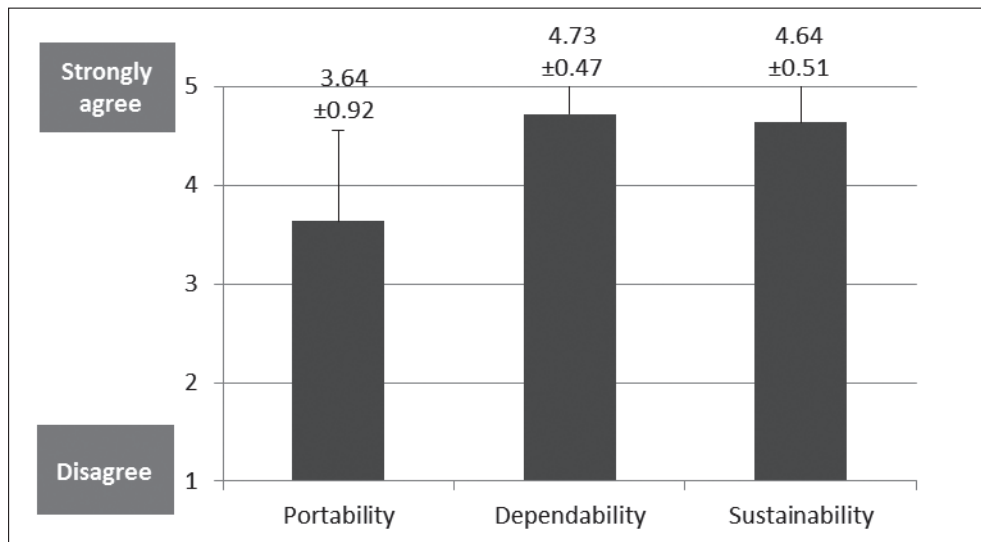


Figure1. A comprehensive assessment for learning retention

The bar graphs show the average score of self-evaluations, and the lines above the bar graphs show standard deviation(±).

4.3 Self-evaluations of the SRL Activity

For the question, “do you think that the reflection notebook was effective?” nine out of 11 students (81.8%) answered “strongly agree,” one (9.1%) answered “agree,” and one (9.1%) answered “neutral.” This result indicates that the reflection notebook influenced participants’ learning and achievement. Some comments by participants included the following: “Writing in the notebook daily helped me reflect on what I had done and how I had felt each day before I forgot”; “I was able to reflect on my achievement and feelings not only during the training program, but also after I came back to Japan”; “I will be able to reflect on what I have learned even years later.” From these comments, students appeared to have used the reflection notebook as a memorandum record. In addition, other comments indicated that the notebook promoted the three stages of SRL, such as “By writing learning goals for the next day, I was able to take appropriate actions,” and “I was able to apply what I had discovered and felt to the next activities.”

5. Conclusion

The study analyzed participants’ self-evaluations on the overseas training program in order to investigate its effectiveness in cultivating learners’ self-autonomy and learning attitude. It used three perspectives to evaluate the program; 1) program comprehensive evaluation, 2) learners’ learning retention, 3) how SRL activities can activate participants’ meta-cognitive skills and influence their self-autonomy learning attitudes as well as learning attitudes. The results can be applied using two perspectives. Firstly, the participants’ comments indicate that they felt they could expand and apply what they had learned in the program. The comments also showed the positive influence of reflection time on participants’ learning by managing their learning processes and activating their metacognitive activity through self-regulation.

Secondly, in order to activate students' metacognitive activity, teachers must support and promote students' autonomous learning (Kobayashi & Ninomiya, 2011). By offering reflection time with the reflection notebook, the program was able to facilitate participants' autonomous learning and promote metacognitive activity: the three stages of SRL, namely planning, conducting the plan and monitoring oneself, and reflecting (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

Valle et al. (2007) point out that acquiring and gaining knowledge actively about learning strategies are also essential for SRL. Regarding future research, it would be beneficial to develop a program that allowed participants to acquire learning strategies as footholds, as well as incorporating rubric and the use of portfolio to increase student reflection.

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Appendix 1: a page of Reflection notebook

Date: September, ____

Reflection

■ How was your day today? Is there anything you have accomplished or learned?

Is there anything didn't work well or you found it difficult?

Self Evaluation



■ Reflecting today, plan your learning goals specifically for tomorrow.

For achieving those goals, what do you should or need to do? What kinds of skills do you need? (Please refer the 15 skills list) * You can choose more than one skill.

■ For tomorrow, how or what do you want to contribute to the group?

