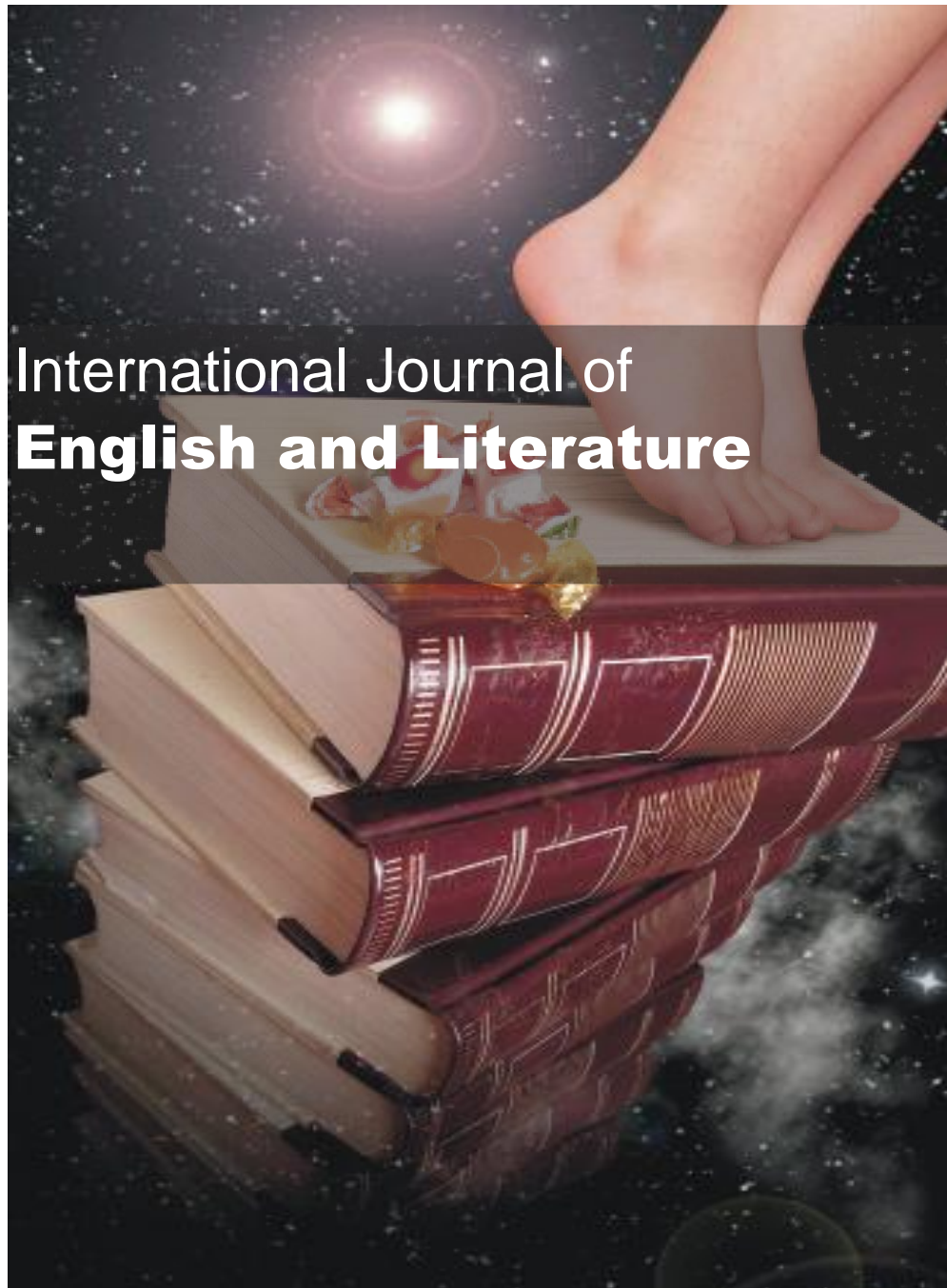


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Full Length Research Paper

Are these students strategic enough? The study of college students' application of self-regulation strategy into task oriented English learning

