

Influence on Learners' Beliefs by Introducing Learner-Agency into Japanese Composition Class: Qualitative Research of the Forming and Changing Process of Learning Beliefs

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After the 1990s, which was the period of the second paradigm shift in Japanese language education, learner's autonomy and peer-based learning were more popularized. Learners were required to elicit proactive behaviors in their learning processes than ever before. Subsequently, researches in learner's beliefs became important, as they reveal the learner's ability to adapt themselves in new learning environments. This study took the contextual approach in the field of language learning beliefs. The purposes of this paper were; 1) to identify the influences on learning beliefs of the learners who took the Japanese composition course introducing the ideas of learner-agency, and 2) to suggest a hypothetical model of forming and changing process of learning beliefs by using the analyzing method of the Modified Grounded Theory Approach (M-GTA). The model was expected to be adopted by other teachers who apply the idea of learner-agency in their composition classes.

Learner-agency is defined as learner-initiated changes through the experiences of their own proactive learning behaviors. This paper discusses the theoretical framework of this learner-agency, and suggests that it is related to constructivism in the field of education. The learner-agency-based composition class is defined by the following components; i) management of learning process by learners, ii) learner's self-discovery of issues, iii) collaborations with others, iv) creativity by interacting with others, v) self and peer evaluation.

The composition course in this study was conducted by the author from October 2009 to February 2010 at a university in Thailand. The meetings were held once a week, totally 15 times during the period. Each session lasted 150 minutes. All 17 students in the course were majors in Japanese language, and at the N2 level of the Japanese language proficiency test.

The data used for analyzing in this study were; a) scripts of the semi-structured interviews with 12 students who participated in the course, b) the narratives of their reflection about self and peer evaluation.

The results suggest that the learners attended the class with the beliefs of objectivism and teacher-centered way of learning at the beginning of the course and their discovery in the class was unexpected. They, however, experienced the heuristic learning and enhanced a sense of audience through the consulting sessions with peers. When the learners faced evaluation, or when they could not rely on their teacher's help during the peer consulting session, they sensed the difficulty of the evaluation and their original beliefs emerged. Nonetheless they evaluated their peers' compositions, taken their peers' feelings into consideration. The learners expressed delight and gratitude when they received the evaluations from peers. In the whole process of writing, although they found repeated revisions of their writings tiresome, they appreciated the freedom of choosing their preferred topics.

All these experiences prompted them to reflect on themselves, and it fostered the new beliefs that they could learn from peers, that evaluations of compositions differed from person to person, that contents were more important than grammars, and that they should be autonomous and goal-oriented.

This paper suggests the flow chart of the theoretical model of the process mentioned above. The chart shows that the experience of composition classes with the idea of learner-agency resulted in the learners' self-reflection and positive changes. It ensures that the process realizes the definition of learner-agency, that is, learners self-initiated changes through the experiences of their own proactive learning behaviors. A key factor of the forming and changing process of learning beliefs is the change triggered by their self-reflection.