

Developing EFL Speaking Skills and Learner Autonomy through Self-Regulation in a University Seminar Course

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要 旨

本研究は、日本の大学における EFL 環境下で注目すべき 2 つの課題として、オーラル・スキルと動機付けを取り上げる。具体的には大学の EFL 学生を自己学習に参加させることが、学習成果と学習者の自律性に与える影響について調査する。対象者は学部生 8 名（日本人 7 名、マレーシア 1 名）で、クラスメートとの会話への参加、学習者の自律性を評価するアンケート、インタビューを事前事後に実施した。この間に、学生に録画された会話を書き起こし、分析させることなどの措置を実施した。本研究では、学生が措置前と措置後の自身のパフォーマンスを比較し、また熟練したスピーカーのパフォーマンスとも比較することで、学習者のオーラル・スキル能力を向上させるだけでなく、学習者の自律性とモチベーションを高める可能性を探求したものである。本調査から得られたデータでは、学生がほとんどの分野でスピーキング能力が改善された。しかし、学習者の自律性に関する結果はそれほど明確ではなく、全体として、日本人学生の態度や自らの学習に対する責任感に大きな違いはなかった。一方、マレーシアの学生は、時間の経過とともに自分の学習に対して責任感を増していることが示された。これらの調査により、対象者が自分の学習を促進するのに役立つ習慣を増やしたことが示された。

Keywords: speaking skills, Japanese university EFL students, self-regulation, learner autonomy, student-centered learning

キーワード: スピーキングスキル、日本の EFL 大学生、自己調整、学習者の自律性、学生中心の学習

1. Introduction

“When the student is ready, the teacher appears.

When the student is truly ready, the teacher disappears”.

- Lao Tzu, ancient Chinese philosopher, and author of the Tao Te Ching -

Motivating EFL students is a complex and arduous task that involves a variety of psycho-sociological and linguistic factors (Dornyei, 2010). This article focuses on the speak-

ing skills and learner autonomy of EFL university students in Japan. This is a context in which motivation has generally been thought to be a problem (Sugimoto, 1997; McVeigh, 2002). For instance, in his survey of fifty university EFL teachers in Japan, Moritoshi (2009) found the following indicators of low intrinsic motivation: poor attendance, poor participation, and poor preparation. Similarly, in his survey of 793 EFL students and 275 EFL teachers at universities in Japan, Matsumoto (2008) identified students' failing to do homework, circumventing the attendance requirements, using cellular phones, and sleeping during class as common issues in his context.

Moreover, in terms of oral English proficiency specifically, this is an area where Japanese EFL learners (JEFLs) have had perhaps their greatest struggles (Taylor, 2020). In coining the term "false beginner", Peaty (1987, p. 4) describes students who have a background in English based on their previous study of grammar and translation but have very limited communicative abilities. Japanese EFL university students are prototypical false beginners, as this term is often used to describe JEFLs in current course books and/or teacher instructional manuals designed for this context (Helgesen, Brown & Mandeville 2007; Martin 2003). In his assessment of the oral abilities of a group of Japanese university EFL learners, Helgesen (1993) reported that his learners rarely initiated conversation, avoided bringing up new topics, did not challenge the teacher, seldom asked for clarification, and did not volunteer answers. Similarly, Farooq (2005) describes JEFLs as having "extreme difficulties in interacting with native speakers in real-life situations even at a survival level" (p. 27).

This struggle with oral competence in English can be attributed to many reasons. First and foremost, most Japanese EFL students have few opportunities to speak English. Upon interviewing 15 Japanese university students about their EFL speaking learning experiences at junior and senior high school in relation to sources of self-efficacy, Kobayashi (2021) reported a tendency for passive speaking mastery experiences, insufficient peer modeling, and a strong preference from students for more communicative activities. Traditionally, most EFL classes in junior and senior high schools in Japan are taught in Japanese, sometimes by instructors who are not wholly proficient in English themselves and tend to focus on passing non-communicative entrance exams (Hidasi, 2004). Consequently, classes are teacher-centered, and the curriculum often relies heavily on reading, memorizing grammatical rules, and translation (Wastila, 2019).

Furthermore, when it comes to speaking, demotivation may be tied to foreign language anxiety. Some Japanese EFL speakers experience a great deal of communication

apprehension (Cutrone, 2009). It is not only that they have little experience communicating in English, but Japanese students may simply not be used to classroom dynamics that encourage a great deal of discussion and communication even in their L1. As some scholars have noted, Japanese society and culture seem to favor reticent and passive students (Anderson, 1993, 2019; Matsumoto, 1994; McVeigh, 2002; Wastila, 2019). Additionally, while it is not the writer's intention to propagate the *Japanese are silent* stereotype, there does appear to be some legitimacy to the idea that Japanese society may value taciturnity over verbosity in some ways (Doyon, 2000), as demonstrated by the long list of famous Japanese proverbs to that effect (see Cutrone, 2015, p. 46). Further, there seems to be a fear of negative evaluation and an emphasis on accuracy (over fluency) that may impede Japanese EFL learners from taking risks (Brown, 2004; Cutrone, 2009).

While this study takes place in a Japanese EFL context (and focuses mainly on the students in this context), one of the participants who helped comprise the opportunistic sample of this study is Malaysian. Thus, while this exploratory action research is not meant to be a comparative study, it is necessary to, at least, briefly describe how Malaysian EFL/ESL learners are characterized in the literature. In Malaysia, English is widely recognized as the de facto second language due to its extensive use in business, education, and daily communication among diverse communities. Further, since at least the implementation of the Education Act of 1961, English has been made a compulsory subject in school (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2017). Despite a great deal of attention paid to English and many good reasons for needing it in Malaysia, “the English proficiency level of Malaysian students is far from satisfactory” (Thang, Ting, & Jaafar, 2011, p. 40).