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Received 11 November, 2016; Accepted 14 December, 2016

Self-regulation is a popular theoretical application into discussing the second language (L2) learning efficacy. Students apply a variety of strategies to regulate their learning processes. In order to explore students' self-regulatory learning strategies, this study assigned a 3-minute English introduction for the freshmen of the sport college students and observed their process of completing the task. Students should follow the skeleton of introductory draft, and practice for two weeks. The tested students should give a 3-minute introduction on the stage with a fluently English speaking skill. This study observes the process of preparation for the introduction, and records the strategies students used during the period. The study collects the self-regulation strategies for these students and categorizes these strategies into the control strategies field of self-regulation. In the conclusion, the study indicates the practice of these self-regulatory strategies that triggers the English learning more efficient and can make contributions to the later research.

Key words: L2 motivational learning strategy, self-regulation, freshmen.

INTRODUCTION

Most researchers state a main problem with strategy research related to the different dimensions of „learning strategies“. Unfortunately, there was no consistent agreement on the actual defined criteria for language learning strategies. It is an interesting issue concerned with the broader field of educational psychology, whether the learning strategies should be viewed as either observable behaviors or inner mental operations.

With a view to a standard definition from the 1980s: Weinstein and Mayer (1986) indicate strategies as the behaviors and thoughts that a learner engages in during

learning that are tried to influence the learner's encoding process. If we sort out the cognition / behavior issue, the range of learning strategies has been further broadened. Then, there were three domains of strategic learning offered by Weinstein et al. (2000): goal-directed, intentionally invoked, and effortful.

We cannot see any strategic elements within the discussion of these three domains. Therefore, the study turned to find some possible insights of essential features of the learning strategies. Riding and Rayner (1998) stated that the learning path becomes strategic while it is

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particularly appropriate for the individual learner. These learners engage in strategic learning through purposely exerting effort to choose, and pursuing the learning procedures which might increase their learning effectiveness.

However, faculty at colleges often raises a common phenomenon about the lack of student motivation. Teachers in colleges often indicate these questions like, why don't these college students seem to care about their work and assignments, why do they only care about their easy grades (gain grades by easy work) but not learning, and why can't they be more organized and plan their work better. There might be some explanation for these issues about lacking the motivation to learning.

Pintrich and Zusho (2007) provided an overview of current research on college student motivation and self-regulated learning. They offered a general model for student motivation and self-regulated learning in the college classroom. There are five major components in the model; personal characteristics, classroom context, motivational processes, self-regulatory processes, and outcomes. Besides, they analyzed the differences between two college students to discuss the relations among these different components of this model. According to the discussion of their case study, it did inspire the carrying out of this research. This study indicates some insights of freshmen's self-regulatory strategies applied to the students' outcome, that is, the academic performance or achievement. It can be indexed by grades in the course or overall performance of English ability.

Most students consider that English writing in colleges has been a difficult task even the assignment itself is just a little piece related to their own experience. Students are asked to write some English paragraphs from a young age, officially high schools or privately in cram schools. They still deem English writing as difficult work. In most writing contexts, the importance of sentence sequencing and grammar correctness is not presented with respect to the pragmatic use as in actual contexts. Rather, it is resented as a means to meeting requirements that are considered major motivational forces for students' English writing. The introductory paragraph is assigned for the main material for this assignment. Among the main troubles students are facing, most students cannot acquire the writing skills for the lack of judgments for the correctness of information they gained from the strategies. Therefore, if students can acquire the correctness of these strategies, such as on-line dictionary, they certainly can demonstrate the English task more efficiently.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the present study aimed at investigating and exploring the self-regulation

strategies for these students and categorizes these strategies into the control strategies field of self-regulation. In some cognitive perspectives, the study indicates the practice of these self-regulatory strategies that triggers the English learning more efficient and can make contributions to the later research.

