Analysis of the Impact of IT and Media on Business English Major Students' Autonomous Learning

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Abstract

This study aimed to 1) analyze the impact of IT and media on autonomous learning among Business English majors at Southeast Bangkok College, and 2) improve the teaching strategy to suit the 21_{st} Century framework for learning. The experimental group for the study consisted of 16 second year Business English majors aged between 20 and 23, studying *Reading Skills* .The experiment took place in the second semester of 2015 academic year. It lasted for a period of four weeks. Research methodology was descriptive analysis based on the participants' learning outcomes assessed by their peers. The findings revealed that autonomous learning encouraged students to actively participate in independent group-work activities. They were motivated to search for materials through the Internet and media to undertake their projects and make presentation in class. In addition, the students' outputs and diaries, including their oral feedbacks showed that they enjoyed autonomous learning which resulted in their development of interpersonal communication and presentation skills responding to the framework for 21_{st} Century learning.

Keywords: impact of IT and media, autonomous learning, communication skills, teaching strategy

1. Introduction

1.1. Benefits of IT for autonomous learning

With reference to Professor Richards (2016), guru in language teaching and learning, "Learner autonomy refers to the principle that learner should take an increasing amount of responsibility for what they learn and how they learn it. Autonomous learning is said to make learning more personal and focused and, consequently, to achieve better learning outcomes since learning is based on learners' needs and preferences." Prof. Richards (2015) also noted that "Today the internet, technology and the media, and the use of English in face-to-face as well as virtual social networks provide greater opportunities for meaningful and authentic language use than other resources available to support out of-class learning" .It is the facts that our students come to school to study English therefore, we teachers should seek to understand, and analyze their needs through introducing practical useful learning strategies for their independent learning. The problems facing English teachers in Thailand today is that many of them still prefer to use classroom-based language learning with limitations on language practice useful for real life communication. Fortunately, advancement in communication technologies have offered teachers intelligent tools to enable students to adapt them to suit their learning need. In the west, there are many popular online courses and distance learning. Therefore, it is practical for English teachers to provide students with new opportunities for self-directed learning and get them exposed to social media as a channel for self-expression and learning English. Martin (2013) points out that many websites give access not only to students, but also teachers and families other environments of virtual education.

1.2. Definition of term:

What is autonomous learning or learner autonomy? With reference to Holec (1981), a father of learner autonomy, autonomous learning refers to:

- situations in which learners study entirely on their own;
- a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;
- an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education;
- the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning;
- the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning

1.3. Characteristics of an autonomous learner

In order for the students to become autonomous learners, they should have the following characteristics.

Figure 1: Characteristics of Autonomous Learners (Holec ,1981)

In addition, autonomy for language learners has been described as "a process   that enables learners to recognize and assess their own needs, to choose and apply their own learning strategies or styles eventually leading to effective management of learning" (Penaflorida 2002,346).
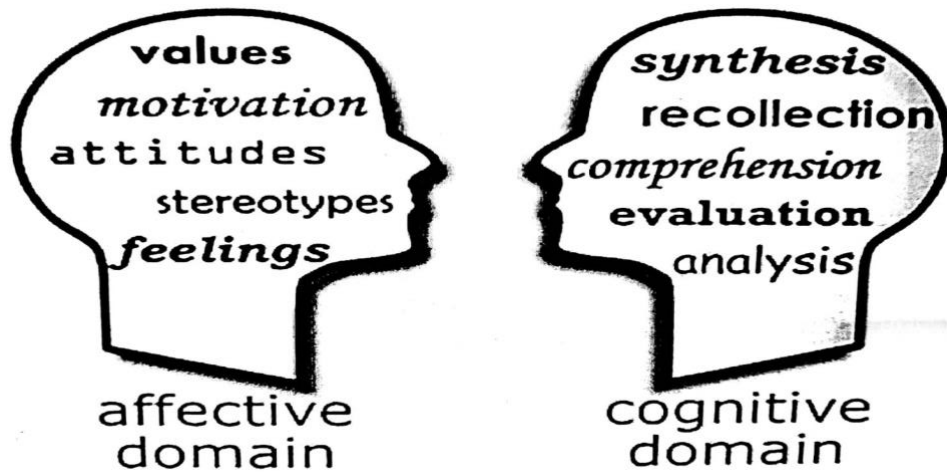

Figure 2: The Affective Domain in the Classroom,(Kirk, SERC retrieved from: http://sere.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/affective/index.html

Before integrating autonomous learning for students, the teacher should also bear in mind that students are different in many ways in terms of values, motivation ,and feelings. Therefore, they have different learning styles. Consequently, the teacher needs to prepare the students for their independent learning. That means allowing students to have their own choice of study for a period of time to study independently on the topics that they are interested in. A good way is to make them work in a small group to encourage them to be collaborative in learning with one another as well as motivate them to make their own decision for their own learning. Little by little students will become more aware of their own learning styles and will become critically more reflective of the value of their study independently. As a result, they will develop their cognitive domain and will eventually enjoy learning autonomously.

