

영어어문교육 9권 1호 2003년 여름

Promoting Learner Autonomy through the CALL Projects*

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Chong, Larry-Dwan (2003). Promoting learner autonomy through the CALL projects. *English Language & Literature Teaching*, 9(1), 1-21.

Learner-centered approach has been a recent research focus in the second language acquisition, but few studies have dealt with how to develop learner autonomy, particularly in a computer-assisted language learning environment. The paper first illustrates the importance of promoting learner autonomy in the EFL context and elaborates the three main factors contributing to its development. Then it focuses on how the CALL research project promotes autonomous learning through a small-scale study in Gyeongju University. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been employed to examine whether in the CALL project learners exercise control over their own learning and evaluate the outcome. The results indicate that due to a flexible syllabus, highly motivating research topics and the network-assisted environment, learners do take responsibility for most aspects of learning and thus the CALL project proves to be a promising approach for autonomous learning.

**[learner autonomy/CALL/inter-group cooperation/project-based learning/language acquisition enhancement/social process,
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I. INTRODUCTION

Along with the development of global communication and the coming of the

* I would like to express my great thanks to anonymous reviewers of the ETAK for valuable comments and critiques.

information age, the English language has started to play an important role in computer mediated communication. More and more English learners are aware of the significance of learning the international language and are trying to master it as a tool for their future development.

However, teacher-centered approaches have been prevalent for a long time in Korea's EFL context. Teachers have been regarded as knowledge-givers and error checkers, while students have tended to limit their work to what was taught in class. Classes have usually been driven by "teacher-centered talk" and depended heavily on text materials. Instruction in the classrooms has been based on the misconception that there is a fixed world of knowledge that students must know. There has been little room for student-initiated questions, independent thought or interaction between students. As a result, many learners have been accustomed to depending on teachers' lectures. Without teachers' timely and adequate help, students have felt disoriented, lost confidence and failed to pinpoint their goals in learning.

Teachers attributed students' passiveness to EFL teachers' insincerity to adopt effective teaching approach. It is true that teachers' reform efforts do contribute to students' successful learning. Recent years have witnessed many teachers' reform measures in new EFL approaches. However, their efforts seem not to have achieved the desirable results. Lack of motivation and weak communication competence on the part of students are still evident in EFL teaching. In this case, I cannot help doubting our traditional perception on language learning, which placed teachers at the center of the learning process.

Moreover, global changes in the availability of information indicate that there is no longer a fixed body of knowledge that can be transmitted to learners. It is no longer possible to teach all students all they need to know. Learning is a lifelong endeavor. Only when learners are able to avail themselves of each learning opportunity rather than simply react to various stimuli from the teacher can they be skilful manipulators of language in their language learning process. The situation calls for the urgent need of cultivating learners' initiatives and learner autonomy.

Furthermore, recent research in psychology, sociology and linguistics, has shed light on language teaching, learning and the role of learners in the language learning process. The process syllabus (Breen, 1987), the learner-centered approach (Nunan, 1988) and cognitive psychology (Piaget, 1977) all emphasize a learner's central place in the classroom. According to Piaget's interactionism, learning takes place when learners actively construct their own understanding and knowledge through their

interaction with the world around them. Influenced by the concept, teachers have begun to attach more importance to learners' cognition, personality and motivation. It is learners who are supposed to play an active role in the learning process and take more responsibility for their own learning. Learner autonomy used to be considered as a concept only suitable in western countries, but is now regarded as an unquestionable goal and a prerequisite for lifelong learning also all over the world.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Related literature indicates that the concept of learner autonomy is closely linked with learners' actions and their perceptions toward learning. On one hand, it relates to learners' actions, ability or capacity to take charge of learning individually and cooperatively (Little, 1991; Pemberton, 1996). As Little defined it, "autonomy is a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action". On the other hand, learner autonomy refers to learners' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes toward learning. Just as Dickinson (1993) claim, being responsible for one's learning is an attitude of mind.

