

# Building Language-Learning Environments to Help Technological University Students Develop English Independent Learning

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*This action research discusses how the teacher integrates the technology-based Self-access Center and Web-based environments into an integrated language skills English class at a technological university in Taiwan. In this study, Web-based environments include English learning Web sites, and communication tools including e-mail, MSN, Instant Messenger, and Skype. This study was an out-of-class project aimed at motivating students to make use of various technology-based environments outside the classroom in order to develop integrated language skills and communicate with others. This research seeks to examine the benefits of using technology-based environments out of the classroom and to inspire English as a foreign language (EFL) educators interested in assisting their students to work toward learner autonomy/learner independence by employing authentic and global environments. Data were obtained from students through interviews, reflective diaries and a questionnaire given out at the end of the term. Collected data indicated that although difficulties and problems were encountered, students maintained a positive attitude toward independent learning in various technology-based learning environments and they intended to continue to use Web-based environments for practicing language skills and communicating with others. In this project, the teacher's support, encouragement, and guidance were regarded as effective and necessary. In addition, motivation, self-confidence and taking responsibility for learning were considered to play vital roles in students' independent learning processes. Further research needs to focus on whether or not students did continue to use Web-based environments for independent learning after the course ended. Recommendations are made for improvements to EFL pedagogy and learning processes in the Taiwanese context, in regards to study results.*

All learning depends, in part, on the efforts of the learners themselves. However, many technological college and university students in Taiwan do not have good learning habits and are seldom challenged to take responsibility for the direction of their own learning. Instead, they are simply accustomed to receiving knowledge from their teachers' lectures. Normally, there are only two hours offered for non-English majors to study English in a large classroom at a technological college or university. Limited time in large classes makes it challenging for students to efficiently learn English in EFL courses.

In recent years, the concepts of learner autonomy and learner independence have acquired important roles within the context of language learning (Little, 1991; see Thanasoulas, 2000). Nevertheless, learner autonomy/learner independence does not mean the teacher becomes superfluous. On the contrary, teachers play a crucial role in creating environments to facilitate and motivate learners to take responsibility for their learning, develop good learning habits, and become independent learners. Teachers also help students be better able to control learning environments so that they can practice language skills and communicate with others both in and out of the classroom -- even after a course ends. Simultaneously, it is imperative that teachers help their learners become aware of and notice the strategies they already use or may possibly use if the teachers want to help the learners have effective control over their own learning (Thanasoulas, 2000).

This paper emphasizes the value of learning. It argues that EFL teachers play a vital role as facilitators to provide learning activities and environments outside the classroom for students to take responsibility for their own learning, develop language skills and learning strategies, enhance learning habits, and work toward learner autonomy/learner independence. What language learning activities and environments are useful for motivating students to increase their English language skills and promote their English independent learning? As we know, technology has greatly influenced our modern age, and has allowed us to access great amounts of information (O'Banion, 1997). This has also had a profound and significant effect on Taiwanese society and on education. As we found, most students have regularly communicated or chatted online at home or outside the classroom (Liou, 2000). Lin (2004) argues that teachers need to consider integrating students' favorites into teaching to promote students' learning and motivation and to help them appreciate human interaction through the use of technology in language learning. Furthermore, technology offers an authentic and global venue, which is an enormously motivating environment that inspires students to learn, perform in another language, and practice language skills (Hanson-Smith, 2000; Pinkman, 2005). Paulsen (2001) indicated that we do not need to question whether to utilize technologies in foreign language instruction, but we need to give much attention as to how to control it and guide our students to use it.

This action research talks about how the teacher integrates the technology-based Self-access Center and Web-based environments into an integrated language skills English class at a technological university in Taiwan. In this study, Web-based environments include English learning Web sites, and communication tools, including e-mail, *MSN*, *Instant Messenger* and *Skype*. This study was an out-of-class project aimed at motivating students to take advantage of various technology-based environments outside the classroom in order to develop integrated language skills and communicate with others. This research seeks to explore the usefulness of using technology-based environments out of the classroom and to inspire EFL educators interested in assisting their students to work toward learner autonomy/learner independence by accessing authentic and global environments.