1.4. Purposes of the study
 - To analyze the impact of IT and Media on autonomous learning of 2_{nd} year Business English majors
 - To improve the teaching strategy suitable for the 21_{st} Century learning
 - To reinforce a student-centered learning approach

2. Review of Related Literature
2.1. Issues concerning enhancing autonomous learning
Benson (2001) reminds us that the idea of autonomous learning can provoke strong reactions among traditional teachers. Since autonomous learning is new in language teaching in Thailand, there may be negative reactions against its implementation in language learning

as many teachers still prefer traditional teaching and learning where the teacher-centered approach is used and students are used to being told what to do and to learn. However, autonomous learning has proved beneficial for learners if they are prepared to learn on their own with recommendation from the teacher about different useful learning strategies.

Viewed in light of learning English not as a second language, but a foreign language in Thailand, encouraging learners' language acquisition through autonomous learning is useful for them to feel connected with the community, as well as learn the culture of the people speaking the target language, so that they will be able to make meaningful comparison, and hence open up their worldview.

Aoki(2008) states that fostering autonomy in learners is the task of the teacher to help them achieve their goals either by making them responsible for specific tasks ,or outside class activities for positive outcomes.

In addition, Godwin-Jones (2011, p. 4) argues that online learning has a lot of benefits to encourage autonomous language learning as he clearly describes:

> The concept of learning autonomy of course pre-dates computing,
> traceable at least back to the enlightenment thinker and likely to a
> much earlier period. Interestingly, its importance for language
> educators parallels the growth of computer-aided language learning
> (CALL), with the two intersecting increasingly in recent years....From
> the beginning, it has been recognized that developing learner autonomy
> does not just involve putting appropriate learning materials in front of a
> student, but necessitates helping the student develop the skills and mindset
> that can lead to successful self-guided language study.

Godwin-Jones' argument is sensible as it is important for the teacher to prepare students how to learn independently under his/her guidance with motivation, and encouragement. In addition, policy and support from the school are also needed to implement autonomous learning. As the researcher has freedom to conduct the class independently, she is inspired to explore different teaching methodologies to engage her students with autonomous learning by assisting them to understand different types of learning strategies.

Rosenshine (2012, pp. 13-15) adapts the principles of instruction as follows:

Step1: Begin a lesson with a short re
view of previous learning,
Step2: Present new materials encouraging students to use online to find material for English practice that interests them,
Step3: Provide questions as guide lines for their practice Language Learning Strategies,
Step4: Provide students with models and work examples that can help them learn to solve their problems faster,
Step 5: Give guidance for their practice of new materials, and
Step 6: Check students' understanding via email to help them learn the material with fewer mistakes. The students were encouraged to choose their own learning strategies that they felt most comfortable with.

2.2. How Does the Use of Modern Communication Technology Develop Language Literacy?

Watt (2010, pp.141-148) explains that communicating via technology occupies a unique middle ground between using spoken and written language for communication as follows:

> Electronic discourse, such as that used in emails, text messages,
> or Internet chat rooms, often resembles writing that read as if it
> were being spoken. She cited other researchers who have termed
> this form of language "written speech ",or "spoken writing"
> (Crystal, 2006). It has been suggested that this form of "nets peak"
> may represent an entirely new language register(Greenfield &
> Subrahmanyam,2003). If children are increasingly communicating
> in an alternative language form, this may have implications for
> their communication and literacy skills.

Watt's explanation of the impact of IT and the practical development of literacy skills is very interesting. It presents a new way of language literacy that should be adopted in teaching and learning English either as a second/foreign language. It will make learning fun and rewarding. Students will also have freedom to learn what they want to learn using English as a medium for their communication. With regard to English language learning in Thailand, autonomous learning should be implemented, and the policy makers involved must take this seriously in order to change the traditional way of English teaching allowing teacher-centered approach to be continued despite the dramatic change in modern communication technologies. That is the main aspect of my research to apply IT and Media to enhance second year Business English communication skills as well as foster autonomous learning for their life-long learning.