According to Lee (1998), "learner autonomy involves taking responsibility for the objectives of learning, self-monitoring, self-assessing and taking an active role in learning". She also puts forward three factors crucial to the development of learner autonomy: learner choice, supporting environment and self-assessment. Learner choice implies that learners can work at their own pace, decide on questions of what, when, how and how often. Giving students choices in learning is congruent with the theory of constructivism which emphasizes that a learner builds up new knowledge based on the old and is an active agent in his own learning process (Thanasoulas, 2000). Supporting environment is also in accordance with the principle of social constructivism, i.e., "language learning is essentially a social process that occurs within a social context through interactions with others" (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Wertsch, 1988). One important criterion for establishing a supportive environment is flexibility in learning, which means that learners can change options (objectives, contents, process of learning) based on their needs and interests. Besides, the teacher's and peer's support are essential in the successful establishment of supporting environment. Self-assessment has been

defined as checking one's own performance on a learning task after it has been completed and is identified to be an important characteristic of autonomous learning.

With the advent of the Internet, networks in classrooms or labs have played an increasingly important role in language education and provide new opportunity for autonomous learning. CALL project is a case in point. In a CALL project students have lots of chances to control the content, the structure of the learning, including the time, the pace, the path to the goal and the measurement of success. The development of learner autonomy does not mean that learners work in isolation or have complete autonomy in the classroom. On the contrary, as learners in Korea's context are too passive to control everything and they require "varying degrees of control" (Egbert & Hanson-Smith, 1999: 392), consultation with and feedback from the instructor are necessary. Thus, learner autonomy also involves the development of interdependence, through which a group of learners and teacher will collaboratively take responsibility for and control of their learning environment (Blin, 1999). To put it more specifically, the development of autonomous learning is a process of moving from dependency through counter-dependence to independence and interdependence (Boud, 1988). Besides, CALL project involves self-assessment, peer-editing and group evaluation, which raise learners' self-consciousness in learning and enable them to continue the self-monitoring after the course is finished. Self assessment has been identified as an important characteristic of a learner-centered classroom (Griffie, 1998). In summary, the successful experience of international colleagues proves that CALL projects facilitate learner autonomy. Recently some Korean teachers have begun incorporating project-based Internet learning into language teaching with satisfactory results, but few studies have been made on the development of learner autonomy in Korea's network-assisted learning environment. In order to explore the possibility and applicability of CALL projects on the promotion of Korean students' autonomous learning ability, a small-scale study was conducted on the basis of a major-related CALL research project in the spring semester of 2002. The study tries to answer the following three research questions:

- Q1: How do students set their goals and decide the pace of learning?
- Q2: In what way do teachers and peers help their students?
- Q3: How do students take responsibility for self-evaluation and mutual assessment?

III. A PILOT STUDY: CALL PROJECT

1. Subjects

Thirty-two sophomore students majoring in English as a foreign language at the School of Foreign Languages of Gyeongju University took part in the project from March 1 to June 20, 2002. All of them had an average of eight years of English learning. None of them had ever participated in any CALL projects before, so they had little experience in collaborative writing and online language learning.

2. Procedures

The CALL Research project is a major-related collaborative activity aiming at integrating students' language, research and technology skills. It lasted from March 1st to the end of the semester with the teacher of their Basic Reading Course. What students mainly did in the project was to choose research topics of their interest, search the world wide web for reading materials, design questionnaires in English and put their research reports on the Web. Their collaborative work was mostly done in the multimedia language lab of the School of Foreign Languages of Gyeongju University. The lab contains 40 Pentium IV PCs, connected to the campus intranet and the Internet, which makes it easier for students to search for information on the Internet. Each student applies for a personal email account either from the campus computing center or gets one from free email services.

The project consisted of five stages with one main task in each stage. In the first stage of the project (from March 1st to March 31st, 2002), the students were divided into seven groups of four or five according to their preferences. Each group decided on topics of interest or specific to their major and narrowed them down through group discussion and related literature surfing. Afterwards, an action list was drawn within each group and tasks were distributed to each group member under the group leader's supervision.

