

The EPFS consists of three required levels of courses: Beginners English (for true beginners or those with less than 1 year's experience studying English), Basic English (for those with 1-3 years of experience), and Intermediate English (which students must pass in order to fulfill their graduation requirements). Students are placed into these courses on the basis of a placement test administered prior to the start of the academic year. Upon completing Intermediate English, students may choose among several elective courses.

The main educational aims of the EPFS are twofold: (1) to develop the students' ability to understand and use the target language; (2) to foster learner autonomy. These aims are consistent with that of the various language programs at Kanda University.

The EPFS approach to developing learner autonomy

The EPFS incorporates the following definition concerning learner autonomy:

1. The capacity to take control of one's own learning in the service of one's perceived needs and aspirations
2. The skills, knowledge, motivation, and confidence necessary to:
 - Take responsibility and make choices concerning what, why, and how to learn
 - To implement the plan
 - To sustain the effort
 - To evaluate the outcome of learning (Aoki, 1999)

In order to achieve its aims, the EPFS has chosen to adopt a particular course structure at the Beginners and Basic course levels:

Integrated skills, textbook-based instruction + Independent Study (IS) component (1 lesson per week)

3-5 lessons per week depending on the level

In a previously-published article, this author detailed the rationale for the Independent Study component, its three key scaffolds of *content support*, *materials support*, and *teacher support* and the overall process whereby the students engage in self-directed learning during the IS lessons. Thus, the remainder of this paper will focus on explicating the teacher's important, multi-faceted role in the IS.

Perspectives on the teacher's role in developing learner autonomy

In the needs analysis administered in class at the start of each school year, EPFS students (hereafter referred to as learners) have indicated that self-directed study is a new concept to them. In previous educational settings, the learners became accustomed to a teacher-fronted classroom style in which they were not given responsibility for the learning content and process. To address this gap between the learners' knowledge/experience and the demands of self-directed study, a strong teacher support structure embedded in the learning context was thought necessary for the IS component.

The following comments from language educators and researchers give credence to the importance of the teacher in helping learners to become more autonomous:

... learner autonomy does not mean that the teacher becomes redundant, abdicating his/her control over what is transpiring in the language learning process... learner autonomy is a perennial dynamic process amenable to “educational interventions” (Candy, 1991, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000).

It may be the case that learner autonomy is best achieved when, among other things, the teacher acts as a facilitator of learning, a counselor, and as a resource (Voller, 1997, cited in Benson & Voller, 1997).

Autonomy is self-regulation, gained through social-interaction with a more capable, mediating person [i.e. the teacher] in a particular setting (Oxford 2003, p. 78).

The teacher support structure of the independent study component

Within IS, multiple responsibilities are assigned to the teacher, hereafter referred to as “instructor.” First, the instructor acts as intermediary between the learners and the target language so that lack of English ability does not impede success in learning it. Specifically, the IS instructor (a Japanese native who received her master degree in the U.S.) interacts with learners mostly in Japanese—the language that all of them are proficient in. Second, the

instructor is a trainer of learning strategies who helps the learners gradually build their own personalized set of tools and skills for organizing and pursuing their English study. Third, the IS instructor manages the self-accessible English learning materials and resources available to the learners on an especially designed portable cart—named MILC (Mobile Independent Learning Center)—which can be transported to any classroom. Fourth, the instructor is available at all times during the lesson as a resource for the learners, for instance, when they have questions about English usage or are in need of a conversation practice partner. Lastly, the instructor is a facilitator of learning through advising the learners and providing personalized feedback to enable them to reflect on, and monitor, their own progress.

The role of the IS instructor in overseeing the self-directed learning process

This section explains the process whereby the IS instructor guides the learners toward self-directed study. As previously explained, the IS component for the learners at the Beginners English and Basic English course levels takes place once per week during a 90-minute lesson. In one academic school year, which consists of two 14-week semesters, there are a total of 28 IS lessons. In the first lesson, the IS instructor administers a self-assessment to help the learners to become more aware of their own preferred styles of learning, and to provide the instructor with information about the learners' background. In the following two lessons, the instructor introduces the concept of language learning strategies (adapted from Oxford, 1990), and facilitates discussion to encourage the learners to think about how they have acquired other languages, as

well as how to transfer their experiences to the study of English. Next, the instructor spends two lessons showing the learners the available on-campus English learning facilities and resources, namely the portable MILC trolley, the Self-Access Learning Center (SALC), and the university library (which houses an extensive collection of graded readers). The learners are also allowed to experiment with some of the materials from those facilities and evaluate them. After these orientation lessons, the learners spend the remainder of the school year undergoing self-directed learning cycles, each with a duration of 3-5 weeks (the learning cycles get longer as the learners gain more experience). During the learning cycles and at important junctures, the IS instructor provides timely feedback and advice.

