

On the Relationship between College Students' Attitude toward the Internet and their Self-directed English Learning Ability

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Abstract

This article is to investigate the possibility that project-based classes introducing mobile phones can replace the monotony of traditional classes led by teachers as well as they can encourage students to take active part in the classes to some extent. The students in groups choose a genre for their own video projects (e.g., movie, drama, news, documentary, and commercial) and produce the video contents using a mobile phone for presentation made at the end of a semester. In the sense that the students are allowed to do video-based mobile phone projects, they can work independently outside of class, where time and space are more flexible and students are free from the anxiety of speaking or acting in front of an audience. A mobile phone project consists of around five stages done both in and outside of the classroom. All of these stages can be graded independently, including genre selection, drafting of scripts, peer review and revision, rehearsals, and presentation of the video. Feedback is given to students. After the presentation, students filled out a survey questionnaire sheet devised to analyze students' responses toward preferences and level of difficulty of the project activity. Finally, proposals are made for introduction of a better mobile phone-based project classes.

▶ Keyword: Intensive courses, Regular courses, e-learning

I . Introduction

The current knowledge-based society has witnessed enormous changes in every aspect of our daily lives, which crucially depend on the use of various forms of media including the internet and IT appliances such as computers and smartphones. Rapid development of technology has also contributed to such environmental changes in many fields including education as well as industry.

Korea is well-known for well-equipped internet facilities. We often hear complaints about extremely difficult access to the internet outside Korea. As a consequence, students living in Korea enjoy easy access to the internet, basically

everywhere anytime. It is also true that concerns about college students' use of the internet exist due to some negative drawbacks, of which the typical one would be that some students are exposed to internet addiction and that they spend excessive time in playing games and entertainment. Therefore, their use of the internet, which crucially depends on their attitude toward the internet, would, then, play a significant role in their achievements in college life including English learning.

English proficiency, in turn, is not simply one of the qualities needed for college students in this highly

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• Received: 2017. 12. 29, Revised: 2018. 01. 24, Accepted: 2018. 02. 14.

globalized society. To many of them, especially Korean students, it may top the list of requisites that would even determine, in extreme cases, their success or failure in their preparation to enter into the real world after college. English is not simply one of the most important foreign languages any more. Its status has changed to become the world language or global language partly thanks to the wide use of the internet, which is arguably one of the main sources and channels for English learning. Thus, their attitude towards the internet is crucial, partly because they, as adults, should rather employ self-initiated or self-directed learning to enhance their command of English than depend on teachers or classes.

With keen interest in the question of whether college students use the internet for positive functions or purposes and whether they use the internet for English learning, the current research aims to identify the relationship between the two apparently apart entities of the attitude toward the internet and self-directed English learning ability.

Knowles (1975) describes "self-directed learning" to be, "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating their learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes"[1] Unlike formal education using standardized curriculums, it is atypical and autonomous. It is usually appropriate for adult education. It involves all the processes of setting up goals, selecting educational programs, performing tasks, handling related information actively and evaluating the outcomes. The importance of using the internet for learning can not be overemphasized, especially for college students, since it is absolutely the main source of information and knowledge and the most effective method for active process of learning.[2]

The current research intends to see what attitude college students have toward the internet, and what their self-directed English learning is like. Moreover, the relationship between the two factors under discussion will be analyzed with an hope that the findings of the research would help find a solution for their baffling question of how to improve their English proficiency. Considering that a good part of their everyday life is spent in using the internet, positive and, more importantly, effective use of the internet would not fail to facilitate more fruitful growth in their command of the English language.