In the second stage of the project (from April 1st to April 30th, 2002), each group laid down the framework of the research report and the research questions, on the basis of which surveys were designed with group members' joint efforts. Then, they began to make social investigations, distributing the questionnaires to the consumers involved and interviewing related persons.

In the third and fourth stage of the project (from May 1st to June 15th, 2002), each group finished the data collection, analyzed data gathered and sorted out supporting details with visual graphics of relevant data. In the last stage, each group started to finish their research report and conducted self-evaluation and group assessment respectively. After the revision and modification, they all got ready to present their final products in a PowerPoint presentation form. All the writing activities such as questionnaire making, data finalizing and research report writing as well as communication among students or interaction among students themselves like group evaluation were conducted in the computer lab. They were also required to keep a weekly progress report and share it with other groups for suggestions.

3. Data collection

To find out whether the three factors crucial to learner autonomy take place in the CALL research process and what effects the major-related project has on learner autonomy, quantitative data were collected from the results of a survey by the end of the project. A statistical analysis was conducted to measure the degree to which CALL project promotes learner autonomy. Besides, a record of students' writing quantity was also collected.

Moreover, to gain further insights into the topic under investigation, qualitative data such as our observation notes, students' responses to an end-of-project interview, students' weekly reports and reflections on the project were also collected.

One end-project survey was distributed to the subjects by the end of the project. It consisted of two parts. The first part concerns personal data including name, sex and class. The other constitutes 20 items to be answered on a five-point Likert scale, with 5 being the highest score. This part falls into 3 sections. Section I (Q2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 19, 20) contains statements concerning learner choice in the entire project. Section II (Q3, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18) aims at examining whether learners get enough support and guidance in the whole process. Section III (Q1, 15, 16, 17) focuses on learners' beliefs and actions toward self-assessment and group evaluation.

Students met their professor of the Basic Reading Course, who was their guide in the project twice a week. At the beginning of each meeting, the representatives

of the seven groups took turns to give a short report of what they had done and what difficulties they had encountered. The other groups would raise questions or offer suggestions. Each week's progress report and the discussion helped me to take a closer look at students' autonomous learning process.

An interview was also conducted on the subjects at the end of the project. Six open-ended questions were generally related to students' perceptions on the relationship between learner autonomy and the technology-based project. (See the interview questions in Appendix II)

4. Data Analysis and General Findings

For the end-project survey, 30 students' responses to the second part were calculated to get an overall mean. The mean score of each question for each student was calculated and compared with a hypothesized mean of 3. The Standard deviations (SD) were also calculated to see the variability of the mean distributions. For the sake of convenience, I divided the questions into 3 sections mentioned above.

Generally speaking, the study confirmed the hypothesis put forward in the Introduction. The overall mean score for all students on all questions in Part Two of the CALL Survey was 3.89, significantly higher than a hypothetical neutral score of 3. All the mean scores of the 20 questions except Q13 were higher than neutral. The whole results indicate that there is a positive change of learner autonomy in the research project.

Moreover, the mean score for each subcategory of the 3 factors is also calculated to understand how the CALL research project enables students to take responsibility for their learning, how they work in a supportive atmosphere and in what way self-assessment and peer editing were carried out. As the following table shows, the highest two mean scores are given to students' perception on autonomous learning and their view on the change of teacher's role. Besides, the percentage of choosing "strongly agree" and "agree" to each item is also taken into account.

In addition, when looking at students' responses to Q19 (the fourth highest mean score), Q20 (the fifth highest mean score) and the interview (Appendix II), we get the impression that the CALL research project enhances students' language proficiency and their overall abilities.

