

A Survey on Autonomous Learning of College English Listening

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Abstract—Autonomous learning of Colleges English Listening (ALCEL) has been carried out in many college and universities for nearly ten years in China. However, the effect of ALCEL is not as good as expected. In order to probe problems of ALCEL, questionnaire on ALCEL was conducted in six local universities of Hubei province. It focused on the quantities of seats in Autonomous learning (AL) rooms, the condition of the hardware and software for ALCEL, the guidance from teachers of Colleges English Listening, and students' attitudes towards ALCEL. 180 Questionnaires were distributed to students at six local universities of Hubei province, and 175 returned Questionnaires were valid ones. Data from the survey showed that there were problems in the existing ALCEL, which need solving urgently. And on the basis of discussion, solutions were offered to overcome these problems in the end.

Keywords—Autonomous learning; Autonomous learning of Colleges English Listening; problems; solutions

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, autonomous learning of Colleges English Listening (ALCEL) is being carried out in many college and universities. Although most of published papers describe a lot of advantages of implementing ALCEL, the effect of ALCEL is not as good as expected. There is very few of literature talking about the existing problems of ALCEL. This study aimed to gain insights into some existing problems of ALCEL by investigating the quantities of seats in AL rooms, the condition of the hardware and software for ALCEL, the guidance from teachers of Colleges English Listening and students' attitudes towards ALCEL, and offer solutions to them.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Autonomous learning(AL) needs two qualities, that is, the ability to take charge of one's own learning and take a more active role in the learning process (Holec, 1981). Autonomous learners are independent, self-directed, life-long learners (Betts, 2004). They usually extend the material being taught by actively seeking and processing information and developing transferred skills according to their own needs or interests (Chan, 2003). Learner autonomy is the key to AL. there are some suggested modes of promoting learner autonomy, such as tiered assignments, flexible groupings (Betts, 2004), and

problem-based learning (VanDenHurk, 2006). The process of improving learner autonomy is considered as a long-term aptitude development effort that prepares learners for later stages of life (Jimenez Raya and Perez Fernandez, 2002). Although AL is highly valued in the USA and Europe, the appropriateness of autonomy-based pedagogies needs examining, for they are not culture-free (F. Jones, 1995; Pennycook, 1997; Schmenk, 2005). Ho & Crookall (1995) argued that autonomy-based pedagogies should be contextualized in local settings because of culture and environment differences, which might prevent learners from obtaining skills and knowledge needed for AL.

However, researchers agreed that language learners could develop their capacity for AL (Benson, 2001; Candy, 1991; Nunan, 1996). Skills of AL are valuable for EFL learners, especially those who will continue English learning after school education. Research on AL in Asian contexts reported similar positive effects to those in Western research (Yang, 2003; Ikeda & Takeuchi, 2006), so did problems specific to Asian contexts. Researchers found that Asian EFL students were less aware of the concept of autonomous learning (Yang, 2003; Lo, 2007), and had difficulties in managing time and learning materials owing to their lack of experience in AL (Kuo, 2003; Yang, 2003), that they preferred looking learning as an end-product to a process due to not understanding that the process was also a part of learning (Lo, 2007). Chan (2003) concluded that learner autonomy in Hong Kong could not be encouraged unless support was given by teachers. Yang (2003) also reported that teacher guidance was essential in developing learner autonomy. So English teachers should probe problems arising in AL and try to find solutions to them.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Sample

A total of 180 second year undergraduates, ranging from 19 to 20 years of age, were randomly selected to participate in this study. The sample consisted of 106 (58.9%) males and 74 (41.1%) females, all of which were Chinese.

The subjects were drawn from six local universities of Hubei province during December, 2013. The main reason for choosing second year undergraduates was that they had

undergone almost three semester's ALCEL, and presumably were in a better position to answer the questions posed.

B. Instrumentation

The survey instrument used for data collection was a 10-item questionnaire designed by the present author. It focused on the quantities of seats in AL rooms, the condition of the hardware and software for ALCEL, the guidance from teachers of Colleges English Listening, and students' attitudes towards ALCEL. The questionnaire was composed of one open-ended question and nine items that asked subjects to choose one answer from the multiple-choice fashion using a five-point scale (likert-scale): never or almost never true; usually not true; somewhat true; usually true; always or almost always true.

C. Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed to the students with the assistance of other English teachers. Subjects were instructed to fill out the questionnaire within 15 minutes in class. All of the subjects received uniform instructions as to how to fill out the questionnaires in order to minimize confusion. The written instructions were given to the individual teachers to be read to their students prior to filling in the questionnaire.

