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日本における英語学習者のリテラシー習得指導の取組について

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【研究ノート】

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Abstract

　　Motivation is a key predictor of success in a variety of language learning situations. However, in EFL contexts such as Japan, learning outcomes can differ to learners with greater opportunities for interaction in the target language. Consequently, it is crucial for educators to reevaluate what motivates their students to achieve learning outcomes. This essay explores engagement in literacy for EFL learners in Japan. With a focus on adult learners, it discusses barriers to effective education such as the deficit model, and highlights alternative teaching methods including implementing funds of knowledge and adopting a multimodal approach, to offer educators opportunities to reconceptualise their teaching pedagogies to facilitate classroom success. The essay concludes by emphasizing the importance of adopting flexible teaching approaches to engage adult language learners, and identifies associated pedagogical implications.

　　さまざまな語学学習において動機が成功を占うカギとなる。しかしながら、対象言語と触れ合うより大きな機会を持っている学習者にとっては、学習成果は学習者個々に異なる場合がある。結果として教育者は学習成果を達成するように何が学生を動機づけできるか再評価することが重要である。本稿は日本における英語学習者のリテラシー習得指導への関心のひきつけを概観する。成人学習者に焦点を置き、欠陥モデルなど効果的な教育の障害となるものについて論じ、教室での授業の成功を促すため教育方法を再構想する機会を教育者に与えるため、知識資産を学習活動に活用し、多様な知覚様式を利用するアプローチを採用することを含めた代替教育方法に目を向ける。本稿は最後に成人学習者を引き付けるために柔軟な教育方法を導入することの重要性を強調し、関連した教育上の問題を特定することを目的とする。

Introduction

　　It is widely accepted that motivation is a key predictor of success in foreign language classrooms, and when students are motivated to learn, they are willing to engage in class activities. Research on factors that motivate language learners often focuses on students' motivation to communicate with target language speakers. However, in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, opportunities for interaction are

often limited (Mori, 2004). The expectancy-value theory is a cognitive-psychological theory of motivation that consists of two components: the expectancy of success in a designated task and the degree to which an individual values the success associated with that task. In this theory, expectancy refers to learners' expectancy of success based on their perceived ability to do a domain-specific task; a writing task for example. The value an individual associates with success in that task can be determined by their perception of how meaningful the task is to their identity and their life, the enjoyment task engagement brings, and negative consequences of engaging in the task (Mori, 2004). Well-acknowledged theories such as the expectancy-value theory demonstrate the importance of adopting teaching pedagogies that motivate, stimulate and engage learners through meaning-focused activities to achieve learning outcomes.

This essay will explore engagement in literacy activities for EFL learners in Japan, with a focus on adult learners. The first section will provide a description of EFL contexts in Japan and identify factors that impact on levels of engagement and motivation in the classroom. The next section will examine the deficit model and discuss the consequences of this approach to English teaching. Following on from that, the essay will focus on the benefits of incorporating funds of knowledge, student voice, a multimodal approach, and turn around pedagogies into teaching pedagogies in order to engage, reengage and motivate EFL learners in literacy studies. The essay will conclude with a summary of the arguments discussed and identify associated pedagogical implications.

Context

In EFL learning contexts in Japan, there has been a growing trend towards the adoption of communicative language teaching, which focuses on language function. However, traditionally, English has been taught through the direct grammar method, which is largely focused on form. In Japanese junior high and senior high schools, the majority of teaching remains via the direct grammar method due to a washback effect from university entrance exams which are designed to test students' English grammar knowledge. Consequently, learners often display competence in English reading and writing skills, but have a deficit in their oral and aural skills (Sakamoto, 2012). In addition, many junior high and senior high school English learners are conditioned to take passive roles in the classroom, and subsequently develop a negative perception of studying English, viewing it as difficult, irrelevant, or boring, and have varying levels of motivation to learn.

Culture shock is another factor that can impact on students' levels of engagement. Culture shock refers to feelings individuals encounter when they are faced with the realities of a different cultural environment, and can occur when a person experiences a feeling of a loss of control when their expectations differ from the cultural reality, and they are confronted with the different and the unknown (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004). Traditionally, English teaching pedagogies involved teachers adopting directive roles. However, in modern EFL classrooms, classes are student-centered and are designed to maximize student-talking time. In addition, the role of the teacher is facilitative rather than directive, sanctioning a shift for learners from passive bystanders to active participants. Although in this case the context is an EFL classroom rather than

a new country, some students experience a degree of culture shock due to the classroom environment and teaching methods being unfamiliar to them, which consequently impacts on their level of engagement.

In EFL contexts in Japan, classes consist predominantly of students from Japanese backgrounds; however, it's not uncommon for classes to include students from other Asian backgrounds such as South Korea and China. Not only do students come from different cultural backgrounds, but they also have different personalities, a range of learner preferences, and varied aptitude for language learning, which needs to be taken into consideration when engaging learners in meaningful class activities.