II. Theoretical Backgrounds

1 Attitude toward the internet

College students are, in principle, required to possess a self-regulating attitude in managing and planning their schedules and tasks. At the same time, once admitted to college, they start enjoying freedom to experience various activities. A part of their freedom would lie in the use of internet: in terms of how and how much, for example, they might use the internet. In some sense, society often expects them to be equipped with a good ability to use computer and the internet, and encourages them to use the internet as a path to reach a professional world.[3]

It is true that the internet can be used for them to widen their views and seek various information and knowledge, which would help grow and succeed as an individual as well as a student. However, it is also true that some negative side effects result from excessive and unfruitful use of the internet, which could be summarized as the cover term 'internet addiction.' This would often lead many students to psychological problems, which would, in turn, ruin their academic performance. Many researches, as a consequence, have been conducted on this negative side of the coin, but not much sanative approach has been reported on how to let them have a positive attitude toward the internet. Thus, it might be meaningful, first of all, to identify what attitude college students have toward the internet, which might be expected to have an effect on many aspects of their college lives including their English learning.

2. Self-directed English learning ability

Development of information and communication technology(ICT) has made it possible for anyone to have an easy access to meaningful contents in the internet and mobile appliances. Thus, the use of media contents accessible through a variety of media including the internet has become an important issue in self-initiated or self-directed learning in the field of foreign language learning.[4] It is not difficult to make a long list of reasons for the importance of the internet in English learning as well as teaching. Benefits and opportunities provided by the internet for learning a foreign language might not simply come from taking lessons but include a variety of other areas as well. Molchanova (2015), for example, classified them into four groups: (i) language lectures and lessons containing new vocabulary, (ii)

testing the level of language proficiency, (iii) watching and listening to video files, and (iv) direct communication with native speakers or other internet users.[5]

Such self-directed learning is an indispensable concept for continuing or life-long education. It emphasizes a learner's self-leading role in learning. In general, it involves both self-leading learning and self-controlling learning.[6] From the perspective of students, they use the strategy of self-directed English learning by watching video materials in the form of dramas, movies or even UCC files.[7] However, the most effective channel would be perhaps the internet. Some researches have proposed a set of suggestions regarding the use of the internet for self-directed English learning.[8][9]

The field of English education or learning has witnessed a big transition of its focus: from written language to spoken language, from knowledge to performance, from good scores to good command, and from teacher-oriented to student-oriented. Self-directed learning is arguably the most effective strategy for improving English for any student at any level. Thus, it should be worthwhile to identify one's self-directed English learning ability of college students. As claimed by Toffoli & Sockett's survey (2015), however, English teachers are conscious of their students' use of many types of informal online learning practices but neither know much of the specifics nor make use of this awareness in their courses.[10]

III. Research Methods

1. Research subjects

The present research proceeded with a group of subjects attending at N University located in Cheonan, Choonnam Province. A group of 105 students taking required general education classes including a course called 'Global English' were selected as the research subjects and were asked to respond to the questions in a questionnaire survey. Their demographic characteristics are illustrated below in Table 1. The group consisted of 43(41%) male students and 62 female(59%). The distribution in terms of years spread throughout the four years: 16 freshmen(15.2%), 23 sophomores(21.9%), 38 juniors(36.2%) and 28 seniors(26.7%). Their major fields also showed a wide variety of spectrum: 18 business-related(17.1%), 17

health-related(16.2%), 15 arts & sports(14.3%), 27 welfare(25.7%), 6 engineering(5.7%) and 22 humanities(21%).

Table 1. General Characteristics of the Subjects

category	characteristics	number	frequency(%)
gender	male	43	41
	female	62	59
year	freshmen	16	15.2
	sophomore	23	21.9
	junior	38	36.2
	senior	28	26.7
major	business	18	17.1
	health	17	16.2
	arts & sports	15	14.3
	welfare	27	25.7
	engineering	6	5.7
	humanities	22	21.0
total		105	100.0

2. Research Scales

2.1 Attitude towards the internet

The factor of the attitude towards the internet was measured by adopting Chang's(2002) research tool.[11] The measurement items include such statements as the following: 'The internet would enhance the quality of life of the human race', 'Using the internet for learning and studying is necessary for everyone', 'The internet is helpful for my studies', and 'I am more knowledgeable of the use of the internet than my friends.' The tool consisted of a total of 10 items also measured on a five-point Likert style scale. A higher score would mean a higher level of attitude towards the internet.