D. Data Analysis

180 Questionnaires were distributed to students at six local universities of Hubei province, and 175 returned Questionnaires were valid ones. In order to understand the data, descriptive statistics such as percentages were used. Data from the questionnaire are as follows:

Table Data from the questionnaire

Items	Percentage					Quantity of seats
	A	B	C	D	E	
1						100~300
2			18.3%	81.7%		
3	100%					
4	72%	38%				
5	53.1%	36%	4%	2.9%	4%	
6	89.7%	4%	6.3%			
7	90.9%	2.3%	1.7%	4%	1.1%	
8					100%	
9	14.3%	25.1%	10.3%	20%	30.3%	
10	100%					

Note: A=never or almost never true; B=usually not true; C=somewhat true; D=usually true; E=always or almost always true.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Hardware of ALCEL

Item 1&2 were used for gaining information about hardware of ALCEL. Data from Item 1 (How many seats are there for ALCEL in your college or university?) showed that there were 100 to 300 seats in AL rooms for all the freshmen and sophomores, which were a large population of over 10,000 students. That is, seats in AL rooms were limited, many students couldn't find seats available for their ALCEL. Data from Item 2 (The system of ALCEL usually got broken because of daily excessive burden.) demonstrated that most subjects(81.7%) answered "usually true" and the rest of them(18.3%) "somewhat true". So data for Item 1&2

suggested that the hardware of AL rooms couldn't meet students' needs for ALCEL.

B. Software of ALCEL

Data from Item 3(The resources of ALCEL are new and authentic language material.) showed that all of the subjects (100%) chose "never or almost never true", which meant that the software of AL rooms couldn't meet students' needs for ALCEL.

C. Students' Qualities for ALCEL

Item 4, 5, 6 and 7 were designed for collecting data about Students' qualities for ALCEL. Data from Item 4(I know the concept and process of autonomous learning.) showed that 72% of the subjects chose "never or almost never true", and 38% of the subjects chose "usually not true". Data from Item 5(I usually make plan for my ALCEL in the beginning of the semester.) showed that 53.1% of the subjects chose "never or almost never true", and 36% of the subjects chose "usually not true", only 4% of the subjects chose "always or almost always true", 2.9% of the subjects chose "usually true". Data from Item 6(I can choose proper learning content for my ALCEL.) showed that 89.7% of the subjects chose "never or almost never true", and 4% of the subjects chose "usually not true", only 6.3% of the subjects chose "somewhat true". Data from Item 7(I can employ some learning strategies for my ALCEL.) showed that 90.9% of the subjects chose "never or almost never true", and 2.3% of the subjects chose "usually not true", only 1.1% of the subjects chose "always or almost always true", 4% of the subjects chose "usually true". These data demonstrated that most subjects didn't know the concept and process of autonomous learning and make plan for their ALCEL in the beginning of the semester, and couldn't choose proper learning content and employ some learning strategies for their ALCEL. So students were not prepared for ALCEL, and they didn't have basic qualities for ALCEL.

D. Students' Attitudes Towards ALCEL

Item 8&9 were employed to obtain information about Students' attitudes towards ALCEL. Data from Item 8(We must fulfill the ALCEL tasks assigned by my English teachers.) showed that all subjects(100%) chose "always or almost always true". Data from Item 9(I usually play tricks to show that I have completed ALCEL tasks assigned by my English teachers.) showed that 14.3% of the subjects chose "never or almost never true", and 25.1% of the subjects chose "usually not true", 10.3% of the subjects chose "somewhat true" but 20% of the subjects chose "usually true", 30.3% of the subjects chose "always or almost always true". The above data indicated that over a half of the subjects didn't have correct attitudes towards ALCEL. So students need improving their attitudes towards ALCEL.

E. Guidance from Teachers of Colleges English Listening

Item 10(Our English teachers trained us strategies or skills for our ALCEL.) served this aim. Data from Item 10 displayed that all of the subjects(100%) chose "never or almost never

true”, which suggested that students’ ALCEL lacked the guidance from teachers of Colleges English Listening.

F. Problems in Autonomous Learning of College English Listening

Data from the survey revealed that six local colleges and universities of Hubei province had platforms for students’ ALCEL aiming at improving students’ English listening abilities. But in the process of implementing ALCEL, many problems arose. The specific problems are as follows:

1) The hardware of AL rooms couldn’t meet students’ needs for ALCEL

Firstly, seats in AL rooms were far from enough, many students couldn’t find seats available for their ALCEL. Secondly, The system of ALCEL usually got broken because of daily excessive burden. So ALCEL is a kind of impractical form due to lack of supporting equipment.