TABLE 1
General Findings

| Factors | Sub-categories | Mean | % |
|------------------------|---|------|------|
| | General perceptions on autonomous learning | 4.43 | 100 |
| Learner choice | Decide to modify the way of doing the project | 4.1 | 93.3 |
| | Decide to choose the materials | 4.03 | 86.7 |
| | Decide on the topics | 4.03 | 86.7 |
| | Decide on the way of doing the project | 3.93 | 80 |
| | Views on the change of the teacher's role | 4.2 | 93.3 |
| Supporting environment | Peers' discussion | 4.03 | 86.7 |
| | Teacher support | 3.97 | 86.7 |
| | Peer support | 3.97 | 83.3 |
| | General perception on the supporting atmosphere | 3.93 | 83.3 |
| Self-assessment | Group assessment | 4.1 | 93.3 |
| | Opinions on the evaluation sheets | 3.87 | 73.3 |

IV. DISCUSSION

On the basis of both the quantitative and qualitative analyses, it is claimed that the CALL research project provides a new opportunity for the development of autonomous learning. The effects of the project on the 3 elements of learner autonomy are discussed as follows:

1. Learners enjoy a large range of choices and take responsibility for most aspects of learning.

The highest mean score to Q10 (4.43) demonstrates that students realized the importance of taking responsibility for their own learning and looked upon it as a good habit. Moreover, the interviews and the students' individual reports show that learners did not wish to be fed with the textbooks, which were considered to be the

authoritative source. Instead, they were more interested in the CALL project, because the research topics were closely related to their major and the course they learned. Just as one student commented, "The project enlarged our knowledge related to our major and pushes us to read more, find more..." (Lee, group 1). To justify that, an example of group 5 who explored the success of Mc Donald in the Korean market can be taken: they searched the Internet for information, designed an English questionnaire and e-mailed or interviewed English speakers to discuss the topic. Thus, they developed an internalized thirst for knowledge as well as experience and in the meanwhile improved their language proficiency.

All of the questions concerning learner choice (Table 2) in the questionnaire were higher than average. Answers to the Q6 showed that the majority (86.7%) of the students were able to decide how to use the computer lab, the libraries and the reference room to find the materials they wanted rather than being confined to textbooks only. They could access the extensive information essential to their research either through the search engines on the Internet or via the library's online catalog in the computer lab. Undoubtedly, the Internet provided a source of authentic, timely, relevant text in the target language.

TABLE 2
Learner choice

| Questions | Mean | SD | F | (%) |
|---|------|------|----|------|
| Q2. After the task division, each member can decide what to do about his/her own task. | 3.9 | 0.48 | 25 | 83 |
| Q4. I help my group to decide on topics for research and discussion. | 4.03 | 0.55 | 26 | 86.7 |
| Q5. I can decide how to complete my share of the task in my own ways. | 3.93 | 0.58 | 24 | 80 |
| Q6. Our group decides how to use the libraries, reference rooms and computer labs to search materials and process our data. | 4.03 | 0.56 | 26 | 86.7 |
| Q7. We can modify our ways of doing the group project when necessary. | 4.1 | 0.48 | 28 | 93.3 |
| Q10. I think being responsible for one' s own learning is a good habit that we should get into | 4.43 | 0.50 | 30 | 100 |

In the meanwhile, students learned to exercise their critical judgments for the source, validity, reliability and accuracy of the information so as to extract the precise data they needed. Just as one student (Park, group 7) remarked: "the Internet is the largest data storehouse in the world, containing so much information available to us. In order not to be drowned in the information sea, I had to improve my skimming and scanning skills to find the most relevant supporting materials". The success of the students' final projects, inevitably, results from their critical thinking and creation. From the statistical result of Q5, I learn that 80% of the subjects were able to decide how to complete their share of the task in their own ways. And their individual reports and my observation notes also showed that learners could choose their preferred learning methods and styles in agreement with their interests and cognitive abilities. For instance, in group 7, tasks were divided based on each group member's strengths and weaknesses. "The one who was good at communication would be responsible for contacting the company and interviewing related people; the one who was skillful in writing was in charge of revising group articles..."(Ruh, group 7). Obviously, in this way everyone would take an active part in fulfilling their learning tasks at hand and were able to bring about their initiatives into full play.