2.2 Self-directed English learning ability

The current research adopted M. S. Kim's (2012) self-directed English learning ability test to measure the subjects' self-directed English learning ability.[12] This scale was a slightly modified version of H. Y. Kim & M. J. Kim's (2009) model,[13] which, in turn, modified Guglielmino's(1977) Self-directed Learning Readiness Scale to be applicable to the subject of English.[14] The present scale was developed and intended for college students, and consisted of a set of 20 measurement items. The statements can be exemplified by the following statements: "I like learning English", "I am responsible for

my English proficiency”, “Learning English is enjoyable”, and “I would like to keep learning English to be a successful person in society.” A total of 20 items were measured on a five-point Likert scale. A higher score would refer to a higher level of self-directed English learning ability.

3. Analysis method

The data collected from the respondents were analyzed by using the statistical program of SPSS WIN version 21.0. First, a frequency analysis was conducted to identify their general characteristics. It was followed by descriptive statistic analysis, which revealed the mean and standard deviation of the scales under analysis. Then, a correlation analysis was performed to identify the relationship between the two variables of attitude toward the internet and self-directed English learning ability. Finally, a regression analysis revealed the effect of attitude toward the internet on self-directed English learning ability.

IV. Research results

The analysis of the collected data measured on the two scales mentioned above revealed the following results.

1. Descriptive statistics of internet attitude and self-directed English learning ability

It was found, as illustrated in Table 2, the mean for the internet attitude was obtained at 2.85 (SD =.593), whereas that for self-directed English learning ability was 2.74 (SD=.617).

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of internet attitude and self-directed English learning ability

	N	min	max	mean	SD
internet attitude	105	1	4	2.85	.593
self-directed English learning	105	1	4	2.74	.617
significant value	105				

One might wonder whether there exist any difference in descriptive statistics depending on subgroups of research subjects. Table 3 below exhibits the mean and

the standard deviation of the internet attitude of the subgroups according to their gender, grades and major fields.

Table 3. Attitude toward the internet

Group	N	Mean	SD
Male	62	2.92	.563
Female	43	2.75	.629
Total	105	2.85	.593
Year			
1	16	2.75	.662
2	23	3.05	.724
3	28	2.99	.549
4	38	2.67	.449
	105	2.85	.593
Major			
Welfare	27	2.86	.638
Health	17	2.65	.389
Humanities	22	3.24	.498
Business	18	2.76	.632
Engineering	6	2.58	.752
Art&Sports	15	2.70	.593
	105	2.85	.593

As shown in Table 3, male and female students did not exhibit any significant difference in their attitude toward the internet. Although the sample size is not big enough, it seems still surprising and interesting that there is neither a gradual increase nor a gradual decrease according to their grades. The sophomores showed the greatest score in the internet attitude, whereas the seniors the lowest, which is also contrary to our expectation. If this can be verified as a reality with a large group of subjects, it would be worthwhile to investigate possible reasons for why. At this moment, a possible assumption might be that seniors are more likely to be under a great deal of pressure about seeking employment and thus to have negative attitude toward many things including the internet. Another interesting thing to note would be that, though the sample size is not big enough, again, the students majoring in humanities were found to have greater scores than any other areas. Moreover, engineering students responded with the lowest score, which is also not expected.

Table 4, in turn, shows the descriptive statistics the self-directed English learning ability of the subgroups of subjects.