The IS instructor's role in dealing with learner attitudes

At the start of each academic year, at least half of the learners new to IS showed resistance to this style of self-directed learning, as manifest in their written reflections as well as oral comments to the instructor: *Why are we doing this? It's a waste of time!* The learners who had looked forward to IS stated that it was different from what they expected. Consistent with their prior educational experiences, the learners expressed their desire for a more concrete, teacher-led form of learning; they wished to be told what and how to learn by the IS instructor, not having to be made to decide for themselves. The learners were also looking for the "easiest" way to learn English through the instructor, and they initially found the IS approach "*too hard*" and "*frustrating*."

To address the learners' attitude and resistance, the IS instructor makes effort to guide them throughout the learning cycles and helps them understand two key points:

- How self-directed learning benefits them
- How to conduct self-directed learning effectively

Although the learners do arrive at certain understandings on their own as they undergo the self-directed learning process, the significance of the IS instructor's feedback and advising cannot be overlooked. As Wenden proposes, attitude change comes about via exposure to a persuasive communication between the teachers and the learners (1998, cited by Thanasoulas, 2000).

Two modes of instructor feedback and advising are carried out in IS: verbal and written. The verbal mode may be delivered in front of the entire class or during scheduled one-on-one sessions between the instructor and a learner. The written mode is represented by the comments provided by the instructor on the learning plans and self-reflections.

The IS instructor feedback mechanism

In IS, timely feedback by the instructor throughout the learning cycles is thought to be of great importance in facilitating self-directed learning, and to help the learners monitor their own progress. Figure 1 illustrates IS instructor feedback process.

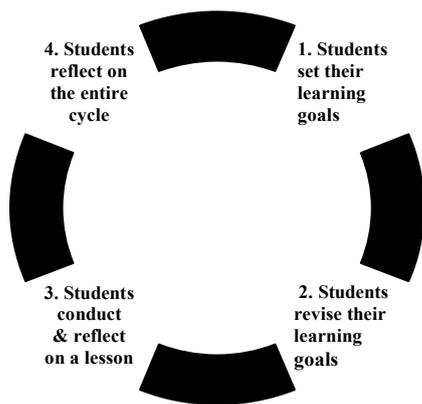


Figure 1. The IS instructor feedback mechanism during the learning cycles

(The dark areas represent the instructor's intervention.)

To clarify, in step 1 the learners write their learning goals on their planning sheet and specify the following information: what exactly they wish to study (for example, vocabulary related to a topic, specific grammar points, etc.); how they will study (the learning strategies they plan to use); where they wish to go during each lesson (the learners must check in with the IS instructor at the start of a lesson but then are allowed to go to any place on campus to conduct their learning); and the materials/resources/equipment they would like to try out. The instructor then looks over each learning plan and writes appropriate comments/suggestions.

In step 2, the learners read the instructor's individualized comments and then spend time revising their goals or

learning plan accordingly. This step is important because one of the major problems of inexperienced learners is planning/goal-setting; they tend to start out with overly vague and/or ambitious goals (for example, "I want to learn 50 new words each lesson." or "I want to become a fluent English speaker.") The IS instructor's written feedback guides students toward more concrete, reasonable goals and asks the learners to break down their goals so that they can achieve them in increments. After the learners have revised their plan, the instructor gives an "OK" for the students to go ahead.

In step 3, the learners spend each lesson of a cycle pursuing their study in the manner they specified in their learning plans. At the end of every lesson, the learners write down their guided self-reflections and put this into their IS portfolio, along with a hardcopy of the work they did during the lesson. The instructor reads reflections in between lessons and writes appropriate comments/suggestions. At the start of the following lesson, the learners consider the instructor's comments so that their follow-up study can be enhanced and any problems addressed. It is important to note that if the learners need any verbal advice or wish to ask questions directly, the instructor is available in the classroom during every IS lesson.

Step 4 takes place after the learners have finished a learning cycle, which may be 3-5 weeks in length for first year IS, and up to 8 weeks for 2nd year IS learners who do not need or receive the orientation lessons. The learners are asked to reflect on the entire cycle—how successful they were in reaching their overall learning goals, and how they felt about the learning process. The instructor takes a look at the end-of-cycle reflections and provides some insight

and/or advice via a scheduled 10-15 minute private dialogue with each learner. This is the time when the learners who have special troubles can be guided and encouraged. They then draw upon their previous learning experience and self-knowledge to set goals and strategies for the following cycle.