Furthermore, from their individual reports, learners were able to choose their own time and place of learning in the whole project. The teacher did help to check the action plans and ensure that tasks in each stage got finished before the deadline, but it was each group which was responsible for planning the distribution in time, deciding when a particular aspect of the work should be started, continued or interrupted. Some groups reported that access to the Internet enabled them to hold group discussions, ask for other groups' advice or make literature research anytime they wanted. It was evident that the learning time and space extended far beyond the traditional class hours and rooms. Of course, different learners require varying degrees of self control, but just as Mc Garry (1995) concluded, if learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own work by being given some control over what, how and when they learn, they are more likely to set realistic goals, develop strategies for coping with new and unforeseen situations and gradually learn how to be more efficient learners.

2. Learners work in a supportive atmosphere

Learner autonomy does not mean learner isolation or "teacherless learning". It

has been widely recognized that autonomy is a dynamic social process, where teachers have a crucial role to play in launching learners into self-access and in lending them a regular helping hand to stay afloat (Thanasoulas, 2000). This is especially true in Korea's EFL context, as learners are too dependent on teachers and they feel too hard to take control of every aspect of learning.

The survey shows that more than 83% subjects considered the project-based learning atmosphere cooperative and supportive (Q9, Mean=3.93) and 87% of them agreed or strongly agreed that they could get immediate feedback from the teacher on their thoughts, ideas and performance (Q18, Mean=3.97). Q11 (Mean=4.2), investigating students' opinions on the teacher's facilitating role, achieved the second highest mean score, which demonstrates that the learners obtained the teacher's systematic support. In the whole project, I witnessed a large amount of email-based or face-to-face interaction and negotiation between the teacher and the students. In group 4, for example, most of the group members did not have a solid language foundation and they were slow in learning.

TABLE 3
Supporting atmosphere

| Questions | Mean | SD | F | (%) |
|--|----------------|------|----|------|
| Q3. I have chances to discuss problems and difficulties with group members at every stage. | 3.97 | 0.55 | 25 | 83.3 |
| Q8. I enjoy the flexibility of this project-based groups learning activity. | 3.77 | 0.50 | 22 | 73.3 |
| Q9. The project-based learning atmosphere is cooperative and supportive. | 3.93 | 0.52 | 25 | 83.3 |
| Q11. The teacher or the tutor acts as a helper rather than a dominator in the whole project | 4.2 | 0.55 | 28 | 93.3 |
| Q12. We cannot complete the task unless everyone contributes his or her best. | 3.73 | 0.78 | 20 | 66.7 |
| Q13. My opinions and suggestions are often neglected in the groups work. | 2.06 (2.94) | 0.58 | 24 | 80.0 |
| Q14. I feel happy to play a more active role in the group discussion. | 4.03 | 0.56 | 26 | 86.7 |
| Q18. I can get immediate feedback from the teacher or the tutor to my thoughts, ideas and performance. | 3.97 | 0.49 | 26 | 86.7 |

() when reverse coded

Inevitably, they encountered many more problems when conducting the research on the success of Bill Gates. They were confused about the logical arrangement and the first drafts of their research report turned out to be highly disorganized. Fortunately, the teacher offered them very individualized suggestions and patient assistance, such as slight lowering the requirements, asking them to review the research process and advising them to conduct peer-editing and learn from others first. Instead of being a traditional purveyor of information, the teacher was the counselor and manager of learning resources. The guidance provided an avenue for learners to solve the problems on their own. Most importantly, I helped to build up their confidence in independent learning. As a result, group 4 successfully reorganized their independent research and analyzed the related factors. It is obvious that their findings are more specific and profound than during the first attempt.

All of the students' individual reports shared one common feature: they spoke highly of peer support. Just as Kim from group 6 reviewed, "Everyone contributes one's own ideas and efforts to the research project. If he or she has any problems, we will lend a hand to his or her. And we also often get some advice from other groups..." Peers' sparking ideas did contribute to their final achievements. And the Internet made it easier for them to contact their teacher, peers, or friends outside the campus for advice conveniently and efficiently via email, MSN Messenger or ICQ.

Students' weekly reports proved to be another efficient way to for students to get mutual help. In addition to sharing their successful tips and effective strategies with other groups, they pointed out the difficulties they ran into. Then other groups and the teacher would give suggestions and advice for improvement. When everybody adds fuel the flames rise high, all the obstacles, after a heated discussion, soon gave way to confidence and solutions. By learning from each other and sharing what they knew, students worked toward their common goals.