One objective of the study was to observe how these self-regulatory strategies work out among these students' tasks. Then, by recording the reflections step by step to check if the strategies really did work on these performances for the college students in their English learning. In addition, this study also investigated how the students had changed in terms of their attitudes toward preparing the English tasks, their English performances, and their perceived achievements. The last objective was to examine what reflections the teacher as the researcher made on the teaching and on the implementation of this self-regulatory strategies method. The data were collected, analyzed by the paper-written journals. Students need to record their feedback of all the procedures related to the problem-solving steps.

College students are definitely not passive recipients of information from lecturers, but rather active, constructive meaning-makers as they encounter some unfamiliar learning field. That is why, giving the so called „perfect“ lecture should not mean that the students in the course will receive the teaching material in lecturers' expected manner. These students can create their own comprehensive ways from the lecture, and part of their meaning will reflect the appropriate knowledge or their own prior knowledge to figure out some useful strategies in solving the specific assignments. It is an intrinsic way to explore some motivational insights through observing students' self-regulatory strategies.

In order to investigate the possible interface between the students' learning strategies and the self-regulatory learning processes, this study indicates these following research questions:

First, What are the students' learning strategies to complete the task? Second, what are the roles these learning strategies played in the self-regulation processes?

LITERATURE REVIEW

L2 motivation

In the 1990s, there were numerous studies written with the focus on the motivation of language learners in specific sociocultural, ethnolinguistic and educational contexts. The self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (1985) has been the most important researches in motivational field. Then, to narrow down this theory into L2 motivational issues, Kim Noels

has been indicating the application of this discussion: the main terms associated with self-determination theory, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Noels, 2001a, b; Noels et al., 1999, 2001, 2000), with a view to specifying the relationship within established L2 concepts, such as integrative and instrumental orientation.

The research has provided insights into the ways these concepts fit into the L2 fields, as well as a solid and reliable measuring instrument assessing the components of self-determination theory in L2 motivational learning. Noels (2001b) also applied self-determination theory to the exploration into the relationship of student autonomy and the teachers' communicative style. Recently, the student autonomy has been a main topic in L2 research (Benson, 2001), and the relationship between learner autonomy and L2 motivation has also been discussed by these studies (Spratt et al., 2002; Ushioda, 1996).

A process model of L2 motivation integrates the overall motivational discussions into some temporal domains organized by the process that presents the way how inner thoughts and desires are changed into goals. Then, these goals operate into intentions which contains attitude. The way how these intentions are practiced by the achievement of the goal is also shown in the final evaluation of the process. There are three important phases indicated by Dörnyei (2003). These phases related to the main rationale of this study are described in details:

First, in the preactional stage, there are three main motivational functions: setting goals, forming intentions, and launching action. The motivational influences are focusing on various goal properties, values of the learning process, attitudes towards the L2, expectancy of success, learner beliefs and strategies, and environmental effects. Second, in the actional stage, there are three main motivational functions: generating subtasks, ongoing appraisal, and self-regulation. The motivational influences are focusing on quality of the learning experience, sense of autonomy, teachers' and parents' influence, classroom reward and goal structure, influence of the learner group, and the knowledge and use of self-regulatory strategies. Third, in the postactional stage, there are three main motivational functions: forming causal attributions, elaborating strategies, and dismissing intention and further planning. The motivational influences are focusing on attributional factors, self-concept beliefs, and received feedback, praise, grades.

According to this framework, the study will discuss these college students' learning strategies under the L2 motivational process.