The content of IS instructor feedback

In order to provide the type of feedback intended to lead the learners to a more effective and autonomous level of study, the IS instructor incorporates the following framework:

- Eliciting what the learners want to learn and/or do
- Suggesting ways to learn and resources to use
- Evaluating what the learners are able to accomplish within the time limit of a lesson/ learning cycle
- Trying to persuade the learners not to be overly ambitious, and to reformulate their learning goals/ plans
- Encouraging the learners to practice planning and to focus on the process of trial and error, not just on the end product

In the next section, this paper will describe the cognitive stages that the learners typically go through as they conduct their learning cycles, and how the IS instructor responds with appropriate feedback.

The stages of learner development during the learning cycles

In one academic year, the 1st year the IS learners, who have not had prior background in self-directed learning, undergo approximately three learning cycles. From over 4 years of experience and close monitoring of the learners, the IS instructor has extrapolated a general pattern—that each of these three learning cycle mark a particular stage in the learners' cognitive development.

At the end of the first learning cycle, to be called “Stage 1”, the learners typically realize they “failed” and couldn't follow and/or complete their learning plan. They feel that they were not learning or getting anywhere; for example, they practiced vocabulary but didn't remember the words the next day. Sample learner reflection on the learning plans include: I can't do it. I didn't accomplish my goals. It was a waste of time.

The content of the IS instructor's written and/or verbal feedback at this stage, when the learners feel that this type of learning process is a waste of time, consists of the following:

- Telling the learners that failure is normal, and advising them to change/readjust when they experience failure so that they learn from their mistakes
- Encouraging and pushing students to keep trying

During the second learning cycle, the learners again attempt to follow their learning plans and to try out various strategies, based on their previous experience. At the end of this cycle, or “Stage 2”, the attitudes of approximately 50%-75% of the learners change somewhat because they begin to:

- Grasp time management and realize how much they can accomplish within a given time limit
- Focus more, and to make clearer/more specific goals
- Realize the importance of this class and the key role of planning well in their learning process
- Feel they are accomplishing their goals
- Feel more (self-) motivated

Sample learner reflections at this juncture include: *I could finish it! I could do it!* Accordingly, at this stage when the learners start to achieve a little success but still feel anxious because they cannot always finish their plan, the instructor provides the following types of feedback:

- Encouraging the learners (for example, putting smiley faces on their learning plans)
- Giving advice about other ways to learn and additional strategies to extend their tools for learning
- Focusing the learners on smaller steps/chunks of learning
- Trying to move the learners away from being entirely dependent on the IS instructor as a resource, for example telling them to go practice with other English teachers on campus, to use the self-access center, or to try other materials

Because many of the learners succeed during this second learning cycle, those who purport to have failed again are compelled into thinking that that they must change, and that

something is wrong with the way they plan. Often, as the IS instructor testifies, the learners talk to each other to try to understand the reasons for the success or failure.

“Stage 3” is when the learners complete the third and longest learning cycle of the year. At this stage, the attitudes of most of them continue to change because they feel:

- They can make clearer, more focused plans by themselves
- Planning is important so they do not waste time (learning becomes more efficient)
- IS is helpful for their English learning because they were able to use resources and/or have more courage to use English
- Safe in their learning because they always have the IS instructor around for support
- They can study better by themselves from this point, and want to try to be more responsible (they exhibit higher intrinsic motivation)
- They can learn because they can see their accomplishments (for samples of learner reflection from the third learning cycle, see Appendix 1)

At this stage, when the learners generally gain more confidence, the instructor's feedback is manifest in:

- Encouraging and praising students, and asking them to challenge themselves more
- Trying to move students away from being dependent on the IS instructor as a resource, and help the learners turn to other resources

- Persuading the learners to build study time by themselves outside of the IS lesson so that they can continue their English study

Usually one or two of the learners in an IS class still feel they failed and that IS represents a waste of time. These learners are typically what Nunan (1999, p. 57) calls “authority-oriented” and do not want to/like to learn without a teacher dictating the path. The IS instructor would then talk to them individually and discuss why they failed and what kinds of problems they could not overcome.

Learner feedback

Each year, learner feedback has been collected from the learning plans/reflections and individual semi-guided interviews with the IS instructor, which were recorded with the learners' consent. To date, approximately 95 learners of the EPFS have experienced IS. To summarize, in general:

- The learners liked English better by the end of the school year
- Those learners who initially resisted IS started to like it (a little or a lot) by the end of the school year
- By undergoing the learning cycles, the learners gained “some” confidence in their ability to set personal learning goals and reaching them
- The learners became more aware of personal responsibility for their own learning

- Most of the 2nd year IS learners—who would not be having this component the following year in their English course—said they wished they could continue to have IS

(For a more detailed data analysis, see Lee (2007); also see Appendixes 1 and 2 in this paper for samples of learner reflections.)