■ Summarize your tomorrow's learning goal

Appendix 2: 15 Generic Skills

| 15 Generic Skills | | Questions of Self-evaluations | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | ID | | |
| Action (Ability to step forward) | 1) Initiative (I) | Ability to take initiative and be proactive | 1 Takes the initiative to research and study relevant topics and issues. 2 Is able to identify personal strengths and weakness and face difficulties with confidence. 3 Is able to identify specific roles and tasks, make decisions, and take action without being negatively influenced by others. |
| | 2) Ability to influence (AI) | Ability to influence and involve others | 4 Understands the importance of cooperation. 5 Is flexible and able to choose appropriate courses of action based on the circumstances. 6 Provides leadership and engages others in research and analysis (e.g. comments on blog articles). |
| | 3) Execution skills (E) | Ability to set goals and act with conviction | 7 Knows how to set goals and make steady progress towards attaining them. 8 Assertively faces challenges without a fear of failure. 9 Is able to complete difficult tasks with strong conviction. |
| Thinking (Ability to think through processes) | 4) Ability to detect issues (AD) | Ability to analyze the status quo and clarify relevant issues | 10 Is able to clarify the issues being researched. 11 Knows how to collect and analyze information to detect problems and issues. 12 Seeks the opinions of others to clarify pertinent issues. |
| | 5) Planning skills (P) | Ability to clarify and implement the processes required to solve issues | 13 Is able to develop a research plan and identify the required next steps. 14 Acknowledges gaps between project plans and project implementation. 15 Is able to flexibly revise plans and develop contingencies depending on each situation |
| | 6) Creativity (C) | Ability to create new value | 16 Knows how to combine various concepts (e.g. ideas, ways of thinking, techniques) to create new value. 17 Is able to look beyond common knowledge and traditional ideas to innovatively solve problems and create new value. 18 Discovers new insights while paying attention to areas not previously focused on. |
| Team work (Ability to work in a team) | 7) Ability to deliver messages (ADM) | Ability to deliver opinions clearly and effectively | 19 Knows how to deliver clear and detailed messages using case studies and objective data. 20 Is able to understand the needs of an audience and is able to respond appropriately. 21 Is able to clearly understand and deliver information. |
| | 8) Ability to listen closely and carefully (ALCC) | Ability to carefully listen to other people's opinions | 22 Is able to understand the opinions of others, and is able to create a conducive atmosphere for group members to express themselves. 23 Uses positive affirmation techniques to create a friendly atmosphere for others to speak. 24 Listens to others without bias from stereotypes. |

| | | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| Teamwork (Ability to work in a team) | 9) Flexibility (F) | Ability to appreciate and value differing opinions and perspectives | 25 | Is able to appreciate differing perspectives (e.g. cultural differences) without rigidly holding on to own opinions and stereotypes. | |
| | | 10) Ability to grasp (AGS) | Ability to comprehend the relationships between self, other people, and the surrounding environment. | 26 | Is able to understand others' ways of thinking by approaching situations from multiple points of view. |
| | | | Ability to comply with social rules and keep promises made with others | 27 | Is able to understand the backgrounds and perspectives of others who are from different countries and cultures. |
| | Ability to deal with the root causes of stress | | 28 | Is able to understand and fulfill individual and group roles and expectations, and knows how to act accordingly. | |
| | 11) Ability to apply rules and regulations (AARR) | Ability to have inquisitive mind and deepen own interests | 29 | Is able to accurately judge the capacities of themselves and group members, and has the ability to take appropriate action based on these judgments. | |
| | | Ability to understand and accept diversity and different cultures | 30 | Takes positive action by accurately assessing and being considerate of the situations of others (e.g. relationships and schedules). | |
| | | Ability to think logically with wider perspective | 31 | Is able to learn and understand the rules and mannerisms of different countries and cultures so as to not cause problems with others. | |
| | 12) Ability to control stress (ACS) | Ability to search and judge the signification and essentiality | 32 | Manages time effectively to achieve personal goals and expectations (e.g. complying with due dates). | |
| | | Ability to deal with even small topics | 33 | Complies with social rules and customs, and acts appropriately when interacting with others. | |
| | | Ability to be curious with even small topics | 34 | Is able to identify the causes of stress and manages stress either individually or with help of others. | |
| | 13) Logical Thinking (LT) | Ability to suspend the decision or affirm various different things without immediate deny or judges | 35 | Is able to temporarily reduce stress by talking with someone or adjusting the perception of a stressful situation in a helpful way. | |
| | | Ability to make an effort for trying to understand others without a biased selfvalue | 36 | Thinks positively, even when things are not going as planned. | |
| | | Ability to understand different cultures) | 37 | Is able to reflect something learned or experienced for future. | |
| | 14) Inquisitive Mind (IM) | Ability to appreciate and value differing opinions and perspectives | 38 | Is able to think looking at things from a different standpoint and situation | |
| | | Ability to comprehend the relationships between self, other people, and the surrounding environment. | 39 | Is able to think and see things objectively without own stereotype. | |
| Ability to comply with social rules and keep promises made with others | | 40 | Is able to deepen knowledge and proceed learnings with inquisitive mind | | |
| 15) Respect for Diversity (RD) | Ability to search and judge the signification and essentiality | 41 | Is able to search and judge the signification and essentiality | | |
| | Ability to deal with the root causes of stress | 42 | Is able to be curious with even small topics | | |
| | Ability to have inquisitive mind and deepen own interests | 43 | Is able to be considerate in different environment, or to others who have different cultures or speak different languages | | |
| | Ability to understand and accept diversity and different cultures | 44 | Is able to suspend the decision or affirm various different things without immediate deny or judges | | |
| | Ability to think logically with wider perspective | 45 | Is able to make an effort for trying to understand others without a biased selfvalue | | |