Self-regulated learning

Self-regulated learning is viewed as a mechanism to help

explain achievement differences among learners and as a means to improve achievement. Most early self-regulation theories focused on cognitive strategies and behaviors, like monitoring, organizing, rehearsing, managing time, and establishing a productive work environment. However, in the latest decade, researchers have increasingly stated the roles of motivational processes such as goals, attributions, self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-evaluations, outcome expectations, social comparisons, emotions, and values. The key issues and an important framework for studying the role of motivation in self-regulation were also illustrated by Schunk and Zimmerman (1998). It provides some ways that how the motivational processes in students' efforts initiated and regulated their cognitions, affects, and behaviors. In comparison, the good self-regulators set better goals, more effective strategies, and assess the goal progress better. These learners establish a more productive environment for achieving the goals of tasks. They even eager to seek assistance more often when it is needed, expend effort and persist better. In the end, these good self-regulators adjust strategies better, and set some other effective new goals while the old ones are completed (Boekaerts et al., 2000; Schunk and Zimmerman, 1994, 1998; Zimmerman and Schunk, 2001).

Self-regulatory strategies

The field of defining the self-regulation is discussed by many researchers and the theoretical results also indicate the possibilities for influencing the learning efficacy. Other motivational factors also integrate into the self-regulation strategy. The latest theoretical paradigm is the L2 Motivational Self System proposed by Dörnyei (2005).

The research discussed the perception of learners' desired future self-states, called L2 learners' self-perception. According to the detailed discussion of this paradigm, it also contains the Possible Selves Theory (Markus and Nurius, 1986) and Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987). That is, individual learner has owned idea of what he/she wants to become in the future. The intention can influence the learning behavior by highlighting the discrepancies between the current actual and the future desired selves (Dörnyei and Chan, 2013). With the given scope and limitations of the theoretical discussion, we cannot review all these related self-regulatory learning methods here. This study will capture some of these college students' learning strategies into analysis. To discuss these learning strategies under the general model for student motivation and self-regulated learning in the college classroom is proposed by Pintrich and Zucho (2007).

With the view to the interaction within this college students motivation and self-regulation learning,

Pintrich and Zusho (2007) indicate five major components of the model for showing college students' academic motivation and self-regulation in the classroom (2007). First, the student personal characteristics like age, gender, and ethnicity, related to student motivation, self-regulation, and outcomes. Second, the contextual factors included some features of the classroom environment. These two parts are certainly influencing the operational processes between the motivation and self-regulatory. The operational process of motivation represents the inner thoughts and emotions that students owned in relation to the context and their perceptions of the context itself. These inner learning strategies and operational processes are called self-regulatory processes. Students can use these processes to monitor, control, and regulate themselves. We will show some evidence of these participants in the study later in the findings and discussions section.

The last factor of the model is various student outcomes like choice, effort, persistence, and actual achievement. College students' actual behavior and outcomes provide feedback to themselves that actually influences their operational processes of motivation and self-regulation. Besides, there still are some covert and unobservable aspects included cognitive engagement and operational processing, such as thinking deeply about the task, using other regulatory strategies to analyze the task in a more disciplined and detailed manner, seeking to understand the purpose of the task and not just accept it. After all these operational processes within the discussion of this study, some of the interesting phenomena will be shown in more detail in the section on self-regulatory processes.

METHODOLOGY

Rationale for the choice of research

This study provides the educational action research as the rationale of research method. Action research allows making modifications in progress and the same process may be run repeatedly until a better solution is found. The teachers can see the main learning problem through students' learning journal and teachers' observation in the real action research. In view of the flexibility and the recursion of action research, the nature of action research fits into the design of the study. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), the complementary and dynamic process of action research goes through four steps, that is, planning, action, observation and reflection. The fundamental steps of action research are in accordance with the design of the program.

Basically, the implementation of the program went through a cycle of design, implementation, reflection, and modification according to researcher's observation and the students' learning journals during the process, and then it repeated till the task finished. The design of the program was flexible and adjustable for the purpose of helping the students' learning strategies from self-regulatory strategies. Action research is chosen not only because the teacher serves as a researcher but also because the teacher has a chance to apply theoretically feasible methods to solve real problems in a natural educational context.