3. Learners are involved in assessment process in the CALL Project

Self-assessment is an indispensable component of autonomous learning (Dickinson, 1993). Its main objectives are to enable students to learn from practical experience, to encourage them to become more responsible for their own learning and to enable them to continue to have the ability throughout their adult lives. It plays a crucial role in networks in this CALL project. With the teacher's instruction,

which is quite necessary at an early stage of self-directed learning, students in our project did various self evaluation and group assessment, such as an individual report on one's collaborative project experience, group comments on the webpage presentation and self-evaluation on the research report. The Intranet in the computer lab eased the process of self and group editing and commenting. Students' work could be freely sent to more than one recipient for comments. As a result, this convenient way of sharing files helped students get more feedback and ideas, just as Choi from group 7 reported: "when revising pair group's project, we made a comparison with our own, which allowed us to know our merits and demerits clearly and absorb others' advantages to improve our own project". Since their overall performance throughout the project rather than a single exam could be taken into account for the final assessment, the self-assessment at each stage did help them to modify their learning strategies and make up for their weaknesses.

TABLE 4
Self-assessment

| Questions | Mean | SD | F | (%) |
|---|------|------|----|------|
| Q1. We find the project evaluation sheet enables us to assess our work from many perspectives. | 3.8 | 0.71 | 21 | 70 |
| Q15. Our group check our own before having it evaluated by the teacher. | 4.1 | 0.48 | 28 | 93.3 |
| Q16. We find peer editing valuable in our report writing process. | 3.53 | 0.51 | 16 | 53.3 |
| Q17. We find the individual and group evaluation sheets helpful for our own assessment and peer assessment. | 3.87 | 0.62 | 22 | 73.3 |

Students' responses to Q15 (the third highest mean score) confirmed that more than 93% students checked their work before having it evaluated by the teacher. The teacher, according to my observation, monitored the peer editing, making sure that each individual and group acted appropriately.

4. Learners are exposed to and encouraged to produce varied and creative language

Traditionally, students' language exposure was mainly from textbooks, which

was not sufficient for language acquisition. According to Spolsky (1989), "the outcome of language learning depends in large measure on the amount and kind of exposure to the target language." Getting plenty of exposure to language, especially first-hand language materials, is the prerequisite for successful language learning. The CALL project is reported to enlarge students' language exposure and improve their writing fluency through the intensive practice of meaningful writing. This is supported by the high mean for the related questions (Q19, Mean=4.07; Q20, Mean=4.04) designed to examine the subjects' language improvement. The Internet, books and email correspondents offer students encyclopedic sources for information. In order to find all the relevant materials, they went to the library, e-mailed their friends for information and used the Internet. In consequence, they found themselves exposed to a variety of language input. In this case, they exercised their critical thinking to extract the useful information. Just as Warschsuer (1997) remarked "those who are able to access, adapt, and make use of information and knowledge, using new information technologies are those who will succeed in all walks of life". Instead of being the passive textbook readers, they become the skilful language manipulators .

Moreover, they were provided with sufficient opportunities to engage in meaningful use of language and to produce comprehensible language output, which is also a means to language development. As Ruh(Group A) reported,

"I find my language ability improved greatly due to this project. We need to use English from beginning to end. Discussing, outlining, writing, proofreading, etc were all in English. We found mistakes now and then, and we corrected them as soon as possible. Because of these practices, we learned new words, new grammar, new idiom etc. We were just like sponge, absorbed all the wonderful knowledge."

In addition to the email correspondence and weekly report, they got themselves familiarized with different discourse patterns in the whole research report. For instance, they had to know how to express their thanks in the acknowledgement, how to generalize their process in the abstract, how to describe their research in the methodology part and how to analyze their findings in the discussion part. When doing a survey outside the campus and holding discussion with their peers and the teacher, they had the chance to use English to communicate, formulate ideas

and solve problems. In short, they were engaged in the use of English in the ways that native speakers normally are. The language production process, on the other hand, stimulated them to read more and find more. At last, when their writing products were put on the Web, technology helped refine and popularize their work so that they would get more feedback from authentic audiences.