3. Methodology

With a belief in autonomous learning, the researcher made an experiment among 16 Junior students majoring in Business English. The project took place in the 2nd Semester of 2015 academic year, and lasted 1 month. At the beginning of the experiment, the researcher provided students with information about the benefits of autonomous learning and integrating IT and media to acquire knowledge relevant to the tasks assigned independently with models and work examples. As the course focuses on analytical reading to enhance the students' business vocabulary to develop their communication skills and extend their knowledge acquired in the 21st Century, the researcher gave guidelines based on the course content to all the students to share their views. Then the students joined a group with their peers who had common interests. The class was divided into 4 groups.

To remind the students of different learning strategies, the researcher gave them a brief review on Oxford's (1990) learning strategy theories to make them aware of their learning styles and how to improve themselves. There was also interaction about the impact of IT and media on language learning. The class agreed that they used IT very often on a daily basis both for personal relaxation, and information. When they were encouraged to learn on their own to develop their Business English communication skills based on group activities, they were very excited. Each group chose their leader, and set a plan for independent study. For fruitful outcomes, all the students were assigned to write their diaries to reflect what and how they had learned to improve their English. Every week, the researcher reviewed their learning progress reflected in their diaries.

After the project ended ,the researcher interviewed each group of students to get their feedback on their autonomous learning activities.

4. Data for the Study

Data for the study derived from the students' oral presentations of their independent study based on their selected topics: "A Must Visit Place in Southeast Asia", *Fast Food Nation, World Best Leader, and Most Popular Classic Movie.* Each presentation lasted 20 minutes. Each group made visual aids and presented their topics in a power-point. Their presentations had to cover the main idea of the topic with a summary, and a list of new vocabulary, including some idioms they had learned, and their peers in class gave feedbacks and evaluations.

5. Method of Scoring

In this study, each project was worth 20 scores which was divided into 4 criteria:
- 1. Collaboration: Group work and distribution of task(5 points)
- 2. Effective use of IT and media for related materials and good content (5 points)
- 3.Good preparation and language use (5 points)
- 4 Good use of media in the power-point presentation(5 points)

6. Data Analysis

Data from the four groups were presented in tables below according to each criteria mentioned above:

Table1: Peers' Feedbacks of Group-work and Distribution of Task

Group No.	Topics	Points Earned
1.	A Must Visit Place in Southeast Asia	5
2.	Fast Food Nation	5
3.	World Best Leader	5
4.	Most Popular World Classic Movie	5

The findings from Table 1 above shows that all the groups were given full scores for their group - work and task distribution reflecting their collaborative effort to work as a group. The criteria for group collaboration were based on group leadership, individual talent and weaknesses, problem-solving skills to come up with solution for the project, or learning difficulties. Team members' active participation outside class that helped make the project a collective success were also taken into consideration. These learning outcomes reflected not only the students' positive attitudes towards autonomous learning, but also their motivation to learn on their own. Eventually, the students have developed their cognitive domain, reflected by their comprehension of the selected materials.

Table 2: Peers' Feedbacks on the Content of Each Presentation

Group No.	Topics	Points Earned
1.	A Must Visit Place in Southeast Asia	3
2.	Fast Food Nation	4
3.	World Best Leader	4
4.	Most Popular World Classic Movie	3

The findings from Table 2. above reveals that the participants in groups 1 & 4 still had some pronunciation problems as they did not speak well and could not communicate their subject matter clearly in comparison to groups 2 and 3. When asked if they were satisfied with the points earned, the two grouped, getting lower points accepted the feedbacks and agreed that they needed more public speaking practice to be proficient in English although they have become more confident in using English. The findings in table 2 also reflected the students' language need. Despite their ability to find a lot of materials on the Internet, some of them still need more practice in organizing the materials for presentation. Consequently, the students were reminded that, similar to writing, a good oral presentation also needs a good beginning, supporting details, and a conclusion. As reflected in table 2. Group1 and Group4 need some assistance in the organization of their selected materials for presentation.