Various studies conducted in tertiary contexts have shown that Malaysian students realize the importance of English for their futures (Ainol & Isarji, 2009; Thang, 2004) and that students are extrinsically motivated by their pursuit of good grades and good jobs. However, despite the obvious importance of English in Malaysia, various studies have shown evidence of Malaysian students exhibiting poor efforts in learning English (Parilah, 2002). Furthermore, as Thang, Ting, and Jaafar (2011) surmise, extrinsic motivation does not necessarily translate to better performance in English. Finally, as Aziz and Kashinathan note (2021), many Malaysian ESL learners struggle to acquire oral proficiency in English.

2. Literature Review

Learner Autonomy

To start, Holec (1981) offers a basic understanding of learner autonomy by defining it as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” and to bear responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning (p. 3). This includes determining the objectives, defining the contents and progressions, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring the procedures of acquisition, and evaluating what has been acquired. However, as Little (2002) has pointed out, the concept of learner autonomy can sometimes be difficult to pin down because it is widely confused with self-instruction. Benson (2001, p. 48) addresses this issue by clarifying that learner autonomy is not necessarily synonymous with self-instruction, self-access, self-study, self-education, and out-of-class learning or distance learning. These terms basically describe methods for learning by yourself (i.e., behaviors), whereas true learner autonomy simply refers to the capacity (i.e., attitudes and abilities) to be able to learn on your own. In other words, just because a learner may well be better than others at learning on their own does not necessarily mean they have to. Conversely, due to the circumstances of their learning environments, some learners who do not possess the capacity to learn on their own may be forced to do so.

In summing up a large body of empirical research in social psychology, Deci and Flaste (1995) refer to autonomy, “feeling free and volitional in one’s actions”, as a basic human need (p. 2). According to Little (n.d.), autonomy “is nourished by, and in turn nourishes, our intrinsic motivation, our proactive interest in the world around us” (p. 2). Similarly, Morbedadze (2015) describes how learner autonomy addresses the problem of learner motivation: “autonomous learners draw on their intrinsic motivation when they accept responsibility for their own learning and commit themselves to develop the skills of reflective self-management in learning; and success in learning strengthens their intrinsic motivation” (p. 1). Little (2007) explains that learning is more efficient and effective because autonomous learners are motivated and reflective learners, and all learning is likely to succeed to the extent that learners are autonomous. Moreover, as Little (2007) points out, the knowledge and skills acquired by the autonomous learner in the classroom can be applied to situations that arise outside the classroom, and this is really the ultimate barometer of whether learners can adapt and function to new and ever-changing environments around them.

Relative to foreign language learning, Dafei (2007) administered questionnaires and

interviews to examine the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency in 129 non-English majors in a teacher college in China. The results of the study demonstrate that the students' English proficiencies were significantly and positively related to their learner autonomy. In a Turkish university context, Ustunluoglu (2009) examined the perceptions of 320 first-year students and 24 teachers regarding responsibilities and abilities related to autonomous learning. The results suggest that although students seem to have the capacity for autonomous learning, they tend not to take responsibility for their own learning. More specifically, students viewed the teacher as a dominant figure whose primary job is to be the decision-maker in the classroom.

Similarly, in a Japanese context, Gamble et al. (2012) investigated 399 university students' perceptions of their responsibility and capacity for autonomous English learning. The results showed that students, regardless of motivational level, had similar perceptions of responsibility in terms of carrying out autonomous learning tasks. However, regarding ability, highly motivated students perceived themselves as having the capacity for greater involvement in their own learning than unmotivated students; however, despite this recognition, these highly motivated students often did not act upon these feelings due to a perception that it is the teacher's responsibility or from a lack of confidence. Such studies highlight the need to integrate learner independence into the language curriculum, with a well-structured focus, delivery, and content.

What is meant by Self-Assessment?

To start with, we shall define three interrelated and overlapping terms that are key to the contents of this paper: self-assessment, self-monitoring, and self-regulation. First, Nunan (1999) defines self-assessment as a sub-component of evaluation that includes "the tools, techniques, and procedures for collecting and interpreting information about what learners can and cannot do" (p. 85). Subsequently, Brown and Harris (2013) define self-assessment as a "descriptive and evaluative act carried out by the student concerning his or her own work and academic abilities" (p. 368). Panadero et al. (2016) define it as a "wide variety of mechanisms and techniques through which students describe (i.e., assess) and possibly assign merit or worth to (i.e., evaluate) the qualities of their own learning processes and products" (p. 804). Relative to language teaching, there is a recent attempt to train learners systematically in ways of assessing their own learning progress. While the term self-assessment generally connotes evaluation of oneself, several researchers have centered their definition more on the benefits of such an approach. For instance, Matsuno

(2009) claims that self-assessment is effective because it helps students improve their learning and understand the purpose and criteria of their assignments.

In this way, Epstein et al. (2008) have transformed the concept of self-assessment into a type of self-monitoring. According to Epstein et al. (2008) self-monitoring “refers to the ability to notice our own actions, curiosity to examine the effects of those actions, and willingness to use those observations to improve behavior and thinking in the future” (p. 5). Taken together, Andrade (2019) points out that these definitions include self-assessment of one’s abilities, processes, and products. Although such a conceptualization may seem quite broad at first, it is useful in that it expresses that each object of assessment—competence, process, and product—is susceptible to self-feedback influence. Thus, the main difference between self-monitoring and self-assessment seems to be the extent to which learners evaluate themselves. They can still be heavily involved in their own learning process without doing the final act of self-evaluation.

Accordingly, while it also does not necessarily reflect self-evaluation, the concept of self-regulation takes the idea of self-monitoring further. Like self-monitoring, self-regulation also involves the process of involving a learner in their own learning. However, as Andrade (2019) explains, self-regulated learning is a process that also involves learners setting goals and then monitoring and managing their thoughts, feelings, and actions to reach those goals. While the three terms self-assessment, self-monitoring, and self-regulation are often used interchangeably in research studies (Panadero et al., 2016), the ones that best fit the methods employed in this current case study are self-monitoring and self-regulation. That is, in the strictest sense, learners will not actually be evaluating themselves.