Comments that the learners have made about the IS instructor on their reflections include (translated from the original Japanese to English):

- *The best thing about IS is being able to consult the teacher about ways to study/learn.*
- *I gained confidence through the teacher's explanations and advice, and through my own experiences with self-directed learning.*
- *I gained some new ways to learn English through the teacher.*
- *I like the fact that we can ask the teacher any questions at any time.*
- *Having the teacher available to explain/recommend the different learning materials on the MILC was useful.*

The above seem to indicate that the learners have started to develop the skills and mental capacity to become more autonomous, yet are still in need of the scaffolding support the IS instructor provides, as they continue to negotiate the steps toward self-directed learning.

Issues for the IS instructor

Since the implementation of the IS component, several issues concerned with the IS instructor's roles and responsibilities, as well as the management of the IS, have emerged. First, the IS instructor must remember to "step back" and concentrate on being a facilitator/adviser who listens and suggests a direction rather than "teach." Along with this, the instructor should allow the learners to go through trial and error and learn from their own mistakes, and to resist the temptation to impose a "correct" way. Second, the learners need to feel a level of trust and comfort with the IS instructor for the advising and feedback interaction to be more effective. Third, some of the learners may have personal problems and/or general lack of motivation that impede their learning process, and the IS instructor may need to take steps to address this. Those learners, however, can overcome their lack of motivation if the overall attitudes of their classmates and the class environment are positive. Lastly, the ideal IS class size should be no more than 15 students. This is due to the time consuming and labor intensive nature of the student oversight and feedback process.

Summary and conclusion

This paper attempted to highlight the role of the teacher in guiding learners toward autonomous learning, by providing the example of the Independent Study (IS) component in the English Program for Foreign Students at Kanda University. The focus was on explicating the various responsibilities of the IS instructor, and the manner in which the learners are given feedback/advice at various junctures in their self-directed learning process. While the teacher must

deal with certain issues arising from the implementation and management of such a course component, qualitative data gathered from learner reflections, interviews, and questionnaires these past four years indicate that the learners have benefited cognitively from the teacher facilitation and intervention embedded in the IS setting.

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Appendix 1

Two samples of first-year IS students' reflections on their learning plans for the third learning cycle (translated from Japanese); the two students are called "A" and "B" to protect their identity.

PAC7 at JALT2008: Shared Identities

Last cycle 2006-2007 academic year

A = 1st year student in IS

Independent Study: 5-Week English Learning Plan

[Redacted]

Dates: November 6, 13, 20, 27, and December 4

Goals:

Nov. 13: Write sentences using grammar points and vocabulary in Units 1-3 and ask the instructor to check them.

Nov. 20: Practice speaking at the ELT. Dictate the recorded conversations.

Nov. 27: Write sentences using grammar points and vocabulary in Units 4-5 and ask the instructor to check them.

Dec. 4: Practice speaking at the ELT. Dictate the recorded conversations.

Focus:

Reviewing the vocabulary and grammar points in the textbook and practicing speaking.

Activities/Strategies:

Speaking: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Listening: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Reading: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Writing: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Spelling: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Vocabulary: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

Grammar: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Pronunciation: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18

Indirect Strategies: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19

Materials/Equipments:

Textbook, notebook, and cassette tape of textbook

Place: Classroom SALC Lounge Library Media Plaza Other: ELT

Last cycle 2006-2007 academic year

A = 1st year student in IS

Independent Study: 5-Week Self-Assessment

November 6, 13, 20, 27, and December 4

[Redacted]

To what extent did I achieve my learning goals for the past 5 weeks? / To what extent did I plan and manage my own learning?

I think I accomplished my 80% of my goals through the 5 weeks. The fact that I had to remake my study plan on the first day is the 20% that I couldn't accomplish. From this experience, I understand that I can't make a perfect plan yet. I think it is important to set realistic goals, not vague goals, to achieve 100%.

I believe that I am self-disciplined, so once I make a realistic plan, I try very hard to achieve these goals. I am confident that I can manage myself to achieve my goals once I set them.

My feelings about this style of self-learning:

Through this type of self-learning, I learned how precious class time was. Before I took this class, I studied when I had time, but I couldn't really remember what I studied and I wasn't aware of my accomplishments. Sometimes I lost focus and I lost my motivation to study. Since this class started, I have tried to make a clear plan and put a lot of effort into accomplishing my goals. I was able to feel the joy of achieving a goal. I think this type of self-learning is very effective for me.

