On the Autonomous Learning of English Pronunciation of Business English Major Freshmen

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Abstract. Autonomous learning has been applied in many fields concerning teaching and learning. This paper sets business English major freshmen as objects to investigate their autonomous learning of English pronunciation. It aims to find out problems that might occur in autonomous learning of English pronunciation and to figure out solutions to solve the problems.

Introduction

With the rapid development of economic globalization, English learning has become increasingly important in our daily life, and English pronunciation plays a significant role in English learning [1]. Pronunciation is the fundamental element of language learning and the key factor for smooth communication with other people [2]. Therefore, English pronunciation has been set as a compulsory course for business English freshmen. However, students usually have only one lesson a week to learn English pronunciation in class, which is not enough for them to improve their English pronunciation. To continue pronunciation practices, students will have to learn English pronunciation by themselves in their spare time, which certainly demands their ability of autonomous learning. Therefore, it is urgent for business English freshmen to improve their ability of autonomous learning.

This paper will gather data through questionnaires, conducting data analyses and having a reflection on autonomous learning of English pronunciation of business English freshmen. The paper expects to find out problems that might occur in pronunciation learning and tries to figure out solutions to solve the problems.

Theoretical Framework

In the field of autonomous learning, scholars at home and abroad have done lots of researches since the 1970s. As for foreign scholars, Henri Holec (1981) put forward the term “learner autonomy.” He noted that autonomous learning was “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning [3].” Ryan (1991) argued that autonomy was “a process of self-determination or self-regulation [4].” Leslie Dickinson (1993) stated that autonomy was “an attitude to language learning which may not necessarily have many external, observable features [5].” Littlewood William (1999) defined autonomous learning as “involving students’ capacity to use their learning independent of teachers [6].” Benson (2001) stated that students should take control over their learning process, and that teachers could create the appropriate atmosphere for students to exert their autonomy [7].

Domestic scholars also conducted researches on autonomous learning. Wang Duqin (2002) wrote that autonomous learning was the goal of language teaching and language learning [8]. Wang Yan (2007) thought that the aim of autonomous learning was to foster learner autonomy [9]. Zhou Shuang (2012) conducted a research that focused on English vocabulary acquisition [10].

Furthermore, several researches have been conducted in the field of autonomous learning in English pronunciation. Yule, Hoffman and Damico (1987) put forward the notion of “self-monitoring [11].” Morley (1994) proposed that “self-monitoring” and “self-correcting” were the targets of pronunciation education [12]. Besides, Wang Yingfang (2006) conducted a research that focused on
the autonomous learning and English pronunciation. She found that improving students’ autonomous learning would help them improve their English pronunciation [13].

Research Design

In this research, a questionnaire was designed to get information concerning respondents’ autonomous learning of English pronunciation. The questionnaire was made up of two parts. The first part was designed to get the basic information of respondents. The respondents were asked to write down their name, age, gender, major, the score of college entrance examination and other important personal information. The second part consisted of ten statements. Those statements were designed to get information from three perspectives, namely, respondents’ attitudes towards English pronunciation learning (Statement 1-Statement 3), respondents’ attitudes towards autonomous learning (Statement 4-Statement 6), and the situation of business English freshmen’s autonomous learning of English pronunciation (Statement 7-Statement 10). Each statement was given three options for the respondents to choose from: A = Always or almost always true of me; B = Sometimes or somewhat true of me; C = Never or almost never true of me. The ten statements are listed as follows:

(1) I think learning English pronunciation is important.
(2) I learn English pronunciation because it is a required subject in school schedule.
(3) I learn English pronunciation because I really like it.
(4) I am willing to spend extra time after class to learn English pronunciation.
(5) I know how to conduct English pronunciation autonomous learning effectively.
(6) I will make a plan to learn English pronunciation autonomously.
(7) I am active in learning English pronunciation.
(8) I evaluate my English pronunciation learning strategies to find out the problems and solutions.
(9) In addition to learning tasks assigned by the teacher, I make a study plan.
(10) In the process of studying English pronunciation, I carry out the plan strictly.