As the writer mentioned previously, Japanese learners may simply not be used to being deeply involved in their own learning process. Hence, for some learners in this context, it might be too much too soon to expect them to suddenly adapt to new ways of learning and confidently rise to the challenge. Some may even see the extra responsibility as a burden or, even worse, view the teacher as somehow neglecting their duties. In fact, in previous research that sought to gauge how Japanese EFL university students were coping with the added demands of remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, Cutrone and Beh (2021, 2022) reported that some learners struggled with the extra responsibilities and sudden independence they were given. It was clear that many students expected the teachers to not only lead them in all facets of a lesson but also to handle the all-important task of evaluation. Many learners simply believe that the teacher is the only

one with enough expertise to assess students.

What is the Rationale for Self-Assessment, Self-Regulation, and Self-Monitoring?

One way to potentially improve oral skills and motivation in this context is to attempt to involve learners in the assessment process. First, the importance of motivation in foreign language learning cannot be understated. According to Dornyei (2000) “motivation provides the primary impetus to embark upon learning, and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process” (p. 425). Accordingly, relating self-assessment to motivation, McMillan and Hearn (2008) argue that “student self-assessment stands alone in its promise of improved student motivation, engagement, and learning” (p. 40). Andrade (2019) considers self-assessment to be a type of feedback that promotes learning and performance.

Tran (2019) further details the benefits of involving students in their own assessments. In the learning process, learners need to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, how much progress they have made, and how to use the skills they have acquired. By being involved in the assessment process, learners can better reflect on their own learning, as they are made aware of the criteria required for good performance. Consequently, they are in a better position to judge their own achievements, set personal goals, and, ultimately, focus on the specific areas they need to improve. From a theoretical standpoint, self-assessment, self-regulation, and self-monitoring are all in line with Schmidt’s (1993) Noticing Hypothesis, which stipulates the importance of learners consciously *noticing* linguistic input in order for it to become intake. Finally, as Birjandi (2010) alludes to, perhaps the greatest benefits incurred by self-assessment may be the long-term ramifications. That is, as self-assessment serves to promote autonomous language learning, students are developing strategies that they can use on their own once their formal education is complete.

What does Research generally tell us about Self-Assessment?

In an earlier survey of studies involving self-assessment of foreign language skills, Blanche and Merino (1989) found that self-assessment greatly improved learner motivation and led to learner autonomy. Further, regarding quantitative comparisons between self-assessments and objective measures of proficiency, Blanche and Merino (1989) found a strong correlation in most of the studies they examined. Similarly, Ross (1998) conducted a meta-analysis on self-assessment of language proficiency and reported substantial cor-

relations between various criterion measures and L2 learners' self-assessment of their language skills. In another study, Yoshizawa (2009) investigated the validity of can-do reading and listening statements, which were developed to assess 151 Japanese university EFL learners' performance of everyday language tasks in English. While no significant correlation was observed between the can-do listening statements and the listening-skills measure, the data showed a positive relationship between the can-do reading statements and the reading-skills measure. Yoshizawa (2009) concluded that can-do statements can be used as a tool to facilitate learner autonomy and as an alternative form for instructors to assess the language proficiency of their students and to analyze their needs.

More recently, Andrade (2019) reviewed 76 studies on student self-assessment conducted between 2013 and 2018. Upon examining such factors as the relationship between self-assessment and achievement, consistency of self-assessment and others' assessments, student perceptions of self-assessment, and the association between self-assessment and self-regulated learning, Andrade (2019) found that "self-assessment is most beneficial, in terms of both achievement and self-regulated learning, when it is used formatively and supported by training" (p. 10). Furthermore, in concluding by advocating for less emphasis on consistency and summative self-assessment and promoting more on the cognitive and affective mechanisms of formative self-assessment instead, Andrade (2019) points researchers toward the next frontiers of research in this area. To this end, this case study seeks not only to examine how self-regulation can improve learners' oral skills and motivation but also how students think and feel about the process. Within this framework, the aim of this case study is ultimately to inform EFL/ESL pedagogy in the university context.

3. Research Questions

As stated in the introduction, EFL university students in Japan (and ESL students in Malaysia) have been shown to struggle with oral skills and motivation. To help improve this situation, this study investigates the degree to which self-regulation can enhance oral skills and build learner autonomy in the EFL university context. To shed light on these areas, the following research questions (RQs) have been formulated:

RQ 1: How did self-regulation techniques affect university students' L2 English oral skills?

RQ 2: Did self-regulation techniques foster learner autonomy among university students in this study?

To answer these research questions, the researchers employed a mixed-methods approach using quantitative and qualitative analyses, as described and reported in the following sections.

4. Methodology

Participants

This action research study included eight participants (n=8): seven female Japanese university students and one female Malaysian university student. These individuals were enrolled in a mixed second- and third-year Seminar class in the School of Global Humanities and Social Sciences at Nagasaki University. This seminar class was held once a week for ninety minutes over the course of a sixteen-week semester. Student participants were between 19 and 21 years old and had studied English for eight years on average (including a collective six years in junior and senior high school). All participants of this study were majoring in Languages/Communication, and their English proficiency levels ranged in approximate terms from upper beginner to lower advanced (i.e., A2-C1 on the CEFR). More specifically, six of the students' proficiency levels were based on their IELTS speaking scores. The remaining two students had only taken TOEFL ITP tests, which did not contain a speaking section; hence, the oral proficiency levels of these two students were judged via interviews with the primary researcher of this study, who is also an experienced EFL instructor. The Malaysian student was the most advanced of this group, as she had taken all of her previous classes in English growing up in Malaysia.

All participants were given clear explanations and instructions (in English and Japanese) regarding this study and their role in it. The participants in this study constituted an opportunistic sample in that the researchers sought (and used) participants by soliciting students who were easily accessible to them and willing to participate in the study. As the sample was comprised of all the members of a Seminar class, it was impossible to use some members and not others, since all the students were willing participants. The researchers are acutely aware that the Malaysian participant will have had a vastly different experience studying English than the Japanese participants. While this exploratory action research is not meant to be a comparative study, the fact that one of the students

is different from the others could reveal some interesting insights. Finally, all participants gave their consent to participate in this study. As volunteers, participants were free to skip parts of or withdraw from the study at any time they wished. In referring to participants in this study, pseudonyms are used and concerted efforts have been made to protect participants' privacy at all times.