Another practical purpose for doing action research is to figure out solutions to the problems existing in the practical educational context. Altrichter et al. (1993) indicated that action research provides the methods and strategies to investigate and improve practical teaching settings. Besides, Burns (1999) also indicated that action research is evaluative and reflective when it aims at exploring the main change and improvement in practice. The results of the research can be applied directly and immediately to the classroom to offer possible solutions to the existent problems. Action research helps to recognize and translate developing ideas into action.

In the theoretical support, this study discusses the possible learning path under the main scope of the discussion of phases of self-regulation proposed by Pintrich and Zusho (2007). We can see the detailed discussion in the literature reviews section.

Participants

Participants are from two male and two female sport college students in the freshman English class whose curriculum design was aimed to increase students' speaking and listening ability. These students are not in the English major, and they are partly presented the low efficacy in English tests.

Procedures

Each student are asked to write a brief and precise introductory speech within the first week. Then, they have to practice the script for another week and do the 3-minute speech on the stage. Each student should make a journal of all the details for the process while doing this assignment. After the task, each one has to record their feedback of the completing task. The researcher is also the same English lecturer in their freshmen class. The later results and findings are all from the observations of these students' learning journals (Appendix).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The general framework of these students' strategies

College students who are not in the English major are not just passive recipients of taking the assignments from teachers. They are actually active, constructive meaning-makers as they encounter into some tough tasks. College teachers are always giving the so-called "perfect" and "academic" lectures in order to show the expectation of students' learning achievements. However, the students not only created their own ways from the lecture, but part of them uses some innovative learning strategies which reflect the appropriate disciplinary knowledge of self-regulation. Yet, even some of these students judge the learning difficulties and measure their strategies by their own prior knowledge and misconceptions, they still show some intrinsic motivation related to the application of self-regulatory learning.

The specific application of self-regulatory strategies

First, according to the researcher's observation of

these learning journals, there show some interesting performance of the intercourse within the learning strategies, self-regulation, and L2 motivation. We can see from the learning journal of participant 1; he wrote:

Steps: 1. Try to write the introductory script by myself. 2. Practice and check if that's smooth enough. 3. Go check online and find some sentences to make it complete. 4. Ask my cousin to check it. (She is an English teacher)

Participant 1 used the inner learning strategies to monitor and control his own learning path (Pintrich and Zusho, 2007). While practicing the operational process, he controlled and even regulated himself with the actual English oral practice. See the following journal of Participant 1:

Difficulties: After the preparation and practicing process, it went smoothly. But I didn't know how to use this into daily life. It just likes if I really bump into some foreigners, I hardly say it.

Solutions: Try to practice more. Speak English in front of the mirror or friends. Do not be afraid to make mistakes. Because if there's some mistake, you would remember it. Hand in the last minute, and I think I can be better.

As to the highlighted lines, Participant 1 not only set a clear self-regulatory strategy to process his own learning path, but encouraged himself with some positive strategies. This spontaneous performance of strategies provided feedback to student himself that actually influenced his operational processes of motivation and self-regulation. We can see the similar performance of self-regulatory strategies from Participant 2's journal:

Although I encountered many difficulties during the process, I still can find the answers gradually. This task makes me learn that how to complete a script of self-introduction. Even I am afraid of speaking in English, I still try to practice the script few times every day. I am so happy that I can finish this task.

The highlighted parts did present the empirical evidence of the last factor of Pintrich's model (2007): various student outcomes like choice, effort, persistence, and actual achievement. These participants all tried to figure out the possible difficulties occurred while operating the task. Then, they can try some possible solutions to finish the task and earn some credits the researcher mentioned in the first beginning. We can see the example of Participant 3:

1. I felt the task is very interesting. I can complete the task by any possible ways which I can imagine.
2. Use the dictionary in the cellphone to check the vocabularies, then complete the sentences with the grammar I have learned; Use the vocabularies and

grammar which I have learned; Translate by the cellphone.