Table 3: Peers' Feedbacks on Power-point Presentation

Group No.	Topics	Points Earned
1.	A Must Visit Place in Southeast Asia	4
2.	Fast Food Nation	5
3.	World Best Leader	5
4.	Most Popular World Classic Movie	4

Data from Table 3 above shows that every group made a good presentation, especially groups 2 & 3 made excellent presentations. This shows the significant role of visual aids to enhance understanding as well as making presentation interesting. The fact that these 2 groups got the full scores for their power-point presentations, reflecting their technology literacy and ability to exploit it effectively. As shown in their learning achievement, and an oral group interview at the ending of the project, students enjoyed positive feedbacks on their creativity shown in their power-point presentation. Members of group 2& 3 agreed that they worked hard to make their presentation clear, inspiring and unique. Their power-point presentation was clear and creative with simple language use, and covered the main points of their presentation. They also highlighted the new words used. Eventually, the students truly felt rewarded after they got full scores for a 5 scale evaluation: Presentation Process, Content & Subject Matter, Visual& IT, Language Use, and Teamwork.

Table 4: Groups' Feedbacks on Autonomous Learning

Group No.	Topics	Points Earned
1.	A Must Visit Place in Southeast Asia	5
2.	Fast Food Nation	5
3.	World Best Leader	5
4.	Most Popular World Classic Movie	5

The data shown in Table.4 shows that all the students enjoyed independent learning and choosing their own learning materials, reflected in their learning outputs and outcomes as well as their oral feedback on the interview. In so doing, they have learned to be cooperative as well as develop their critical thinking and problem solving skills. This implies that autonomous learning shifts the role of the teacher from the center of the classroom to become a facilitator, motivator, and evaluator relevant to the frame for 21st century learning as shown in the chart below:
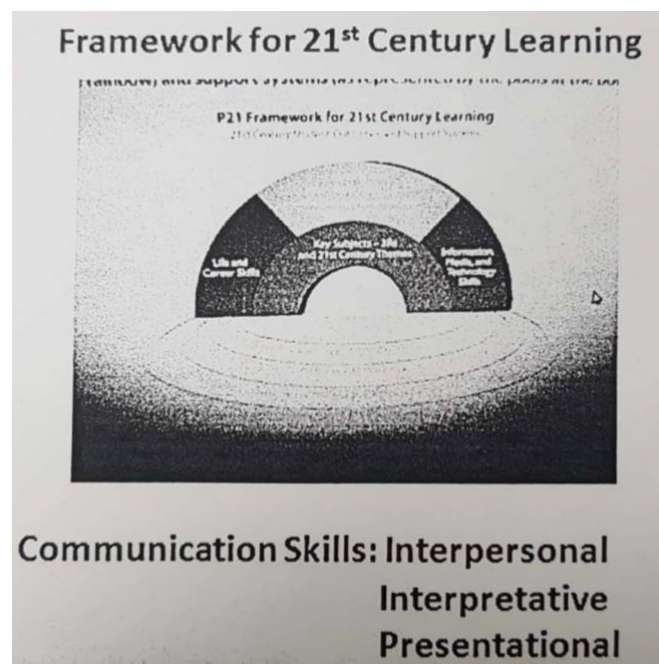
Figure 3. Framework for 21st Century learning, retrieved from
(From www.p21-org/storage/documents/p21_ framework_Definitions.pdf)

The framework for 21st Century learning describes the skills, knowledge and expertise students must master to succeed in work and life; it is a blend of content knowledge, specific skills, expertise and literacy. Among these, students must learn the essential skills for success in today's world, such as critical thinking, communication and collaboration. From the experiment, the students learned to interact with one another to achieve their common goal, sharing personal views on the assigned tasks and improve their presentational skills as discussed earlier.

7. Discussion on Findings

Autonomous learning can enhance English communication skills of Business English major students. The findings show that autonomous learning inspired learners to be seriously engaged in their learning. During the four week experiment, the class activities went on smoothly. All the groups made their panel presentations based on their selections: A Must See Place, Fast Food, World Sports, and Famous World Leader. They were required to make oral presentations with creative power-point, introducing the topic, the online resources for their materials, a summary of the content, including the structures, vocabulary or new idioms, and new expressions they had learned. Then their peers gave feedbacks on each presentation, and finally, the students made their own self-assessment. Each group took turn to make their presentations, followed by an individual opinion about autonomous learning. After a period of four weeks of intensive English, the students had learned so much. They have improved their communication skills, and were confident in using English. In addition, they felt more relaxed and became more engaged with learning activities outside class. They also admitted that they had improved their IT skills via communicating with their friends through many channels of communication: chat, face-book, emails, Line and mobile telephones. They found it enjoyable to enhance their language literacy in the contexts of Business English through popular medium of electronic communication mentioned earlier. As the college provides WIFI around campus, students found their learning environment very supportive and comfortable. The students also revealed that they worked harder, and felt engaged and challenged to do their best to improve

their English. With positive feedbacks from the researcher, the students agreed that autonomous learning was beneficial for them both individually and collectively. In addition, they were free to choose what they wanted to learn. In other words, communication technology has a positive impact on the students' English improvement. They were more motivated to learn and found that autonomous learning, not only developed their English, but also language literacy, and they have learned how to learn English on their own.