Procedures and Data Collection Methods

This action research study involved the steps described in Table 1.

Table 1: The Four Procedural Steps Involved in this Study

Step 1	Pre-tests (consisting of observations and questionnaires) conducted within one week of Step 2 beginning
Step 2	Treatment (see Table 2)
Step 3	Post-test (consisting of observations and questionnaires) conducted within one week of Step 2 ending
Step 4	Analysis and interviews

The four procedural steps involved in this study are described in greater detail:

Step 1: (Pre-test): All eight participants in this study received identical pre-tests occurring within one week of each other. This consisted of observation sessions (i.e., participants engaged in nine-minute dyadic video-recorded conversations, of which the middle three minutes were used as data in this study) and having students complete an adapted version of Ustunluoglu's (2009) widely used Learner Autonomy questionnaire (see Appendix 1). These conversations took place in the primary researcher's office at Nagasaki university. The video recording equipment used was a Sony digital video camera, which was placed unobtrusively in the corner of the room. While the conversation was being recorded, only the participants were present in the room. Initial conversational prompts (i.e., involving peer mentoring) were offered to help stimulate conversation; however, it was made clear to all participants that they were free to talk about anything they liked.

Step 2 (Treatment): Upon completion of all elements of the pre-test in the first session, subsequent meetings with students involved the instructional phase of the course. To this end, the following tasks were carried out over the course of the sixteen weeks:

Table 2: *Description of Tasks Involved in the Treatment Phase of this Study*

A	Convert video files and then have students watch and transcribe their conversations
B	Teach students how to analyze spoken data from their transcriptions (see analytical framework in Table 3)
C	Comparing pre-treatment performances to post-treatment performances; discussion and reflection; identifying areas for improvement
D	Comparing students' performances with those of proficient English speakers; setting goals (and making a plan) for the future

The tasks involved in the treatment phase of the study are described in greater detail, as follows:

A. The researcher converted all the videos into MP4 files and provided each student with a three-minute video file of the conversation they took part in. After receiving explicit instructions on how to do so, the students transcribed the conversation they took part in (see Appendix 2 for sample transcription). Two class periods were used for this. To improve reliability, students compared their transcription with that of their interlocutor throughout the process.

B. Subsequently, following the analytical framework that Inoue (2010) administered in her earlier study, the instructor taught the students how to analyze the speech transcripts. As outlined in Table 3, the speech data were examined in terms of fluency (temporal and hesitation), syntactic complexity, accuracy, and lexical complexity. The next three classes were used for this. The students were walked through each of the tasks and shown how to analyze their transcriptions according to each criterion shown in Table 3. In doing so, students were able to learn many linguistic terms and analytical processes.

For instance, as shown in Table 3, to investigate syntactic complexity and accuracy, students needed to be able to identify Analysis of Speech Units (i.e., AS-Units). In its simplest form, an AS-Unit can be seen as roughly the equivalent of a sentence. However, more specifically, as defined by its creators (Foster, Tonkyn, and Wigglesworth, 2000), "an AS-Unit is a single speaker's utterance consisting of an independent clause, or sub-clausal unit, together with any subordinate clause associated with either" (p. 365). Within the AS-Unit framework, there are many issues that the students had to be taught how to deal with, such as how to deal with fragmentary and elliptical data (among other things) which

is typical of oral language samples.

Moreover, as mentioned in Table 3, to analyze Lexical Complexity, the students learned about how to use websites associated with the JACET 8000 scale (Uemura & Ishikawa, 2004). The words in the JACET 8000, a vocabulary glossary created by the Japan Association of College English Teachers (JACET), are separated into eight levels ac-

Table 3: Analytic Framework Adapted from Inoue (2010) Used for Instruction

Aspect	Measures	Definition
Fluency (Temporal)	Mean length of runs	Average no. of syllables produced in utterances between pauses of 0.25 seconds and above
	Speech rate	Total no. of syllables produced in a given speech sample divided by the amount of total time required to produce the speech sample (including pause time) expressed in seconds
Fluency (Hesitation)	No. of repetitions	No. of immediate and verbatim repetition of a word or a phrase
	No. of false starts	No. of utterances that are abandoned before completion
	No. of reformulations	No. of phrases or clauses that are repeated with some modification either to syntax, morphology, or word order
	No. of replacements	No. of lexical items that are substituted for another
Syntactic Complexity	No. of words per AS-unit	Average no. of words per AS-unit (does not include error words)
	No. of subordinate clauses per AS-unit	Average no. of subordinate clauses per AS-unit
Accuracy	Percentage of error-free clauses	% of clauses which do not contain any error to the total number of clauses
	No. of errors per AS-unit	No. of errors divided by the total number of AS-units
	Errors per 100 words	No. of errors divided by the total number of words produced divided by 100
Lexical Complexity	Type-Token Ratio (TTR)	No. of types (different words) divided by the number of tokens (total number of words) in a given text
	Lexical Frequency Profile Vocab Size (world list checker)	% of words listed in the LFP Vocabulary Lists (JACET 8000)

ording to the frequency of use in several corpora. Thus, its 8000 words were presented in eight levels (from 1 to 8, with 1000 words in each level) from easier to more complex words. Hence, by examining the percentage of words students are using in each category, we can get a sense of the size and depth of their vocabulary.

C. Subsequently, in the seventh session, students had discussions with each other and then individually with the instructor about their performances and where they believed they needed to improve. Students offered each other advice about how to improve, and the instructor provided specific advice to each student.