2) The software of AL rooms couldn’t meet students’ needs for ALCEL

For the resources of ALCEL were out of date, students’ ALCEL were short of authentic language material. As English teachers knew, the material of ALCEL that software contained were made in 2002, Most of the listening material was collected before the year of 2001. therefore, students were not interested in listening material provided by the AL platform.

3) Students were not prepared for ALCEL, and they didn’t have basic qualities for ALCEL

On the one hand, most subjects didn’t know the concept and process of AL and make plan for their ALCEL in the beginning of the semester; on the other hand, most subjects couldn’t choose proper learning content and employ some learning strategies for their ALCEL. The educational environment in China heavily dominated by standardized entrance examinations, which put great pressure on both teachers and students. So teachers were accustomed to dominate the classroom, be responsible for choosing teaching methods and make learning decisions for their students to save time and cost, and to win in the standard tests; and students were used to their teachers’ transmission according to teaching plans; furthermore, teachers never introduce the concept and strategies of AL to their students, or gave them chance to choose learning content because they thought it was waist of time to let students learn autonomously.

4) Most of students didn’t have correct attitudes towards ALCEL, and their attitudes towards ALCEL need improving

As both teachers and students knew, there were some management shortcomings in the system of ALCEL, students who didn’t have correct attitudes towards ALCEL used some kinds of tricks to show that they had fulfilled their ALCEL tasks assigned by their teachers. As the management shortcomings of the system for ALCEL couldn’t be solved by English teachers, many students, in fact, never completed ALCEL tasks.

5) Students’ ALCEL lacked the guidance from teachers of Colleges English Listening

Teachers didn’t train students necessary strategies or skills of managing their ALCEL because they didn’t realize the importance in developing students’ abilities of AL. Students tended to view learning as an end-product rather than a process and did not understand that the process was also a part of learning. So teachers should guide them to understand the importance of developing abilities of ALCEL and cultivate students’ abilities and strategies in learning autonomy.

The above problems supported the views that Asian EFL students were less aware of the concept of autonomous learning (Yang, 2003; Lo, 2007), had difficulties in managing time and learning materials, due to their lack of experience in autonomous learning (Kuo, 2003; Yang, 2003), and that teachers’ guidance was important in helping students to develop autonomy(Yang, 2003). English teachers should have been cautious in adopting autonomy-based pedagogies, for Academics have argued that the autonomy-based pedagogies used in Western culture need to be appropriately contextualized to fit into Asian culture(F. Jones, 1995; Pennycook, 1997; Schmenk, 2005).

V. SOLUTIONS TO SOLVE PROBLEMS IN AUTONOMOUS LEARNING OF COLLEGE ENGLISH LISTENING

As AL has been increasingly advocated by administrators of colleges and universities in China, college English teachers should reflect their teaching, and read more literature on AL so that they can make sensible decisions and help their students in ALCEL. Here are some solutions to the existing problems in ALCEL:

A. Stakeholders of Colleges and Universities

Firstly, stakeholders of colleges and universities should invest more money into updating the existing equipment of ALCEL and installing more equipment for ALCEL so that students can have seats for ALCEL in the AL rooms during their free time.

Secondly, stakeholders of colleges and universities should provide more supports for college English teachers, for instance, reconsider college English teachers’ workload etc.

B. College English Teachers

Firstly, college English teachers should introduce the concept and process of AL to their students, and cultivate students’ abilities of learner autonomy, such as making learning plans, managing time and choosing proper learning materials etc.

Secondly, college English teachers should shift their roles from decision-makers to facilitators who can help students to monitor themselves, provide advice, be reminders of students’ duties, and guide them to find answers from various resources.

Thirdly, college English teachers should make effort to help their students to develop proper attitude towards ALCEL and fight against their laziness and lack of determination.

VI. CONCLUSION

In summary, the analysis of findings in this study provides some interesting insights into ALCEL. In terms of pedagogical implications, the existing problems in ALCEL and solutions presented here will be useful for college English teachers in implementing ALCEL, and they also remind stakeholders of colleges and universities of rethinking their budget and policies on ALCEL. As Ho & Crookall(1995) noted that autonomy-based pedagogies should be contextualized in local settings. Stakeholders of colleges and universities, college English teachers and students should make joint effort to improve the present condition of ALCEL. College English teachers should shift their roles from decision-makers to facilitators, and students need to develop proper attitude towards ALCEL.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The research is funded by grant no. 13d044. The present authors are grateful to the instructors and learners who participated in this study.

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