7.1 Use of communication technologies as intelligent tools for autonomous learning proved effective.

From the experiment with Business English majors, it was found that IT and communication technologies are useful tools for autonomous learning .They are also used as medium for exchanging ideas and making connections, which are vital parts of language learning. That means using language to connect with people in the community. Through the Internet, the students feel that they are connected and engaged with the whole world and feel part of it. Moreover, autonomous learning also allows the students to pursue what they consider valuable for them to learn and to know. It is good way to enhance life-long learning.

Subrahmanyam (2003) remarks that the overall influence on social interaction depends on whether the social uses of the computer supplement or substitutes other sources of social contact that young people have. Other studies also found that computer use have positive effects on cognitive and meta-cognitive skills. In particular positive effects on visual intelligence and cognition.[cited by Watt (2010)].

7.2 Autonomous learning can reinforce student –centered learning approach

The findings discussed earlier also reflect the impact of student-centered learning approach with integration of technologies and autonomous learning and are relevant to previous research finding as follows:

Yagcioglu (2015) reveals that "***developing learner autonomy in foreign language education is one of the fundamental and universal duties of all foreign language educators.***" In the 21st Century learner autonomy should /must be encouraged. Yagcioglu is right to say that our fundamental duty to foster learner autonomy for each learner's direct learning, and in a long run classroom should be a place for exchanging ideas with healthy learning atmosphere. Autonomous learning will develop learners' sense of responsibilities for their own learning. They learn what they need and want to learn, and this will make them motivated and achieve their goals.

If the learning means to discover something rather than to get something passed on from one person to another, learner autonomy should be encouraged. According to Tereza, et al.(2 016) incorporation of technologies into learning process has positive learning outputs. The most challenging requirement for their research on "Fostering innovation in social work and social education degrees" reveals that technologies created favorable creativity. Students shared what they had learned through self-made videos on the subject's Facebook page, and in some cases on their YouTube account. And some of their videos were very high level productions.

In addition, Maria Tereza, Gisela Riberas, and Geoveva Rosa (2016) found that through English, students can be encouraged to use technologies and invited to take a deeper look into

significant aspects of the process of developing innovative solution to common needs such as the innovative process, technologies, creativity, leadership and funding.

In brief, developing autonomous learning can directly lead to the proposition that knowledge cannot be taught but only learned because knowledge is something built up by the learner. In this respect, autonomous learning is not a new approach, but has not been applied enough in a language class in Thailand. Therefore, it should be reviewed and supported by all concerned parties ;namely policy makers, administrators, and teachers to make teaching and learning a foreign /second language serve the needs of each individual learner not only for language literacy, but also to nurture lifelong learning.

Motteram (2013) points out in his Introductory note in *Innovation in Learning Technologies for English Language Teaching* that " In the early part of the 21st century the range of technologies available for use in language learning and teaching has become very diverse and that they are being used in classrooms all over the world has become central to language practice, and are increasingly a core part of English language teaching in the world."

7. Conclusion

Based on the findings earlier discussed, it is obvious that It literacy and media can effectively foster autonomous learning. Therefore, it is practical for teachers to focus on a student-centered approach to encourage the students' autonomous learning, and working as a team to develop their overall communication skills derived from creative thinking, problem-solving, including interpersonal, interpretative and presentation skills required for 21st century learning. Autonomous learning will be a breakthrough to teaching and learning English in Thailand With autonomous learning students learn what they want to learn and they can search for more knowledge about the subject matter available on the internet. In this way, they are inspired to use English to explore learning materials. They also have to be selective and critical about what they have read. In order to achieve their learning goal, students will have to plan their task with their peers, and discuss the project content relevant to the topic selected. Today media is so powerful and good visual presentation is required to engage the audience. The facts that all the experimental groups were successful in their projects proved that integration of IT and media can significantly foster autonomous learning. It is, therefore, recommended that English teachers change their teaching method from the commonly used traditional approach to the student-centered learning approach with the focus on learning autonomy. In so doing, learning English can be fun and meaningful as students are free to choose what they want to learn through exploitation of It and media. They will also feel rewarded when the performed task was accepted and recognized by both the teacher and their peers. The teacher will also get a big applause as a good coach when the class ends.

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