D. Over the next three classes, the students then embarked on a project in which they were tasked with choosing, transcribing, and analyzing a three-minute video (from a movie, TV show, YouTube, or another source) of a proficient speaker engaged in a dialogue. The instructor stressed the point that English is a common lingua franca around the globe and proficient speakers can constitute both native and non-native speakers (Seidlhofer, 2011). By doing this task, students had a model data set that they could use to compare with their own earlier one. By seeing how a proficient speaker of English navigates a conversation, the learners developed strategies for improving their own speaking.

E. Then, the instructor used two ninety-minute class periods to help students further develop strategies to help themselves. This ranged from methods on how to improve accuracy, fluency, syntactic complexity, increase vocabulary, and keep the conversation going, etc. Revised goals were shared and discussed among the class.

Step 3 (Post-test): In the thirteenth week of the course, each student underwent the same battery of tests described in Step 1 above.

Step 4: From the fourteenth to the sixteenth week of the course, each student transcribed their second conversation. Subsequently, oral interview sessions were conducted in which differences between pre-test and post-test performances and future goals were discussed. Students were interviewed individually in the primary researcher's office. All interviews were conducted in English; however, students were told they were free to use Japanese if they needed to (although none did). The interviews were semi-structured (and informal) in that the interviewer had a general plan for the interviews but did not stop the inter-

viewee from talking about things beyond the questions posed.

Interviews began with a few general questions to help students feel comfortable, such as *How important is improving your English to you?* and *How has your experience participating in this study been?* Subsequently, the interviewer asked more specific questions, such as *How do you think you performed in the video-recorded conversations?*, *Did you notice any key differences between your performance in the first conversation from that in the second conversation?*, *Did you notice any key differences between your conversational performances and that of the proficient English speaker you analyzed?*, *What would you say are your weakest areas that you need to improve in?*, and *How can you go about improving in the aforementioned areas?*, etc. It is important to note that at this point the students will have already pondered many of these questions, as they had engaged in plenary class discussions where these topics were brought up.

These interviews were not part of evaluating the students' oral proficiency. Rather, in addition to getting students' feedback about their experiences in this study, the interviews were designed to raise learners' consciousness regarding their own learning and help them assess their own abilities. In doing so, from an educational perspective, students would have the opportunity to identify potential weak areas and address them in specific future improvement plans.

5. Results

Differences in Fluency from the Pre-Test to the Post-test

As shown in Table 4, the participants, on average, improved their Fluency in most areas. Regarding Temporal Fluency, from the Pre-test to the Post-test, the participants' mean length of runs increased by 2.45 syllables, and their speech rate increased by .44 syllables per second. Further, concerning Hesitation Fluency, participants, on average, produced .76 fewer repetitions, .75 fewer false starts, 6.5 fewer reformulations, and .25 fewer replacements from the Pre-test to the Post-test. As Table 4 reported, the standard deviations are generally low in all areas except for one (i.e., reformulations). Thus, the fact that the standard deviations are quite low in most categories suggests that there was not great variability within the performances of this group in those categories. However, regarding the Reformulations category in the Pre-test, the high standard deviations suggest that there was considerable variability within the performances of this group.

A closer look revealed that the Malaysian student had produced 61 more reformula-

tions than the second next most frequent producer who produced 7. Even in the Post-test where the Malaysian student had produced far fewer reformulations (9), this was still the second highest in the group. When we remove the outlier data pertaining to the Malaysian student, the results show that the rest of the group, on average, produced 1.21 more reformulations. When asked about why she had produced so many reformulations initially, the Malaysian participant attributed it to her advanced level of English proficiency and how she attempted to read the reaction of her interlocutor. That is, when she felt her interlocutor may have been confused, she reformulated her words to facilitate understanding and communication.

Table 4: Fluency from the Pre-Test to the Post-test

Aspect	Measures	Pre \bar{x} (SD)	Post \bar{x} (SD)
Fluency (Temporal)	Mean length of runs	4.27 (2.54)	6.72 (5.15)
	Speech rate	1.7 (.62)	2.14 (.89)
Fluency (Hesitation)	No. of repetitions	4.89 (5.06)	4.13 (2.64)
	No. of false starts	2.13 (3.64)	1.38 (2.13)
	No. of reformulations	10.25 (23.5)	3.75 (4.1)
	No. or replacements	2 (2.2)	1.75 (1.67)

Differences in Syntactic Complexity and Accuracy

Similar to the results on Fluency, the participants, on average, improved their Syntactic Complexity and Accuracy across the board. As presented in Table 5, in terms of Syntactic Complexity from the Pre-test to the Post-test, participants, on average, increased their number of words per AS-Unit by 2.06, and they, on average, increased their number of subordinate clauses per AS-Unit by .14.

Moreover, regarding Accuracy from the Pre-test to the Post-test, participants, on average, increased their percentage of error-free clauses (by 4.99), decreased their number of errors per AS-Unit (by .36), and decreased their number of errors per 100 words (by 1.28). Concerning the Percentage of Error-Free Clauses' category (in both the Pre-test and Post-test), the high standard deviations demonstrate considerable variability within the performances of this category.

Table 5: Syntactic Complexity and Accuracy from the Pre-Test to the Post-test

Aspect	Measures	Pre \bar{x} (SD)	Post \bar{x} (SD)
Syntactic Complexity	No. of words per AS-unit	5.03 (1.19)	7.09 (1.75)
	No. of subordinate clauses-per AS- unit	.12 (.1)	.26 (.11)
Accuracy	Percentage of error-free clauses	51.85 (25.4)	56.84 (23.8)
	No. of errors per AS-unit	.98 (1.57)	.62 (.76)
	Errors per 100 words	4.4 (2.9)	3.12 (3.03)

Differences in Lexical Complexity

Overall, the participants seemed to have shown a modest improvement in their Lexical Complexity. As Table 6 reports, from the Pre-test to the Post-test, participants uttered 1.6% more words in Level 1, .34% more words in Level 2, 2.51% more words in Level 3, .21% more words in Level 4, .45% fewer words in Level 5, .007% fewer words in Level 6, .05% fewer words in Level 7, and .05% more words in Level 8. While most of the differences are negligible, the 2.51% increase from the Pre-test to the Post-test in Level 3 is salient enough to suggest that participants may have increased their Lexical Complexity over time. Similarly, concerning the Type-Token Ratio (which indicates the degree to which participants used different words), the participants improved (by .22) from .37 in the Pre-test to .59 in the Post-test.