5. Learners' real-world abilities are enhanced through the project

All the subjects concluded that the project built up a bridge between books and real life. In the university, they did not have to worry about anything and took the teacher's and parents' help for granted. But once they stepped into the society, they encountered many more challenges than they had expected. Facing cold faces when distributing the questionnaire, getting refusal from the top managers or the executives of the companies, and even laughed at by passers-by in the street are just trivial difficulties in the whole process. Some students thought of giving up, but the consistent encouragement from the teacher and the classmates inspired them to continue. They learned to be patient, persistent and diligent; how to speak appropriately in different situations, how to contact people of all types and how to gain other people's understanding and support. In fact, this research project enabled them to gain a deep insight into the society before graduation from school. Many students have realized that book knowledge is far from enough for survival and they have to get well prepared both academically and psychologically. Others have come to see from the research that English and computer skills are just tools.

Most importantly, they learned one truth from their own experiences, i.e., "Everything is possible if one tries." Just as Warschauer (1997) commented, students are engaged in meaningful tasks and solve meaningful problems in the CALL project. They not only bridged the gap between hands-on work and abstract learning, but also succeeded in tackling tasks which they would face in the near future, just as one group writes in their project research report,

"During the research, we met a lot of difficulties. We have been refused and laughed at for many times. But we believe what we have done in this semester will benefit our major study and finally will be helpful to our future career." (Group 5)

V. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This pilot study witnessed how students explored knowledge in a way quite different from the traditional learning. Their initiatives and potential were to some degree brought into play in the self-directed learning process. However, since it was the first time for them to participate in the project, the weaknesses they displayed were unavoidable. Therefore, the students and the facilitators need to make joint efforts to compensate for those deficiencies so as to pave the way for more effective autonomous learning.

First, pre-project training needs to be carried out. During the whole project, several subjects showed their passiveness and unwillingness in the course of doing their tasks, even if the tasks were of their preferences. In that case, their group leader had to shoulder more burdens. When analyzing the reasons, it turned out that those students did not have a clear idea of the purposes of the project. They seemed to be accustomed to the regular courses and did not wish to be disturbed. Some students were frightened and frustrated by the technical requirements because of lack of former experience. Therefore, it is proposed that a basic training aiming at building up students' confidence and equipping them with the skills of using related software be essential for participants to get actively involved in whole process.

Second, inter-group cooperation needs to be strengthened. Group works ensured that each member cooperated with others and worked together toward their common goals. However, this inevitably resulted in the fierce competition between groups. It is true that appropriate competition promotes healthy growth, but if it goes to the extreme, it will hinder the process. For example, some students did not like the evaluation sheet because each one tended to give his group the highest score. That is why only 70% students (Q17, Mean=3.87; Q1, Mean=3.8) spoke highly of the group evaluation sheet. Thus, it is recommended that the evaluation sheet design work be assigned to students themselves.

Learner autonomy is considered as a highly desirable outcome of learning. However, autonomy is a process, not a product. One does not become autonomous; one only works towards autonomy. This is especially the case in Korea's EFL context, where the majority of students are still being taught in ways which promote dependence, leaving them worse-equipped to apply their school-learned knowledge and skills to the world beyond the classroom. A training process needs to be carried out between the traditional spoon-feeding method and learner control.

The research project just serves as a training process, taking students from their states of varying degrees of dependence to the state of the greatest degree of independence. It starts from larger groups towards smaller groups, pairs and finally individuals and from giving the students fewer choices concerning their learning and work towards many choices, and finally freer choices such as open-ended tasks, thus allowing students to make their choices entirely on their own. Besides, it provides the perfect opportunity for learners to go out and use their language. In becoming actively involved in the process of learning, students may set their own objectives. By working independently of the teacher both inside and outside the classroom and selecting and using the strategies best suited to the occasion, they may realize a sense of autonomy. This learner training process can broaden the horizons of the learners and may empower them to become autonomous in their present or future language learning.