## Relevant Literature: Learner Independence and Learner Autonomy

Notions such as teaching learners how to learn, learner autonomy and learner independence have significantly influenced EFL language education (Oxford, 1990; Holec, 1981; Dickinson, 1993; Thanasoulas 2000; see Agiorgitis, 2003; see Pinkman, 2005). According to Thanasoulas (2000), there are numerous definitions of autonomy and other synonyms for it in relevant literature, such as "independence" (Sheerin, 1991), "language awareness" (van Lier 1996), and "self-direction" (Candy, 1991). A common distinction is made between the terms learner independence and learner autonomy (Pinkman, 2005). Nonetheless, learner autonomy and learner independence in language teaching are more or less synonyms or used interchangeably (Benson and Voller, 1997; Agiorgitis, 2003; Pinkman, 2005). However, according to Pinkman (*ibid*), the meanings of each may cause confusion.

According to Little (1991:4), learner autonomy is defined as a "capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action." Berge defined learner autonomy as the notion of being ready to act independently and to cooperate with others as a socially responsible person (Berge, 1995). Holec (1981; see Benson & Voller, 1997; see Thanasoulas, 2000; see Pinkman, 2005) defined learner autonomy as taking responsibility for one's learning and being in charge of all the decisions in the learning process — for instance choosing methodology, and evaluating what has been learned. In fact, for Holec (see Olmos, 1998), to be an autonomous learner is to be the manager of his or her own learning processes.

Independent learning, as defined by Sheerin (1997; see Pinkman, 2005), involves learning how to learn or strategy development in the fundamental principle. According to Dickinson (1993; see Agiorgitis, 2003), independent learners are better able to understand what is being taught, achieve learning objectives, monitor their own learning, and use appropriate learning strategies. Benson and Voller (1997) have elaborated that both the terms "autonomy" and "independence" imply that students take a greater degree of control over the content and methods of learning than is usual in classroom language learning contexts.

This study is concerned with facilitating and assisting students to be responsible for control over the content and methods of learning, and to develop their integrated language skills, critical reflection, learning strategies and communication skills outside the classroom. The term independent learning will be considered to involve both the ideas of learner autonomy and learner independence.

## The Importance of Teacher Autonomy

Learner autonomy or learner independence does not indicate that the teacher becomes redundant. Instead, learner autonomy or learner independence depends on teacher autonomy. Both teachers, as well as learners, should be fully involved and open to challenge and change if they want to achieve the optimum effectiveness of language teaching and learning. Little (2000) indicates that in order to help learners become autonomous language learners, first of all teachers have to guide their learners to accept responsibility for their own learning. Secondly, students are guided to be reflectively engaged in planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning with the support of writing. Thirdly, from the earliest stages teachers should require their learners to use the target language to express their own meanings by social interaction with others.

Teachers play a crucial role in creating environments to facilitate and motivate learners to take responsibility for their learning, develop good learning habits, become independent learners and be better able to control learning environments to practice language skills and communicate with others both in and out of the classroom -- even after the course ends. Simultaneously, it is imperative for teachers to help their learners to notice the strategies they already use or may possibly use if they want to help learners control their own learning effectively (Thanasoulas, 2000). Thanasoulas (2000) points out that many factors, such as learner needs, motivation, learning strategies, and language awareness, have to be taken into consideration for the development of learner autonomy. The author also acknowledges that autonomy is a process, not a product. Thus, one does not become autonomous, but only works toward autonomy.

### The Value of Technology in Language Learning

Technology has affected our learning styles and has allowed us to obtain a great amount of information (Chapelle, 2001). This phenomenon has also had a profound and significant effect on education in Taiwanese society. According to Liou's investigation of students' perception of using the Internet, most students have regularly communicated or chatted online at home or outside the classroom (Liou, 2002). Meanwhile, Lin (2004) argues that teachers need to consider integrating students' preferences into teaching to promote students' learning and motivation and to help students appreciate social interaction through the use of technology in language learning.