Table 6: Lexical Complexity from the Pre-Test to the Post-test

Aspect	Measures	Pre \bar{x} (SD)	Post \bar{x} (SD)
Lexical Complexity	JACET 8000 Level 1	79.85 (6.57)	81.45 (8.56)
	JACET 8000 Level 2	5.5 (3.5)	5.84 (3.4)
	JACET 8000 Level 3	.44 (.58)	2.95 (2.38)
	JACET 8000 Level 4	.56 (.81)	.77 (.69)
	JACET 8000 Level 5	.45 (.9)	0 (0)
	JACET 8000 Level 6	.01 (.01)	.003 (.01)
	JACET 8000 Level 7	.13 (.35)	.08 (.15)
	JACET 8000 Level 8	.09 (.18)	.14 (.28)
	Out of the JACET list	12.6 (6.62)	8.18 (4.7)
Type-Token Ratio (TTR)	.37 (.12)	.59 (.23)	

Student Perceptions Regarding Who Bears Responsibility for Their Learning

Table 7 reports student perceptions regarding who bears responsibility for various aspects of their learning from the Pre-test to the Post-test. By and large, the differences were negligible; most of the students in the group did not change how they felt from the Pre-test to the Post-test. Except for Item 2 (to ensure you make progress outside of the class), the students, generally, did not feel individually responsible for their own learning (even after the treatment). Rather, they believed throughout that the teacher was mainly responsible or that the responsibility should be shared equally among the teacher and the student. Interestingly, a closer look at the data revealed that the Malaysian student was the only student who consistently altered her thinking and bore more responsibility for her own learning from the Pre-test to the Post-test. That is, for items 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 in the Pre-test, she answered that it was the teacher's responsibility; however, at the time of the Post-test, she felt that all of these items bore at least a shared responsibility between the teacher and the student.

Table 7: Student Perceptions Regarding Who Bears Responsibility for Their Learning

N = 8	Student's		Teacher's		Both	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Whose responsibility should it be to:						
1. to ensure you make progress during English lessons	0	0	1	1	7	7
2. to ensure you make progress outside class	8	7	0	0	0	1
3. to stimulate your interest in learning English	1	2	3	1	4	5
4. to identify your weaknesses in English	1	1	1	3	6	4
5. to decide the objectives of your English course	3	3	4	3	1	2
6. to decide what you should learn next in your English lessons	0	1	5	4	3	3
7. to choose what activities to use to learn English in your English lessons	2	0	4	7	2	1
8. to decide how long to spend on each activity	1	0	6	7	1	1
9. to choose what materials to use to learn English in in your English lessons	0	0	7	6	1	2
10. to evaluate your learning	1	0	4	4	3	4

Students' Perceptions of Their Own Abilities

Table 8 describes students' perceptions of their own abilities. Accordingly, the data displayed in Table 8 show that students, generally, increased confidence in several areas from the Pre-test to the Post-test. That is, in the Pre-test, there were 23 responses in which participants felt that they would be either poor (21) or very poor (2) at doing the

task in the 10 items presented (items 11-20); however, in the Post-test, there were only 12 in the poor category (and none in the very poor category). Similarly, in the Pre-test, there were 24 responses in which participants felt that they would be either good (20) or very good (4) at doing the tasks in the 10 items presented; however, in the Post-test, there were 44 responses in which participants felt that they would be either good (33) or very good (11).

Table 8: Students' Perceptions of Their Own Abilities

N = 8	Very Poor		Poor		OK		Good		Very Good	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
How good do you think you would be at:										
11. choosing learning activities in class	0	0	3	1	2	1	3	5	0	1
12. choosing learning activities outside class	0	0	1	2	2	3	5	2	0	1
13. choosing learning objectives in class	1	0	3	1	3	2	1	2	0	3
14. choosing learning objectives outside class	1	0	0	2	5	1	1	3	1	2
15. choosing learning materials in class	0	0	3	1	4	3	0	4	1	0
16. choosing learning materials outside class	0	0	1	1	4	4	2	2	1	1
17. deciding what you should learn next in your English lessons	0	0	4	0	2	3	1	5	1	0
18. deciding how long to spend on each activity	0	0	3	2	4	3	1	3	0	0
19. identifying your weaknesses in English	0	0	1	1	3	2	4	3	0	2
20. evaluating your learning	0	0	2	1	4	2	2	4	0	1

Students' Habits That Help Facilitate Their Own Learning

Table 9 reports on the frequency of habits that help facilitate students' learning. In the Pre-test, there were 54 responses in which participants indicated that they sometimes performed tasks that facilitated self-learning in the 22 items presented (items 21-42), while in the Post-test there were 50 responses in which participants indicated that they sometimes performed these tasks. However, when looking at the outer dimensions of the scale, it was clear that students seemed to increase their use of habits that help facilitate their own learning. That is, in the Pre-test, there were 51 responses in which participants indicated that they frequently (28 often and 23 always) performed the tasks in the 22 items presented; however, in the Post-test, there were 75 responses in which participants indi-

cated that they frequently (49 often and 26 always) performed the task.

Similarly, in the Pre-test, there were 71 responses in which participants indicated that they did not frequently (47 rarely and 24 never) perform the task in the 22 items present; however, in the Post-test, there were 51 responses in which participants indicated that they did not frequently (30 rarely and 21 never) perform the task. The improvement among the seven Japanese students was even more pronounced when considering that the habits of the Malaysian student did not change much at all. That is, she responded that she frequently performed the facilitating tasks in both the Pre-test and the Post-test.