The whole project not only involves the students' active participation and cooperation, but also sets a high demand on teachers. Many people assume that the teachers in the autonomous settings will transfer all responsibilities to learners, thus becoming a redundant part of the learning process. As a matter of fact, the success of language acquisition enhancement depends to a great extent on an active role for teachers, whether in a classroom or a self-access center. In other words, the teacher still plays an indispensable role in working towards autonomous learning, but instead of being the traditional knowledge giver, he or she will be a facilitator, a counselor and a supporter. His or her guidance and encouragement will prove beneficial towards learners' autonomous learning, as all learners need to be prepared and supported on the path to greater autonomy.

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Appendix I Survey

Part One: Background Information

Your name: in Korean _____, in English _____

Age:

Sex:

Course:

You have been studying English for _____ years.

Check if you have a computer at home____ or in the dormitory? ____

Please rate your knowledge of computers before participating in the research project.

Poor__ fair__ good__ very good__ excellent__

Please rate your knowledge of computers now.

Poor__ fair__ good__ very good__ excellent__

How often did you write emails before participating in the project?

Daily__ Weekly__ A few times in a month__ rarely__ never__

How often do you write E-mail now?

Daily__ Weekly__ A few times in a month__ rarely__ never__

How often did you visit English websites before participating in the project?

Daily__ Weekly__ a few times in a month__ rarely__ never__

How often did you visit English websites now?

Daily__ Weekly__ a few times in a month__ rarely__ never__

Part Two: Questions on Autonomous Learning

The following statements describe some feelings and actions you might have experienced during the project. Please select one number (1–5) that best fit your case and put it on the left margin of each statement:

1=strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=neutral 4=agree 5=strongly agree

- Q1. We find the project evaluation sheet enables us to assess our work from many perspectives. (3.8)
- Q2. After the task division, each member can decide what to do about his/her own task. (3.9)
- Q3. I have chances to discuss problems and difficulties with group members at every stage. (3.97)
- Q4. I help my group to decide on topics for research and discussion. (4.03)
- Q5. I can decide how to complete my share of the task in my own ways. (3.93)
- Q6. Our group decides how to use the libraries, reference rooms and computer labs to search materials and process our data. (4.03)
- Q7. We can modify our ways of doing the group project when necessary. (4.1)
- Q8. I enjoy the flexibility of this project-based groups learning activity. (3.77)
- Q9. The project-based learning atmosphere is cooperative and supportive. (3.93)
- Q10. I think being responsible for one's own learning is a good habit that we should get into. (4.43)
- Q11. The teacher or the tutor acts as a helper rather than a dominator in the whole project. (4.2)
- Q12. We cannot complete the task unless everyone contributes his or her best. (3.73)
- Q13. My opinions and suggestions are often neglected in the groups work. (2.06)
- Q14. I feel happy to play a more active role in the group discussion. (4.03)
- Q15. Our group check our own before having it evaluated by the teacher. (4.1)
- Q16. We find peer editing valuable in our report writing process. (3.53)
- Q17. We find the individual and group evaluation sheets helpful for our own assessment and peer assessment. (3.87)
- Q18. I can get immediate feedback from the teacher or the tutor to my thoughts, ideas and performance. (3.97)
- Q19. I have many opportunities to practice writing in English in the whole project. (4.07)
- Q20. I think the research project is helpful for my language learning. (4.04)

Appendix II Interview questions

1. What do you think of the role that the computer-assisted project plays in your language learning?
2. Do you think that the project offers you a variety of activities that encourage you to use English meaningfully?
3. What do you think of the self-directed learning process in doing the project, helpful or difficult?
4. Could you monitor your learning process in doing the project?
5. What do you think of the role that the teacher or plays in the whole project?
6. What do you think of the role that the computer or the WWW plays in the whole project?

예시언어(Examples in): English

적용가능 언어(Applicable Languages): English

적용가능 수준(Applicable Levels): College/Higher

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Received in May, 2003

Reviewed in June, 2003

Revised version received in July, 2003