In recent times English language education has become increasingly popular for adult learners. The relationship between a learner's age and their potential for success in language acquisition has been widely debated, and although there are several anecdotes about older learners who have reached high levels of proficiency, a negative stigma remains which can impact on the motivation of older language learners (Lightbown & Spada, 2001). Younger learners often have more opportunities to use language in environments where there is little expectation for them to speak fluently and accurately from the start, and any attempts made to communicate are often praised or at least accepted. Conversely, adult learners are often in situations that require more complex language use and the expression of more abstract concepts. Not surprisingly, adults often experience embarrassment when they make mistakes and become frustrated when misunderstandings occur, leading to a sense of inadequacy (Lightbown & Spada, 2001). Teaching pedagogies need to consider these factors to help motivate and successfully engage adult learners.

The deficit model

Over the years, teachers have generated counter-productive discourses that deem certain students as being in 'deficit'. Students placed in this category may include students with disabilities, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and students from non-English speaking backgrounds (Comber & Kamler, 2004). From an EFL perspective, the 'deficit model' refers to language education that contains a lopsided emphasis on Anglo-European and Anglo-American culture in English language teaching (ELT). Based on this argument (which is more a set of implicit assumptions rather than a formal theory), learners are not considered truly proficient English speakers until they are able to replicate the speech patterns of native speakers. A 'deficit' approach to English teaching identifies learners who cannot employ English words without making grammatical or pragmatic errors, or are unable to perfectly replicate standard accents, as sub-standard rather than praising general comprehensibility and promoting flexibility in language use (Nault, 2006). The 'deficit' model of English education fails to acknowledge the global reality of modern-day English, and wrongly categorises English learners as flawed unless they resemble native speakers. Furthermore, the model poses problems for non-native English educators, many who are well qualified but face unfair discrimination in ELT job markets (Nault, 2006). The 'deficit' model can have negative repercussions for language learners (particularly adult learners) trying to achieve unrealistic goals, leading to decreased levels of motivation.

With English now being used throughout the world across diverse cultures, educators need to design

curriculum with a multicultural focus that reflects cultural and linguistic awareness (Nault, 2006). According to Nault (2006), language learners need "heightened cultural awareness" (p. 320) to minimise misunderstandings when engaging in intercultural communication. However, awareness should not only focus on other cultures, but also on learners' own cultural identity. Fewer misunderstandings can lead to increased confidence for language learners and motivate them to further engage in intercultural communication. By adopting a more cosmopolitan outlook that recognises other styles of English use and accepts different modes of thought, English educators can engage and motivate their students by demonstrating how English is relevant to their daily lives. Ultimately, teacher expectations, their interactions with students and their enacted curriculums promote classroom success (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Nault, 2006).

Funds of knowledge and student voice

The term 'funds of knowledge' refers to the culturally developed and historically accumulated bodies of knowledge and skills an individual possesses to function within the community. This could include their knowledge in dealing with dynamic social and economic circumstances, or skills such as using the Internet (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2005). Implementing students' funds of knowledge into the curriculum can provide a valuable bridge between formal and informal education, and make literacy more meaningful for language learners (Cheung, 2001). Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo & Collazo (2004) argue that it is crucial for educators not only to focus on the knowledge and discourses, but also to examine the funds through which knowledge and discourses are generated, to make the social construction of these elements visible, and learners' funds of knowledge more easily implemented into classroom activities. Furthermore, by focusing on a learner's out-of-school funds, teachers can gain a sense of which funds shaped students' interactions with texts, and endeavour to use them as tools of engagement (Moje et.al., 2004).

Particularly with adult learners, drawing on their funds of knowledge is a pivotal tool of engagement. Often in classrooms learners are required to respond with 'correct' responses to texts, whose forms remain fixed and meaning undisputed, which neglects to acknowledge the creative and critical resources adult learners can contribute to classroom-based discourses. Written discourse, for example, should be based on shared knowledge building around a topic, tapping in to learners' diverse funds of knowledge to make class activities more meaningful. Offered access to a range of genres, learners can develop an extensive textual repertoire and be empowered to contribute to wider discourse communities (Wallace, 2006).

Research has shown that there is a dominant education paradigm in EFL classrooms across Japan, which adopts a 'cookie-cutter' approach to English education and disregards learners' individual abilities, interests, preferences, and learning goals. Form-focused instruction leaves little opportunity for the development of communicative competence, and it has been widely documented that students find teaching methods of this nature demotivating (Murphey, Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009). Educators from Western backgrounds are often quick to assume that what motivates Western students is equivalent for Asian learners, which can impact negatively on learners' levels of engagement (Life, 2011). By implementing 'student voice' into

teaching pedagogies, "students have the potential for contributing their opinions on a variety of levels, including sharing their views on problems and potential solutions in their schools" (Mitra, 2003, p. 289). Studies have shown that students, especially adult learners, want to be involved in decision-making processes regarding their education, and are most likely to be engaged in learning when they are empowered to make choices and exercise some control over the learning process. In addition, meaningfully-engaged students are more motivated to learn, and achieve classroom success (Murphey et.al., 2009). Student voice can be facilitated through discussion, questionnaires or interviews.