The integration of computers into language teaching and learning has been widely accepted by many educators and researchers (Warschauer and Whittaker, 1997; Warschauer and Healey, 1998; White and Weight, 2000). How to take advantage of online resources available via the Internet to facilitate language learning has also been a critical issue discussed by numerous researchers (Felix, 1999; Warschauer, 1995a, 1995b; Singhal, 1997; Sperling, 1997; Paulsen, 2001; Kung & Chuo, 2002). Paulsen (2001) indicated that we do not need to question whether to utilize electronic technology in foreign language instruction, but we need to give much attention as to how to control it and guide our students to use it.

Many EFL instructors are taking advantage of technology to provide students with opportunities to continue learning outside the classroom because, for instance, technology allows learners to work at their own pace and to have the freedom to choose their own materials (Blin, 1999; see Pinkman, 2005). Moreover, technology and multimedia resources and Web-based learning environments provide students with authentic and global environments and interesting tools to achieve learner autonomy or learner independence and offer them an opportunity to learn, practice and communicate with others in the target language outside the classroom (Hanson-Smith, 2000; Pinkman, 2005).

Findings from Furmanovsky's (1999a, 1999b, 2000; see Nozawa, 2002) intercultural keypal projects indicate that keypal exchanges across cultures can be effective, and a motivating factor for developing intercultural communication. Furmanovsky (2000) further suggests that EFL teachers can use their home pages to design e-mail exchange projects. Dahlin (1997) and Muehleisen (1997, 1998a, 1998b) also argue that e-mail exchanges can motivate language learners by giving them a chance to develop language skills while, at the same time, forming a relationship with a person from another culture. Von Kolln (1998) offers a theoretical frame-

work and practical applications of the e-mail tandem in foreign language learning and suggests the appropriate use of the international e-mail tandem for motivating students to develop learner autonomy. Robb (1996), and Kitao and Kitao (1997) provide suggestions for finding keypals, and conclude that keypal exchanges can be worthwhile for students, but note that they might not be very successful the first time someone undertakes an exchange. Nozawa (2002) points out that in the initial stages of e-mail exchanges, students may encounter difficulty because they do not have much experience in written exchange. As a result, they may not know what to write in follow-up letters. It is clear that keypal instructors should provide topics for e-mail discussion, by specified dates, in printed or online syllabi.

## **Learner Attitudes and Motivation**

Wenden (1998) defines attitudes as motivation, beliefs and evaluations. According to the author, learners' beliefs about their role in the learning process, and their capability as learners are two types of vital attitudes learners keep. Brown (1987) indicates that awareness of self, of others, and of the culture of the target language can be part of attitudes. Positive attitudes are helpful for increasing motivation while negative attitudes have a different result. According to Dornyei (1998), most scholars accept that motivation is one of the primary forces that affect whether second language (L2) or foreign language learning can be successful or not because motivation offers the key factor to initiate L2 learning and then maintain it during the long and often tiresome learning process.

Thanasoulas (2000) points out that in language learning, learners are motivated in different ways and to various degrees. For example, some learners like doing grammar and memorizing, others want to speak and role-play; while still others prefer reading and writing, but avoid speaking. Finding a good job and being interested in the culture of the target language can be sources of learners' motivation. Furthermore, a learner's willingness to be responsible for her own learning and her confidence in her ability as a learner can be possible ways of promoting learner autonomy.

## **Research Methodology**

### ***Research Questions***

The research questions that guide this work are as follows:

1. What problems and difficulties do students encounter when they are independent learning in technology-based environments?
2. How effective are the strategies used by the teacher to facilitate English independent learning?
3. What are students' attitudes toward their independent learning experiences?

### **Participants**

In this action research, a first-year English class was selected from National Kaohsiung Marine University in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. At this university, all the new students had been

graded into three levels (A, B, C) according to the results of their English scores in the placement test. Consequently, the selected class was in the Level A. The class was an integrated skills class, which met two hours a week for English class. There were 46 students in the class, ranging in age from 18 to early 20s. Among them were 19 students majoring in Shipping Transportation and Management, seven students majoring in Marine Environmental Engineering, 10 in Information Management, and the remainder in Logistics Management. Most participants were females. Twelve were males. Most participants graduated from vocational senior high schools.