Table 9: Frequency of Student Habits that Help Facilitate Their Own Learning

N = 8	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
In the past few months, how often have you:										
21. done assignments that are not compulsory?	0	0	1	1	6	4	1	3	0	0
22. noted down new words and their meanings?	0	0	3	7	5	0	0	1	0	0
23. read newspapers in English?	0	0	0	2	3	2	2	3	3	1
24. visited your teacher about your work?	0	1	0	0	1	0	3	3	4	4
25. read books or magazines in English?	1	0	0	2	3	1	3	3	1	2
26. watched English TV programs?	2	3	3	4	3	1	0	0	0	0
27. listened to English songs?	6	7	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
28. talked to foreigners in English?	2	1	0	1	2	5	4	0	0	1
29. practiced using English with friends	0	1	2	1	2	4	3	2	1	0
30. done grammar exercises?	0	0	0	2	2	4	6	1	0	1
31. done group studies in English lessons?	0	0	1	0	0	5	5	1	2	2
32. attended the self-study center?	0	0	0	0	2	3	2	1	4	4
33. asked the teacher questions when you didn't understand?	0	1	2	0	2	3	3	3	1	1
34. made suggestions to the teacher?	0	0	1	1	0	1	3	3	4	3
35. planned your lesson/study?	0	1	2	3	3	3	2	1	1	0
36. activated your prior knowledge while studying?	0	0	1	2	7	5	0	1	0	0
37. made inferences about your lesson?	0	0	0	5	4	2	4	0	0	1
38. done classifications while studying?	1	0	1	3	2	1	3	3	1	1
39. summarized your studies while studying?	1	0	2	4	1	3	2	1	2	0
40. taken notes while studying?	5	4	3	3	0	1	0	0	0	0
41. used resources while studying?	3	4	3	3	2	1	0	0	0	0
42. worked cooperatively with your friends?	2	3	2	4	3	1	1	0	0	0

6. Discussion: Summary and Implications

In summarizing and interpreting the findings of this current study, RQs 1 and 2 are answered and discussed in succession below.

RQ 1: How did self-regulation techniques affect university students' L2 English oral skills?

The results presented in Section 5 show that students, generally, improved their oral skills in this study. More specifically, the data showed improvements in fluency (temporal and hesitation), syntactic complexity, lexical complexity, and accuracy from the Pre-test to the Post-test. Thus, we can say that self-regulation techniques seem to have had a positive effect on the participants' L2 English oral skills. In post-experiment interviews, several students commented on how self-regulation techniques helped them focus on areas of improvement, as follows:

Student A: This was the first time I carefully looked at my speech like this. By watching the video many times and analyzing the transcriptions, I became more aware of what I was doing wrong and what I needed to do to improve my speaking.

Student B: (Teacher's name) clearly showed us how to transcribe and analyze our speech. This really helped me create future goals for myself. It also helped that we could practice and develop strategies in class to work on the points we needed to improve.

Student C: Learning how speech is analyzed really helped me because I had no idea what specific things to focus on before. It was also helpful to compare my language with others.

Student D: In particular, I found it useful to compare my speech with proficient English speakers according to the criteria that was (sic) presented in class. This clearly showed me where I needed to improve upon (sic) and what I could say in certain situations.

The common theme in all these responses is how self-regulation techniques helped students become more aware of various elements of their speech, which, in turn, guided them to specific areas for improvement. These responses provide support for Schmidt's (1993) Noticing Hypothesis. That is, by explicitly teaching students how oral output can be analyzed, evaluated, and produced, the instructor seems to have helped raise students' awareness of the target language, which is the first step in helping students acquire new features of the target language. Similarly, as Students C and D alluded to above, the fact that learners seemed to consciously perceive the differences between features in their target language and their own can be said to be evidence of "noticing the gap" (Schmidt

& Frota, 1986, p. 311).

RQ 2: Did self-regulation techniques foster learner autonomy among university students in this study?

Unlike for RQ1, the answer for RQ2 is not clear-cut and requires further introspection. On the one hand, the participants' behaviors point towards a positive finding. That is, the fact that students, generally, increased habits that help facilitate their own learning from the Pre-test to the Post-test seems to suggest that self-regulation may have helped them develop some degree of learner autonomy. Similarly, another positive development is that participants, generally, increased confidence in their own abilities from the Pre-test to the Post-test. Thus, it is not a great leap to surmise that students now have the confidence, as well as the ability, to take on more responsibility for their own learning.

On the other hand, however, according to the questionnaire responses presented in Section 5, most students' attitudes regarding who bore responsibility for their learning did not change much from the Pre-test to the Post-test. The one clear exception was the Malaysian student, who bore more responsibility for her own learning over time. When she was asked to explain her thinking process in the post-experiment interviews, she answered as follows:

Student E: I suppose my initial responses had to do with the influence of having been studying in Japan for a few years. This class basically brought me back to my roots and allowed me to get more involved with my own learning. I was quite motivated by the fact that I was assessing my own performance. This is not something I imagine many Japanese students have experience with.

As her response touched upon differences in educational practices between Japan and Malaysia, the interviewer asked her if she could elaborate on her experiences. She responded as follows:

Student E: In terms of learner independence and responsibility, I just feel that things are a bit different in Malaysia. Of course, some of it has to do with one's personality, parents, and how they were raised. For instance, in my case, my parents were quite strict, and I was a high achiever, so I always went above and beyond what I had to do. Also, I do think

Malaysia's education system is more to the 'search' than 'accept' compared to Japan, although not as extreme as the West. This may be because our education system is based on the British one, due to their past systems being adopted in Malaysia, even after their colonization and the independence of Malaysia.

When the Japanese students were asked to explain their thinking processes regarding learner autonomy, it was difficult for most to come up with an answer (even in Japanese). Two students, however, were able to shed a little light, as follows:

Student F: In Japan, we are used to the teacher leading the class and doing everything for us.

Student B: Well, in the classroom, it is the teacher's job to motivate students and be responsible for students' English progress.