Participant 3 tried to solve the difficulties by her own ways, which made herself become a self-regulated learner while operating the learning path. Although she felt the task is hard for her to complete at the beginning, she still tried to find some strategies that might be useful. Students might think deeply about the task, use other regulatory strategies to analyze the task in a more disciplined and detailed manner, or try to seek to understand the purpose of the task. That is why we can see there still are some covert and unclear aspects referred to cognitive engagement and operational process of these students' learning paths.

Conclusion

College students' actual behavior and outcomes of task-solving abilities presents the processing of self-regulatory strategies. These strategies shown in the data of this study could provide some empirical evidence of the model proposed by Pintrich and Zusho (2007).

Considering the general framework of these students' strategies, they not only created their own ways from the processes, but part of them uses some innovative learning strategies which reflect the appropriate disciplinary knowledge of self-regulation. Yet, even some of these students judge the learning difficulties and measure their strategies by their own prior knowledge and misconceptions, they still show some intrinsic abilities related to the application of self-regulatory learning.

As to The specific application of self-regulatory strategies, these participants think deeply about the task, use regulatory strategies to analyze the task in a more disciplined and detailed manner, or try to seek to understand the purpose of the task. In order to complete the task, participants use some learning strategies shown the intercourse within the learning strategies, self-regulation, and L2 motivation. Even the empirical evidence of this study limited into the numbers of participants, further studies could keep the discussions for considerations.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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APPENDIX

Introducing the task: Teacher:

1. The thoughts while you're listening to the task?
2. How to complete the task? Any possible ideas should be ok to write them down.
3. Please write down every steps you use in writing the introductory script and practicing the short speech.
4. Write down every difficulties you faced in the preparing process and the solutions you used according to every single problem.
5. After the presentation, what do you think about this task?

P1:

1. It's not hard to introduce myself, but it's a big challenge to say it exactly and completely. Sometimes I am wondering that if I really bump into foreigners, how to introduce myself?
2. Try to write down the first script by myself with no other checking information. Try to use the simple sentences to introduce myself, then add some other sentences afterwards.
3. Day 1: try to make an introductory paragraph by my own ideas and the vocabularies I have learned. But it seems to not so good.
Day 2: Check the original draft written yesterday, it seems to miss lots things. But I have an idea that I can introduce my family members and favorite stuff, like that.
Day 3: Decide to go online and check some information. Because I don't really have any ideas.
Day 4: I have roughly finished the draft and checked all the vocabularies. After checking all the information, it can be a piece of introductory paragraph.
Day 5: I finished an English introductory paragraph with the information I've checked. There's no odd right now.
Day 6: I read the draft to my cousin, she said ok, but there's no extraordinary, just like most people's introduction.
Day 7: I try to memorize it, but there came to some problems. It seems like a simple introduction, but I didn't know what to do in English version.
Day 8: After practicing repeatedly, I did make a big confidence. But there's another thing while bumping into the actual situation.
Day 9: It's almost done.
1. Steps: 1. Try to write the introductory script by myself.
2. Practice and check if that's smooth enough.
3. Go check online and find some sentences to make it complete.
4. Ask my cousin to check it. (She is an English teacher) Difficulties: After the preparation and practicing process, it went smoothly. But I didn't know how to use this into daily life. It just likes if I really bump into

some foreigners, I hardly say it.

Solutions: Try to practice more. Speak English in front of the mirror or friends. Do not be afraid to make mistakes. Because if there's some mistake, you would remember it. Hand in the last minute, and I think I can be better.