### **Context and Procedure**

This project applies action research. Action research, for the purposes of this project, is defined as when teachers conduct inquiry about how to take specific steps to systematically improve educational practice by groups of participants, according to their own actual actions and their own reflection on the outcome of those actions (Hopkins, 1985; McNiff, 1988). This research project lasted approximately 18 weeks. In order to help students build various language-learning environments, the technology-based Self-access Center and communication technology tools, such as *Microsoft MSN Messenger*, *Yahoo Messenger*, *Skype* and e-mail were introduced at the beginning of the project. Suggestions for finding international keypals were offered.

Simultaneously, these participants were required to do out-of-class assignments and activities, as follows:

- (a) Listen to the textbook CD and then read it aloud every day.
- (b) Write a paragraph (at least 120 words) of summaries each from the textbook and each from outside reading every week.
- (c) Use English to write e-mails or chat with their teacher, partners or keypals from abroad through communication technology tools every week. They were asked to write at least two e-mails in English every week. Alternatively, they could choose to talk to at least five international people online, and then write a report regarding their experience socially interacting with others across cultures. As soon as they finished their written assignments, they were asked to upload them to their teacher's Web site.
- (d) Every week they should do at least two general proficiency tests (GEPT) from the Self-access Center Web site. Their scores were recorded on computer. The teacher collected their written assignments and test records as part of their portfolios for assessment.

### **Research Methods**

Diaries are often used to offer students the opportunities to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning, recognize any problems they encounter, and find remedy (Wenden, 1998).

Semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires are two kinds of retrospective self-reports to reflect on learning. Cohen and Hosenfeld (1981) point out that self-reporting is a useful tool in understanding the language learning process. According to Wenden (1998), self-reports can be a means of raising awareness of learners' strategies and the need for constant evaluation of techniques, goals and outcomes. The author indicates that without awareness, learners will never be entirely autonomous.

In this project, the participants were asked to keep diaries regarding how they studied English (see Appendix A). In addition, informal and formal interviews were undertaken. During recesses or online, the teacher often talked with participants to discover their difficulties and what support or guidance these students needed in their language learning processes. Depending on the participants' preference and convenience, semi-structured questions were asked of individuals or of small groups (consisting of two to five students) during meetings at the teacher's office. A structured questionnaire (see Appendix B) was given out at the end of the class. The interviews and questionnaire were used to assess numerous factors, such as: learners' attitudes toward their assignments, activities, and learning environments; the effectiveness of the assignments/activities and learning environments in encouraging students' out-of-class learning; whether or not students would continue learning via computer support in the future; problems students encountered; techniques they resorted to to deal with these problems; and learners' views on optimum strategies or ways of developing integrated language skills.

## Results and Discussion

### *(I) Difficulties and Problems Encountered*

Regardless of the students' ample online experience, they said they had never thought of chatting with someone online in English and had no experience in using English to communicate with others, specifically foreigners, in both spoken and written forms. All of the participants reported that they experienced the feeling of being shocked when they first used English to chat with others, especially with foreigners. Many stated they felt especially frustrated when there were language barriers. Some of them reported that they did not know how to talk online or what to talk about online at the onset of class.

In the initial stages, linguistic problems were major roadblocks for students who felt frustrated by the learning process. Many students reported that they lacked the vocabulary, reading, and listening skills necessary to understand ESL Web sites quickly and efficiently. Some claimed to be intimidated by Web pages that featured only English text. All reported that when they were given written assignments as homework, at first they panicked because they did not have any English writing experience. All claimed that this learning experience was very different than any others they had previously.

Besides linguistic problems, there were some other difficulties, such as not being able to download sounds, and getting disconnected while communicating with others online. Furthermore, some students did not have personal computers and there were not enough computers at the university for students to do their own assignments and access the Internet. In addition, some students complained that it was quite time consuming to learn online.

Regardless of all of these problems and difficulties, after three or four months almost all the participants reported that they overcame their fears, built up their confidence, and acquired

some keypals from many countries to communicate with regularly. Many responded that they would continue to learn and use the target language to communicate with others in technology-based environments because they found it interesting and useful to learn through these venues.