Table 4. Self-directed English learning ability

Group	N	Mean	SD
Male	62	2.74	.639
Female	43	2.73	.591
Total	105	2.74	.617
Year			
1	16	2.88	.525
2	23	2.78	.807
3	28	2.80	.571
4	38	2.60	.548
	105	2.74	.617
Major			
Welfare	27	2.75	.549
Health	17	2.36	.595
Humanities	22	2.99	.691
Business	18	2.81	.549
Engineering	6	2.58	.882
Art&Sports	15	2.76	.456
	105	2.74	.617

As in the internet attitude, gender was not a big factor in measurement of this scale of self-directed English learning ability. Male and female students recorded a similar score: 2.74 and 2.73, respectively. It seems interesting, again, that the senior group and the engineering groups marked the lowest score in self-directed English learning ability: 2.60 and 2.58, respectively. One thing to note would be that these subgroups also ranked at the bottom of the list in the internet attitude. It would be interesting if any plausible reason can be found for this low scoring of these groups, perhaps with extensive analysis of big data from a large group of subjects. Otherwise, it might lead us to assume that it is not the matter of their grades or their major fields but the matter of individuals.

2. Correlation analysis of internet attitude and self-directed English learning ability

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to see the correlation between college students' internet attitude and self-directed English learning ability. The analysis obtained the following results shown below in Table 5.

Table 5. Correlation between the factors

		[1]	[2]
self-directed English learning ability [1]	Pearson coefficient	1	.639**
	significance probability		.000
internet attitude [2]	Pearson coefficient	.639**	1
	significance probability	.000	

** . p<0.01

As shown in Table 5, the correlation analysis found

that the two factors showed a statistically significant correlation at the significance level of 0.01. That is, the correlation between internet attitude toward the internet and self-directed English learning ability was obtained at .639, which showed that there existed a significant correlation between the two factors.

3. Effect of internet attitude toward the internet on self-directed English learning ability

A regression analysis of the effect of their internet attitude on self-directed English learning ability revealed that the former had a significant influence on the latter, as illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6. Effect of internet attitude on self-directed English learning ability

dependent variable	independent variable	B	Beta	t	P
self-directed English learning ability	constant	.846			
	internet attitude	.664	.639	8.424	.000***

***p<.001

V. Concluding Remarks

In reality, college students exert every effort for self-management and self-development to get prepared to enter into society after college. Their access to and use of the internet accounts for a good portion of their everyday life, either for academic purposes and also for pleasure. For example, they depend much on the internet for their projects and assignments of classes. However, it seems that they do not make good use of the internet for the purpose of improving their English proficiency. Rather, offline classes, taken either on or off campus, are preferred by many students, usually through intensive courses during the vacation. It is important to train them to handle the internet, but it is also important to utilize the internet for a variety of purposes including English learning, as it is accessible anytime anywhere. It was found that their attitude toward the internet had a significant impact on their self-directed English learning ability. Thus, a positive change in their attitude toward the internet would eventually result in a positive change in their English proficiency. As mentioned above, ESL

teachers' level of perception of the importance of online or mobile English learning falls short of that of ESL students. Thus, the findings of this research might shed light on the change that ESL teachers should make in the way language practices are encouraged in their curriculum. Thus, colleges should arrange a systematic plan and curriculum of English studies that involve effective use of the internet, so that students can perform self-directed learning activities to improve their command of the English language.

For further researches in the future, we propose a couple of suggestions for the possible topics of analysis. First, one might examine whether a significant difference is found in the impact of the attitude toward the internet on the self-directed English learning ability depending on the research subjects' gender, major fields and grades. It would be more than meaningful if a generalized conclusion with possible support from big data can be made on the topic.

Given that college students' internet attitude would have a significant influence on their English language learning ability, another meaningful and natural step would be to ask whether improved internet attitude would result in enhanced English learning ability. It should be admitted that the current research has not presented a real curriculum of using the internet for English learning. The follow-up research is expected to design such an educational program and report the actual differences between the pre-test and post-test so that the importance and effect of using the internet for self-directed English learning can be empirically proved. For that purpose, two groups of subjects may be selected for analysis: an experimental group and a control group. After measuring the items under analysis as a pretest, a structured education program may be implemented for a certain period of time to improve students' attitude toward the internet. A post-test, then, would improvement of that their attitude toward the internet, perhaps in contrast to the control group. As a consequence, their self-directed English learning ability is expected to improve as well, since it is significantly influenced by their attitude toward the internet.

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