The objects of this investigation are the business English major freshmen in Ningbo Institute of Technology, Zhejiang University. Altogether, 50 freshmen (13 male students and 37 female students) took park in the investigation. The questionnaire was given to them at the beginning of their first semester at school. Fifty pieces of questionnaire had been distributed and fifty pieces of questionnaire had been collected.

Data Analysis

Table 1 reveals the respondents’ attitude towards English pronunciation learning. As for the first statement, all the students chose option A, which means that they were all fully aware of the importance of English pronunciation learning.

| Students’ View | Option A |   | Option B |   | Option C |   |
|---------------|----------|---|----------|---|----------|---|
|               | Number   | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| Statement 1   | 50       | 100%       | 0       | 0%         | 0       | 0%         |
| Statement 2   | 14       | 28%        | 9       | 18%        | 27      | 54%        |
| Statement 3   | 32       | 64%        | 15      | 30%        | 3       | 6%         |

As for the second statement, 14 respondents chose option A, which accounted for 28 percent of the total respondents. Nine students chose option B, which accounted for 18 percent of the total respondents, and 27 students chose option C, which accounted for 54 percent of the total respondents. It implies that more than half of the respondents have a positive attitude towards pronunciation.
learning. The motivation for their learning English pronunciation was not that English pronunciation was a compulsory subject in the school schedule.

As for the third statement, 32 students chose option A, which accounted for 64 percent of the total respondents. Fifteen students chose option B, which accounted for 30 percent of the total respondents. Only three students chose option C, which accounted for 6 percent of the total respondents. These figures also demonstrated that business English freshmen had a positive attitude towards pronunciation learning. They learned English pronunciation because they really liked it.

In short, from Table 1, it can be seen obviously that business English freshmen on the whole have a positive attitude towards English pronunciation learning.

Table 2. Students’ Attitudes towards Autonomous Learning.

| Students’ View | Option A | Option B | Option C |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|
|               | Number   | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| Statement 4   | 42       | 84%       | 8      | 16%        | 0      | 0%         |
| Statement 5   | 7        | 14%       | 30     | 60%        | 13     | 26%        |
| Statement 6   | 33       | 66%       | 15     | 30%        | 2      | 4%         |

Table 2 reveals the respondents’ attitudes towards autonomous learning. As for the fourth statement, 42 students chose option A, which accounted for 84 percent of the total respondents. Eight students chose B, which accounted for 16 percent of the total respondents. It can be seen that the respondents had strong desire to learn English pronunciation after class.

As for the fifth statement, seven students chose option A, which accounted for 14 percent of the total respondents. Thirty students chose option B, which accounted for 60 percent of the total respondents. Thirteen students chose option C, which accounted for 26 percent of the total respondents. These figures show that although the respondents were willing to spend extra time to learn English pronunciation, they lacked effective ways to conduct autonomous learning.

As for the sixth statement, 33 students chose option A, which accounted for 66 percent of the total respondents. Fifteen students chose option B, which accounted for 30 percent of the total respondents. Two students chose C, which accounted for 4 percent of the total respondents. It implies that many students were willing to make plans to learn English pronunciation.

Thus, from the analyses made above, it could be concluded that most business English freshmen were willing to learn English pronunciation autonomously, but they were not sure how they could conduct autonomous learning of English pronunciation effectively.

Table 3. Students’ Autonomous Learning of English Pronunciation.

| Students’ View | Option A | Option B | Option C |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|
|               | Number   | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| Statement 7   | 20       | 40%       | 11     | 22%        | 19     | 38%        |
| Statement 8   | 11       | 22%       | 15     | 30%        | 24     | 48%        |
| Statement 9   | 13       | 26%       | 13     | 26%        | 24     | 48%        |
| Statement 10  | 20       | 40%       | 8      | 16%        | 22     | 44%        |

Table 3 reveals the respondents’ current situation of English pronunciation autonomous learning. As for the seventh statement, 20 respondents chose option A, which accounted for 40 percent of the total respondents. Eleven respondents chose option B, which accounted for 22 percent of the total respondents. Eighteen respondents chose option C, which accounted for 38 percent of the total respondents. It means that over one third of business English freshmen were still passive in learning English pronunciation.