## **(2) Teacher's Strategies for Facilitating Independent Learning**

All the participants reported that they appreciated various technology-based learning environments outside the classroom that the teacher constructed for them to learn and use the target language to communicate with others. Most students liked to use the Self-access Center for self-study because it was air-conditioned and had 55 computers. As one participant reported:

*After class, I often go to Self-access Center and read the Biz magazine, Live ABC magazine, and Studio Classroom. Sometimes, I use the computer to play with CDs, and then I listen to the CD. I want to improve my listening comprehension, pronunciation and intonation. It is great that English becomes easy and interesting to me.*

However, three students said that they did not have time to study there, but they liked to learn English from the Self-access Center's Web site. It was found that most of them did two tests of the GEPT (General English Proficiency Test) from the center's Web site every week. According to one participant, "Using GEPT is helpful because it helps my abilities of reading and listening."

Most participants completed the majority of required assignments. Their written assignments were satisfactory. Students who did not complete assignments satisfactorily were requested to redo and resubmit them. Most reported that they learned writing by writing, and gave a positive evaluation of written assignments. According to their diaries, many did not know how to write summaries about the stories they read and were instructed and showed examples of written summaries by paraphrasing and condensing the original material without changing the original meaning (Hartmann and Blass, 1999). At the end of the class, most of their written assignments were quite satisfactory and many even enjoyed writing summaries. Two participants responded that written summaries helped them to understand the content of the text more clearly and quickly. However, one student complained about having too many written assignments.

Another participant noted in her diary:

*I often used the teacher's Web site (<http://203.64.167.162/teacher/>) because it links with the Web site of the Self-access Center (<http://203.64.167.161>) and other English learning Web sites that she recommended. It is quite convenient. Moreover, there are some other Web sites, which provide good English learning environments, as well. For example, Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab ([www.esl-lab.com](http://www.esl-lab.com)) helps train my comprehension. At the beginning, I can't understand what is said, but I gradually catch the key words after a period of time. Whenever, I have free time, I use these Web sites to learn English.*

A student said, "I am used to surfing the English learning Web sites to extend my knowledge and my vocabulary. I will continue to do this when I'm free." It was found most students considered that English learning Web sites to be interesting and beneficial.

In their diaries, many participants wrote that they were thankful for the teacher, who often offered them immediate and necessary support and encouragement. As one participant reported, "It is good for us to get our teacher's telephone numbers, e-mail address, Skype search code, and Web site address. It is very convenient for us to contact her if we need any help." The students also noted their appreciation for much of the encouragement they received from the teacher, especially when they were frustrated. Most students enjoyed helping each other and working with others. However, two students responded that group work did not fit them. As one said, "Sometimes I have free time, but others don't. I can do my own work on my own, I don't need to wait for others to have free time."

According to some participants, at first they did not know how to talk, what to talk about or what to write in emails with their international keypals. They said it was quite useful to be instructed how to initiate conversation with international keypals, how to introduce themselves and which interesting questions and topics to use to start and continue conversations online. As a result, they enjoyed talking with international keypals online.

Most students found that the strategy instruction on reading and writing in English was important because it helped them improve both skills. As one wrote in her diary:

*Now when I am engaged in reading some English materials, which might be difficult for me to read or I am not be familiar with, I still can catch the main ideas of the contents by using the strategies I learned from the class. Now I have learned to think in English instead of translating when I am doing my assignments outside the classroom.*

E-mail keypal exchanges were found to be not very successful. Only four students used e-mail frequently to practice English e-mail writing with international keypals. Many students responded that communicating with international keypals through Skype, Yahoo Messenger or MSN was a nice way to improve English. Those resources helped them get to know people from other countries, and to understand their cultures. It also allowed foreigners to learn more things about Taiwan. As one participant proudly reported, "Outside the classroom, I often use Skype. I already have many friends from different countries. I like to share Taiwanese culture with them, and they share theirs in return. It is fun to know their daily life and their points of view." Most participants even made friends with international people and talked with them regularly. According to the students, they preferred to use Skype to talk with their international keypals because they were very eager to practice their speaking skills. As a whole, international keypal exchanges were satisfactory because through them participants not only practiced using their English skills, but also learned much about different cultures.