2. After this task, I found that the most difficult is to speak in front of others. I know I can get improve day by day.

P2:

1. I thought the task is very difficult for myself. I feel that I cannot make it, but I want to try and to see how much I can reach the task. I thought English is very hard.
2. First, I go check the information online, then revise the draft and make the introductory look like what I need.
3. Day 1: Go check the information online.
Day 2: Write down and revise the first paragraph with the information. Read the first paragraph frequently, but there are still some vocabularies not easy to memorize.
Day 3: Don't know how to write the second paragraph. I only read the 1st paragraph today.
Day 4: Write some part of 3rd paragraph about the characteristics. I can memorize the first paragraph today.
Day 5: Start to write the 2nd paragraph. I have been training during my school days, that's why I am very impressed with my sport specialty. I wrote something about my specialty.
Day 6: Finish the introductory script.
Day 7: I read the whole script many times but it's hard to memorize it thoroughly. The phrase "encourage each other" is hard to memorize.
Day 8: I can memorize and read the 1st paragraph thoroughly. But the 2nd and 3rd paragraph are still not smoothly. I still need to read them with the script and cannot read it smoothly.
Day 9: I read the whole script with paper for many times.
Day 10: I stopped while reading the 2nd paragraph every time. I keep improving my 2nd paragraph today.
Day 11: I thought that may be my poor pronunciation makes the bad performance with the 2nd paragraph. I need to practice the 2nd paragraph.
Day 12: I can memorize and read the 1st paragraph, and read the 2nd one with looking at the script but not smoothly with it. I found that I did smoothly speech in the 3rd paragraph with script.
1. Steps: 1. Go check the information online. 2. Write down the 1st draft in Chinese. 3. Translate Chinese draft into English one. 4. Start practicing orally
Difficulties: Don't know how to start the paragraph in English; Don't know certain English vocabularies.
Solution: 1. Go online to check other information. 2. If I

cannot find the information online, I will go to consult my classmates and ask her to help me finish this task.

5. After finishing this task, though I feel there are some difficulties in learning English, I still finished the task in the end. Although I encountered many difficulties during the process, I still can find the answers gradually. This task makes me learn that how to complete a script of self-introduction. Even I am afraid of speaking in English, I still try to practice the script few times every day. I am so happy that I can finish this task.

P3:

3. I felt the task is very interesting. I can complete the task by any possible ways which I can imagine.

4. Use the dictionary in the cellphone to check the vocabularies, then complete the sentences with the grammar I have learned; Use the vocabularies and grammar which I have learned; Translate by the cellphone.

5. Day 1: Translate by the cellphone. Day 2: Translate by the cellphone. Day 3: Translate by the cellphone. Day 4: Write the sentences by myself.

Day 5: Write the sentences by the grammar and vocabularies which I have learned.

Day 6: Check the unknown vocabulary by the cellphone, then checking the grammar by google translation, then adjust by myself.

Day 7: Translate by the cellphone, then revise the grammar by myself.

Day 8: Translate by the cellphone. Day 9: Translate by the cellphone.

1. I cannot know the correctness of the grammar while the information is from the internet. That's the biggest problem during the task-completing process.

P4:

1. I think it's really hard. I am poor at English since I was a child. But I heard the teacher said that I can get some money after finishing this task, I say yes.

2. Revise the previous introduction in high school and ask my friends to help me translate. My friend just came back Taiwan from US.

3. Day 1: Find out the autobiography in high school. Day 2: Revise the old autobiography

Day 3: Spend 50 dollars asking the friend who came from U.S. to translate for me.

Day 4: Translate the old script, and I found it's very difficult.

Day 5: Use the google translation, and try to speak it out.

Day 6: Ask my friend to teach me how to read it.

Day 7: Read once and it didn't go smoothly. Day 8: It was getting smoothly.

Day 9: Try to memorize it

Day 10: Done.

1. Difficulty: Pronunciation.

Solution: Use google translation and consult my friend. Money makes better learner. I don't want to do this homework at the first thought. But after I know the payment for the extra task, I immediately say yes. I thought it's really difficult in the beginning, and it's really very hard while I am doing the homework. But I found that I really got some slightly improvement after the task. It's a nice experience.

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