A Multimodal approach

In this day and age, it is essential to gain proficiencies in multiliteracies for successful communication in the modern world. Digital communication is rapidly changing and combines reading and writing with a variety of factors including music, sound, images, film and photography (Walsh, 2010). A multimodal approach to teaching is one "where attention is given to all the culturally shaped resources that are available for meaning making" (Kress et.al., 2005, in Wallace, 2006, p. 22). The term multimodal literacy is used to describe the relationship between processes of literacy (writing, talking, listening, reading) and digital communication technologies, and refers to "meaning-making that occurs through the reading, viewing, understanding, responding to and producing and interacting with multimedia and digital texts" (Walsh, 2010, p. 213).

Changes in social practices of literacy have had both educational and social implications. The popularity and availability of blogs, wikis and social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have facilitated different forms of communication and generated the evolution of new communities (Walsh, 2010). Literacy has been shown to be prevalent in social practices and is not as simplistic as just interpreting and reproducing written discourse. Walsh (2010) argues, "that becoming literate is a complex interaction between the learner's background and language and the context, purpose and discourse of the text" (p. 215), and consequently, literacy practices need to be adapted to acknowledge these changed forms of communication.

It is well documented that a multimodal approach can be used to engage and motivate EFL learners by drawing from their funds of knowledge and facilitating student voice through written and spoken discourse. Furthermore, students today need to be able to adapt to the dynamic nature of new technologies and their associated literacy practices (Walsh, 2010). However, adult learners may find it difficult to engage with a curriculum that is dominated by new technologies which may be overwhelming and demotivating, so when employing a multimodal approach, educators need to find a balance between new and traditional literacies, and carefully consider how they integrate new technologies into the curriculum in order to provide a supportive learning environment to adult learners, and enhance their language and literacy skills (Cloonan, Hutchison & Paatsch, 2011).

Turn around pedagogy

There are several factors that may lead to disengagement for EFL learners. These include, a lack of confidence to communicate in English, culture shock, predominantly form-focused instruction, and topics that are perceived as irrelevant to learners' lives. Particularly in an EFL context, where learners are not living in the target language community, it is crucial for educators to make language instruction meaningful for students.

'Turn around pedagogy', a term coined by Comber & Kamler (2004), refers to transformative teaching practices that are used to reconnect learners who have become disengaged or are at risk of disengagement, with literacy and education. In their study, Comber & Kamler addressed issues such as disrupting deficit discourses and redesigning pedagogy to reengage learners who are perceived as 'at-risk' of not achieving desired language outcomes. They concluded that the adoption of turn around pedagogies enabled teachers to reengage students in literacy education, improved the quality and quantity of learners' literacy skills, and positively impacted on learners' attitude and self-esteem.

Although Comber & Kamler's study was focused on children perceived to be disadvantaged in Australia, turn around pedagogies are also applicable to reengaging EFL learners in Japan. Turn around pedagogies can be used to discard negative perceptions of learners who are not reaching learning objectives due to a lack of motivation or disengagement, and to enable teachers to engineer pedagogic design to help their students reengage and achieve classroom success.

Conclusion

In summary, engaging language learners is crucial for the facilitation of classroom success. When students perceive a task as having little value to their lives or their identity, it has important pedagogical implications for educators. Especially with adult learners of English, who are likely to have developed certain attitudes and beliefs concerning English education in their previous schooling, it can be challenging for teachers to maintain their students' levels of motivation in literacy activities. To encourage students to actively engage in certain tasks, teachers need to be flexible in their approach and chose or modify tasks according to their students' values or needs (Mori, 2004). Furthermore, rather than adopting a 'deficit' approach to language teaching, educators need to provide an encouraging and supportive learning environment that promotes linguistic and cultural awareness.

Teachers need to explore and make evident the different funds of knowledge that adults draw from as they engage with various forms of text, and experiment with teaching methods that merge these funds with funds traditionally valued in EFL classrooms (Moje et.al., 2004). In addition, by placing emphasis on insights gained from student perspectives, teachers can incorporate learners' interests and values into classroom practices, which promotes their commitment, success and motivation in learning (Murphey et.al., 2009). Adopting a multimodal approach can effectively combine learners' print-based literacy learning with modern digital communication technology, reflecting communication practices that are significant in the

current era, and that will continue to be significant in the future for students. However, challenges exist for educators working in these relatively new learning environments, and although there are no concrete guidelines concerning the integration of new and traditional literacies, teachers need to ensure that basic literacy skills are still explicitly taught (Walsh, 2010). Finally, turn around pedagogies can be used to address issues associated with adult EFL learners who become disengaged, and help educators to reconceptualise their teaching pedagogy, which allows them to respond to new challenges differently (Comber & Kamler, 2004).

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