### **(3) Students' Attitudes toward Independent Learning Experiences**

It was interesting to find that at the beginning of the project most students were very dependent and did not possess any learning habits at all. For instance, one participant said,

"I am a dependent learner. I want the teacher to explain things to me." Another participant stated, "I feel like a ship without a captain." Many of them reported that, "I do not have any learning habits. I usually study just one day or two days before mid-term or final examinations." However, many students gradually changed and acquired learner autonomy and learner independence. For example, after completing four months of the project, one participant mentioned in her diary:

*I was not independent at all. Before I really depended on the teacher to tell me to do this and to do that because I thought that I did not know anything. Now I don't like the teacher to tell me what to do. Before I liked it and I accepted it. But now I like to choose books and read them. I have learned a lot of new vocabulary from the books I am interested in.*

Reflecting very critically about her change as a language learner, another participant reported that some months after she started working at the Self-Access Center, she became aware of the way she changed. According to her, at first she wanted to have a teacher help her and then she became more independent. For example, she liked to choose learning materials for her needs. She evaluated herself and knew what she needed.

It was also interesting to find that many students' attitudes toward the target language changed from negative to positive. For example, some students reported that: "I used to hate English," but now "I like English" or "I love English." After five months, according to their reports, most of the participants were positive about independent learning through ESL Web sites, communication technology tools and the Self-access Center. Many stated it was great to have opportunities to learn to communicate with people from other countries in English through *Skype*, *MSN*, *Yahoo Messenger* or e-mail. They believed that doing so was an efficient way to help develop language skills, computer skills, telephone skills and communication skills. However, two participants stated that they did not like to use these methods to practice English because it was also easy to meet strange or odd people that way.

There are some other strategies students used to create their own language learning activities and environments for developing independent learning. Most of them stated that they enjoyed watching movies to learn English. As one student pointed out:

*I always rent the English movies at home on weekends. Usually, I change the subtitles into English. It is hard for me to understand the whole movie the first time because the actors speak English very fast. Now, I can understand the movies better and I'm happy my English keeps progressing. I always write down the words I don't know and look them up in the dictionary after watching a movie. As I know more idioms, slang and vocabulary in this way, it's easier for me to learn more.*

Two other participants stated that on Saturdays or Sundays they usually went to church to take classes and talk with foreign missionaries in English. Some other activities were reported as effective for independent learning including listening to English songs, listening to English programs on the radio, and reading English novels. According to another participant, "It is important to use English in daily life. I often talk to my roommate in English. At the

same time, I usually send English messages to my roommate and my classmates. I also use TV, CDs, or textbooks for learning English."

All of them agreed that independent learning was an important way to learn more. In the questionnaire, when asked about their recollections of the experience, most students stated it was a positive experience. Most appreciated the Web sites' rich content and variety of materials. Some said the best thing the Web sites offered was the possibility of interacting with people from different countries and cultures. These findings suggested that students' attitudes toward independent learning were positive. Motivation, self-confidence and taking responsibility for learning were also found to play very significant roles in language learning.

## Conclusion

In summary, technology-based environments can be rich, authentic, global, interesting and useful resources that offer students opportunities to practice and use their integrated target language skills and to communicate with others outside the classroom. This study supports the hypothesis that technology-based environments can be beneficial for developing independent learning outside the language classroom. However, all participants encountered difficulties to some degrees by using the technology-based environments for the first time. Fortunately, the teacher offered immediate and necessary support and encouragement sufficient to prevent the students from being overwhelmed by difficulties. Afterwards, most students had an overall positive attitude toward independent learning in technology-based environments and were interested in continuing to learn and use the target language to communicate with others in these venues even after the class ended.

This study indicates the interdependence of teacher and learner autonomy. Motivation, self-confidence and taking responsibility for learning play very significant roles in language learning. Thus, the teacher and learners should be in it together, fully involved, open to challenge and change. Simultaneously, it is crucial for the teacher to create quality language learning environments to motivate and encourage learners to accept responsibility for their own learning; to reflect, monitor, and evaluate their own learning; to overcome difficulties and build up self-confidence; to use the target language to communicate with others; to become aware of the strategies; and to develop their strategies and language skills.