As for the eighth statement, 11 respondents chose option A, which accounted for 22 percent of the total respondents. Fifteen respondents chose option B, which accounted for 30 percent of the total respondents. Eighteen respondents chose option C, which accounted for 38 percent of the total respondents.
respondents. However, 24 respondents chose option C, which accounted for 48 percent of the total respondents. Almost half of the respondents did not evaluate their English pronunciation learning strategies to find out the problems or solutions.

As for the ninth statement, 13 respondents chose option A, which accounted for 26 percent of the total respondents. Thirteen respondents chose option B, which accounted for 26 percent of the total respondents. However, 24 respondents chose option C, which accounted for 48 percent of the total respondents. These figures reveal that apart from learning task assigned by teachers, nearly half of respondents did not make a plan to guide their English pronunciation learning.

As for the last statement, 20 respondents chose option A, which accounted for 40 percent of the total respondents. Eight respondents chose option B, which accounted for 16 percent of the total respondents. However, 22 respondents chose C, which accounted for 44 percent of the total respondents. These figures show that nearly half students did not carry out their plan strictly in their process of studying English pronunciation.

In conclusion, the respondents’ current situation of English pronunciation autonomous learning is not satisfying.

Discussion and Suggestions

According to the studies done by previous researchers, an effective autonomous learning could be judged from the following five aspects: (1) learners should determine the objectives of learning; (2) learners should define the content and progress of learning; (3) learners should select methods and techniques of learning; (4) learners should monitor the learning procedure; (5) learners should conduct evaluation of learning [14]. Based on the statistics analyzed above, it could be concluded that although the respondents held a positive attitude towards English pronunciation learning and autonomous learning, their autonomous learning of English pronunciation was not satisfying. Almost half of the respondents did not make a plan to guide their English pronunciation learning. The reason why they did not make a plan might be that they were not certain about their learning objectives, the content of their learning, or the methods of learning, which, to some extent, revealed their poor autonomous learning competence. Moreover, nearly half of the respondents did not carry out their plan strictly in the process of English pronunciation learning, which demonstrated their inability to monitor their learning procedure. Almost half of the respondents did not evaluate their English pronunciation learning strategies. This could be seen as another piece of evidence to show their poor autonomous learning competence.

In order to enhance the students’ autonomous learning competence, measures could be taken from two perspectives. As for students, they could set up learning objectives according to their own situation, and arrange the agenda to ensure the time of English pronunciation learning. They could also communicate with each other about their experiences in the process of English pronunciation autonomous learning, and ask teachers and classmates for help when they find any difficulties or problems. As for teachers, they could encourage students to learn English pronunciation autonomously by creating good atmosphere for autonomous learning. For example, they could form learning groups and advise students to use online resources [15]. They could also give students a hand when students have difficulties in autonomous learning of English pronunciation. Setting office hours to answer students’ questions might be a good choice to help students solve problems.

Conclusion

This paper aims at providing a survey on the current English pronunciation autonomous learning situation of business English freshmen. It expects to find out problems that might occur in business English freshmen’s autonomous learning of English pronunciation, and tries to put forward suggestions to solve the problems. According to the statistics analyzed above, the business English freshmen who took part in the survey were generally positive about English pronunciation learning, and they were also positive about autonomous learning. However, their autonomous learning of English pronunciation was not satisfying. Not many of them could plan their English pronunciation
autonomous learning, nor could they arrange or evaluate their English pronunciation autonomous learning well. Hence, measures should be taken from two aspects, both from students and from teachers, to help the students enhance their English pronunciation autonomous learning competence.

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