In light of these responses, as well as the fact that attitudes toward learner autonomy did not really change for most students in this study, it may be difficult to expect too much too soon. As Roarty (2021) describes, the change to a more student-centered approach may lead to some students feeling overwhelmed as they may be accustomed to a more passive, teacher-led classroom during high school. This was consistent with an earlier study conducted by Cutrone and Beh (2022), who found that some Japanese students had trouble adapting to the demands (and additional learner responsibilities) of remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This notion of the teacher as the dominant figure whose primary job is to be the decision-maker in the classroom is certainly not relegated to Japan. As was described in Section 2, Ustunluoglu's (2009) study in the Turkish university context also found that while students seem to have the capacity for autonomous learning, they tend not to take responsibility for their own learning. Nonetheless, the fact that the students in this current study are now doing more on their own outside of class is a great place to start. Finally, concerning the observations of the Malaysian student, it is difficult to come to any concrete conclusions based on the thoughts of one individual. However, she has touched upon some important issues, and, thus, future explorations into the motivation and learner autonomy of Asian students in different contexts would seem to be justified.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shown that involving students in their own learning can have a positive effect on their oral competence. When students can identify their specific weaknesses, they can then develop clear goals and practical strategies to attempt to overcome them. In terms of increasing learner autonomy, however, a great deal more work needs to be done. In this exploratory case study, we have seen that self-regulation can indeed help students develop confidence (in their abilities to take more responsibility for their own learning) as well as aid them in increasing the habits that they employ to help facilitate their own learning. However, this may not be enough to say that participants have developed their learner autonomy, as a general feeling seems to persist among students that they should simply rely on their teachers for a great deal of their English learning. The lone exception was the Malaysian student, who, by the end of the study, seemed to relish the opportunity to take on more control and responsibility for her own learning.

Due to the limitations of this study, it is not possible to generalize the findings in any way. Undoubtedly, as the sample size of this study was small and the participants of this study were limited to a small group of second and third students in one faculty at one university, larger-scale studies examining a more diverse group of students across different faculties and settings would be welcome in the future. In addition, due to factors beyond the researchers' control, it was not possible to include a control group or a delayed post-test. Unquestionably, in future research, the presence of a control group would help enhance the effect of the treatment under discussion, and the inclusion of a delayed Post-test would help reveal whether the results were sustained over time. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the importance of the results of this exploratory study, as they do provide a platform for future research into this area.

Finally, this study has only scratched the surface of another issue also in need of further investigation. That is, one of the participants in this study was Malaysian, while the other seven were Japanese. In some cases, there were clear differences in attitudes and performances across cultures. However, as the sample was small and only one individual belonged to a different culture, it is not possible to attribute her responses to any particular cultural traits or differences. By the same token, future analyses of the attitudes, motivations, and performances of Asian EFL students in different contexts would seem to be justified. With more and more students crossing Asian borders to attend ter-

tiary institutions, it would be useful to explore and better understand the educational systems and student psyches that exist within the Asian EFL context moving forward.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Learner Autonomy Questionnaire

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfjM1HvahGeciOOgEXr6QOMEWJyO9e0qmcYt2JXHJFFL5yciw/viewform?usp=sf_link

Appendix 2: Sample Transcription (3 minutes)

Note: (.) indicates micropause of less than .5 seconds, while (···) indicate pause longer than .5 seconds

Student A: Um(···)I want to go to Australia.(.)

Student F: Australia(.) Why? (.)

Student A: Because (.)I wanna go to the sea.(.)

Student F: Sea! (.) Yeah(···)

Student A: Where do you want to go?(.)

Student F: I want to go (···)England or Australia.(.) And my(.) mother went to Australia(.) um(···) a many years ago(···) and she said Australia,(···) the weather is very good and (.) like buildings(.)or (.) streets is like (.) European because it was(.) um(···)it um(···)it was(···) British, (···) part of British.(.)

Student A: really?(.)

Student F: um? (.)Part of British?(.) Like(···)how do you say *syokuminchi*?(.)

Student A: Ah.(.)

Student F: empired? (.) By, (.) in, (.)by the UK or England(.) So, its building looks like very European, so, and weather is good in Australia. But, (.) in England, (.) building is beautiful, but the weather is not good, (.)

Student A: Ah.(.)

Student F: So (.) so(.) Australia, um(···) my mother recommended me (.) went to,(.) going to Australia(.)

Student A: Traveling to Japan is (.) good because (.) Japan is safe, (.)

Student F: um(.)

Student A: And we can (.) talk to others (.) with (.) using engli ···(.) Japanese(.)

Student F: yeah(···) If you (.) travel in Japan,(.) which city do you want to go?(.)

Student A: um(···) I'd like to go to Tokyo.(.)

Student F: Tokyo! (.) yeah(.) Have you ever been to Tokyo?(.)

Student A: No, I'm never been to(···)Have you been to Tokyo?(.)

Student F: yes, I went (.) only once(.)

Student F and Student A: um(.)

Student F: I went to Odaiba(···)

Student A: I'm interested in (.) Tokyo's (.) food restaurant(.)

Student F: oh, restaurant!(.)

Student A: did you eat (.) something (.) food in Tokyo?(.)

Student F: Eh(…)I don't remember(.) Maybe, I don't have (.) like special,(.) I don't have (.) special food(.) I don't know (.) what is famous (.) for Tokyo? (.) Tokyo's food, (.) Tokyo?(.) like food,(.) special food?(…)

Student A: um(…) I heard that I,(,)un? (.) Tokyo is famous for(…) Korean food,(,) Shin-Okubo(.)

Student F: Ah(.) I(.) have ever,(,) I have hear, heard.

Student A: So, I want to eat Korean Food(.)

Student F: Korean food!(.)

(Both laugh)

Student A: But I go, (.) I can go to Korea someday(.)

(Both laugh)

Student F: yeah(.) Korea is (.) closer (.) than Tokyo from Nagasaki?()

Student A: Yes!()

Student F: After pandemic, (.) we can go (.) easily(.)

(Both Laugh)

(Silent)

Student F: Do you want to (.) study abroad (.) in Australia?()

Student A: Oh, yes()

Student F: Which city or which university (.) do you want to stay?()

Student A: I haven't decided yet,(,) but I(…) I want to go to Sydney(.)