Hopefully, this study will inspire EFL educators to consider incorporating various technology-based environments -- especially authentic, communicative, global venues -- into their EFL pedagogy for the purpose of inspiring their students to work toward learner independence/learner autonomy. Furthermore, it also suggests that EFL instructors should not disregard their students' difficulties and problems when considering including communicative and global environments as part of their students' independent learning process.

However, Warschauer & Meskill (2000) point out that computer technology is not a panacea. It is still too early to state whether technology-based environments help encourage greater learner independence and whether, even after a class ends, they continue to be considered interesting learning and communication tools outside the classroom. Further studies need to be done.

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## Appendix A: Diary Guidelines

Dear Students,

Thank you very much for your help with this research, which aims to investigate how technological university students study English. Here are suggestions on how to approach writing your diary.

1. Please do not worry too much about your grammar.
2. Please do not use your dictionary too often. Try to express your ideas clearly.
3. Please carry a small notebook with you so you can make notes about your English learning experience whenever you wish.
4. Please write anything and everything you feel. For example, you can write about:
  - (a) your own English activities after class, your purpose and feelings about these activities.
  - (b) learning or teaching activities in the classroom and your feelings about these activities.
  - (c) your opinions about how English should be learned.
  - (d) your reflections on your problems, difficulties and progress in your learning process.
  - (e) the hours you spend studying English.

## Appendix B: The Questionnaire (translated from Chinese into English)

1. Do you have your own computer? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
2. Do you know how to get onto the Internet? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
3. Is your computer connected to the Internet? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
4. Did you have any English writing experience before this English course?
5. Which media do you like to use to learn English: XTV, movies, newspapers, textbooks, books, magazines, radio, tapes or computer?
6. What do you think of the content and number of written assignments? What do you think about the written summaries as assignments?
7. Do you like to learn to communicate with international keypals through communication technology tools, such as Microsoft MSN Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, Skype and e-mail? Yes \_\_\_ No\_\_\_ Why or why not?  
Which communication tool do you use most often?
8. Do you think it is a good idea to learn English by communication technology tools, such

- as Microsoft MSN Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, Skype and e-mail? Would you describe how you felt when you first used communication technology tools to communicate with people in English?
9. Do you have any international keypals who you talk to or write to regularly? Would you like to have international keypals to practice English with? Why or why not? From your experience, what have you learned from your international keypals?
  10. Do you like to study English through the English learning Web sites recommended by your English teacher?
  11. What activities outside the classroom do you think help you most to improve your English?
  12. Do you like to study English at the Self-access Center? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Why or why not?
  13. Please talk about your reflections on your problems, difficulties and progress in your independent learning process.
  14. Do you think it is important to develop independent learning outside the classroom? Please explain in detail.
  15. Do you think it is important to get support or guidance from your English teacher in your independent learning process outside the classroom? Have you received enough support and guidance from your teacher? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Why or why not?
  16. Do you like to work with others in your independent learning process outside the classroom? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Why or why not?
  17. Do you think knowing English is important to get a good job? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
  18. Do you want to improve your English? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Why or why not?
  19. Do you enjoy learning English? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Why or why not?
  20. What do you think is the best way to learn English for you? Please express your opinions about how English should be learned.
  21. Are you an active and responsible learner who works hard to improve your English? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Why or why not?
  22. How many hours do you usually spend studying English with the help of a computer? How many hours do you spend chatting or communicating in English online every week? How many total hours do you spend studying English each week?
  23. Which of your English skills improved by using the independent learning process or experience?  
Listening \_\_\_ Speaking \_\_\_ Reading \_\_\_ Writing \_\_\_ Vocabulary \_\_\_  
Grammar \_\_\_
  24. Do you translate or think in English when you are using English? Do you think it is important to think in English?
  25. Will you continue to use computer technology to learn and use English to communicate with people even after the class ends?

Many thanks for your help!