Last cycle 2006-2007 academic year

B = 1st year student in IS

Independent Study: 5-Week English Learning Plan

Dates: November 6, 13, 20, 27, and December 4

Goals:

In this cycle, I am going to write about events that happen to me. By writing a diary,

I would like to find and overcome my weaknesses. My writing ability is still low, and I

need to be more aware of my grammar mistakes. I want to learn from these mistakes,

and I plan on writing more carefully to reduce the number errors I make.

Focus:

Grammar

Activities/Strategies:

Speaking: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Listening: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Reading: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Writing: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Spelling: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Vocabulary: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

Grammar: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Pronunciation: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18

Indirect Strategies: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19

Materials/Equipments:

Dictionary

Place: Classroom SALC Lounge Library Media Plaza Other: _____

Last cycle 2006-2007 academic year

B = 1st year student in IS

Independent Study: 5-Week Self-Assessment
November 6, 13, 20, 27, and December 4

To what extent did I achieve my learning goals for the past 5 weeks? / To what extent did I plan and manage my own learning?

Throughout the past 5 weeks, I wrote about some events just like writing a diary. I feel I am more careful and better with grammar such as tenses, but I think I can still improve. It was okay to make mistakes if I hadn't learned the grammar, but I made several errors even with the grammar I know because I didn't pay attention enough. I would like to be more careful. I learned something new every time I wrote, and I felt joyful when writing. There is no IS next year, but I would like to write in English when I have time and ask a teacher or someone who is good at English to check my writing, so that I can expand my knowledge by learning from my mistakes.

My feelings about this style of self-learning:

At the beginning of this year, I didn't know how much I could do in 90 minutes and how I could use the time efficiently since I had never had this type of class. I was not sure what was a good learning plan. Through this class, these vague points became clearer and clearer. Furthermore, I am now able to use effective learning strategies to become a good learner. Although we don't have this class next year, I would like to utilize these strategies as much as possible.

Appendix 2

Two samples of second-year IS students' reflections on their learning plans for the third learning cycle (translated from Japanese); the two students are called "C" and "D" to protect their identity.

Last cycle 2006-2007 academic year

C = 2nd year student in IS

Independent Study: 10-Week Self-Assessment
Sept. 20, 27, Oct. 4, 11, 25, Nov. 1, 8, 15, 29, and Dec. 6

To what extent did I achieve my learning goals for the past 10 weeks? / To what extent did I plan and manage my own learning?

Last semester, I focused on grammar. This semester, I took the advice from the instructor, "don't just leave my knowledge on shelf, "use" the knowledge to communication and express myself." I focused mainly on writing practice. It wasn't easy at first because I had a lot of mistakes, but as I wrote more, I started to enjoy writing in English. I felt I wanted to write more by myself. My writing is not good enough yet, but I think I can write better compared to my writing in April. I am very happy. I never thought I would be able to write paragraphs in English.

I also made an effort with speaking (pronunciation) this semester. At first, I thought I had to pronounce each word clearly, but by practicing with the teacher's advice, I started to pay attention to word linking. Sounding more natural in English is my new goal from now on.

My feelings about this style of self-learning:

Though the self-study this semester, I feel it fits me well more. Though the past 2 years, I became to be able to use learning strategies not only for English but also for other subjects.

I feel a little anxious because we have only 2 English lessons a week next year, but I think I can study out of class using the strategies I learned. I would like to improve my English skills by using strategies, making a clear plan, and feeling a lot of small satisfaction. I appreciate you for teaching me good learning strategies. Thank you.

Last cycle 2006-2007 academic year

D = 2nd year student in IS

Independent Study: 10-Week Self-Assessment
Sept. 20, 27, Oct. 4, 11, 25, Nov. 1, 8, 15, 29, and Dec. 6

To what extent did I achieve my learning goals for the past 10 weeks? / To what extent did I plan and manage my own learning?

I have accomplished most goals, but I think the important thing is how much I remember in my head.

Last semester, I only did grammar exercises, but this semester I tried to use the grammar I studied by writing paragraphs.

My goal was to review and prepare for Alice's class, and I think I managed very well. I made a paragraph and the teacher checked it, and the next week I fixed errors by myself and the teacher checked again. This way of study was very good. It was very useful to learn from my mistakes.

My feelings about this style of self-learning:

I like this class very much. I got my writing checked by the instructor, and I tried to fix errors taking the teacher's advice in her comments. I asked her when I didn't know about something and when I couldn't understand.

I could challenge my overall skills and I could learn better by using grammar I learned. I kept reminding myself to "use" and I think I did my best.