Self-Regulated Learning and First-Year College Success: A Longitudinal Case Study in Japan

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The 1st year of college poses the challenge of adjusting to a new environment. Self-regulated learning (SRL) is crucial for a successful transition to college. This study investigated 1st-year students' SRL development and SRL skills' impact on time management for self-study. 8 participants at a 2-year women's college in Japan were interviewed 4 times in their 1st year and once at the end of their 2nd year. The SRL developmental trajectories of the participants in both higher and lower proficiency groups revealed that some of them followed but not all of them completed the cyclic phases of SRL and the levels of the SRL developmental process as Zimmerman's (2000, 2004) social cognitive model suggests. SRL skills also impacted students' time spent on language learning. The factor that impeded SRL development was difficulty with emerging needs; this included setting realistic goals, balancing study and social obligations, and controlling emotional distractions.

大学の初年次は新しい環境に適応する上で新入生にとっては大きなチャレンジである。大学へのスムーズな移行には、自己調整学習が重要となる。この研究では、新入生の自己調整学習スキルの発達過程と、そのスキルが自己学習へ及ぼす影響を調査した。日本の女子短期大学で学ぶ8名の学生に、1年次に4回、また2年次の終わりに1回のインタビューを行った。習熟レベル上位と下位のグループがたどった自己調整学習の発達過程を分析した結果、ジマーマン(2000, 2004)の社会的認知モデルが提唱した通り3段階の学習フェーズと4段階の発達過程をたどった学生と、そうではない学生がいたことがわかった。また、自己調整学習スキルは英語の自己学習時間にも影響することが明らかとなった。現実的な目標設定の難しさ、勉強とそれ以外の社会的な活動との両立、心理的なストレスをコントロールする難しさなどが自己調整学習を阻む初年次特有の要因として示唆された。

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The transition to college may pose numerous challenges to new college students (Upcraft et al., 2005). A successful transition for first-year students includes not only developing intellectual abilities, but also factors such as developing support networks, exploring their identity, and choosing a career path (Upcraft et al., 2005). Researchers and practitioners have attempted to identify what predicts success in college, examining prior subject knowledge, entrance exam scores, aptitude test results, personal traits, and other factors (Harvey et al., 2006; Krsmanovic et al., 2020). Other researchers have focused on self-regulatory skills as critical skills to survive the first year (Thibodeaux et al., 2017; Wolters & Brady, 2021). Developing and using effective self-regulatory skills is essential to succeed in college. This paper focuses on the development and use of self-regulated learning (SRL) skills in the first year in college.

Literature Review

Transition to College

The transition to college in the U.S. and U.K. contexts has been widely discussed because student retention has been a major issue. There is an increasing need to support a diverse population of students, including minority and first-generation students, in the first year of college to avoid attrition (Conefrey, 2018; Harvey et al., 2006). Attrition is not a major problem for Japanese universities. However, Japanese colleges and universities are facing the situation of having to recruit from a smaller pool of candidates in an attempt to maintain their enrollment levels. In 2021, 46.4% of private Japanese universities reported that they had not filled all of their places for new enrollment (Kyodo, 2021). Although Japan's population of 18-year-olds has been decreasing, the number of universities in Japan has increased due to government deregulation of university establishment standards (Brasor, 2017; Harada, 2015). According to Harada (2015), "by around 2000, Japan had already entered an age of 'universal' access to higher education—meaning that everyone can go to college as long as they are not picky about the school or faculty" (para. 2). To maintain enrollment levels, universities are admitting more high school graduates of lower academic ability; teachers have noticed a decline in academic skills of university students (Matsutani, 2012). More academic support seems to be necessary for these less prepared incoming students. The situation is more severe for two-year colleges in Japan. More students are entering four-year universities. Since the 1990s, the number of

two-year colleges has declined to under 60% and the number of students to 25% (Doi, 2017). Although little is reported on their academic ability, Matsumoto et al. (2011) reported that two-year college students are more likely to be depressed possibly due to the factors unique to two-year colleges: they need to graduate in two years, thus there are more classes every day and accordingly more assignments, and they need to start job hunting in less than half a year after entrance to college. Many students choose to transfer to a four-year university and the first-year GPA is often one of the selection criteria. Students in a two-year college are likely to be more susceptible to stress and may need additional support in adjusting to college.

First year education is provided to support students with smooth transition to college. According to Yamada (2012), first year education began to draw attention around 2000 in Japan. Common topics covered in first year education courses include study skills, orientation to the university, introduction to majors, information literacy, and career planning (Yamada, 2019). Yamada (2012) pointed out that although first year education programs have been implemented in the United States since the late 1970s with methods underpinned by research, Japanese first year education programs still lack empirical grounding, claiming that practice has been taking precedence over research in Japan. A large number of research projects on first year education have been reported, but many are school based and on a small scale. On February 24, 2022, a search on the CiNii (Scholarly and Academic Information Navigator) database for "初年次教育 [first year education]" yielded 1952 results. They are mostly reports of school or classroom practices and cover a wide range of topics, including career planning, academic writing, online learning, and placement testing.

Studies suggest that several aspects determine a smooth transition to college. Some have pointed out that factors such as a sense of belonging and friendship may be involved in a successful transition (Bowman et al., 2019; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Wilcox et al., 2005). Wolters and Brady (2021) claimed that time management is especially critical for first-year students because more autonomy is required in the use of time compared to that in secondary school. Thibodeaux et al. (2017) investigated first-year students' use of time and concluded that first-year students might not be good at self-regulatory skills and need more support with their time management skills in particular. Some researchers have examined the effectiveness of high-impact practices (e.g., writing-intensive courses, first-semester seminars) for first-year students. They have shown that their first-year courses including such practices are effective in improving first-generation students' self-

efficacy and self-regulated learning (Conefrey, 2018) and are effective also in an online learning environment (Stephen & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021). These studies added insights into helping students navigate the transition to college; however, little has been investigated in the context of Japan, with even less in a foreign language-learning context in Japan. The impact of the self-regulatory skills of first-year students on their adjustment to college in Japan needs more investigation.

Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)

In the research field of educational psychology, Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) observed high school students and examined high-achieving students' utilization of a greater number of learning strategies compared to other students. The strategies included goal-setting and planning, organizing and transforming, environmental structuring, seeking social assistance, and performing self-evaluations. The researchers called these SRL strategies. Zimmerman (2000) developed a social cognitive model of SRL and defined it as "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals" (p. 14). According to Zimmerman (2000), self-regulation involves the interaction of personal, behavioral, and environmental processes, and it comprises three cyclical phases. The forethought phase concerns actions that happen before learning, such as task analysis, goal setting, and strategic planning. The performance phase involves actions that occur during learning, such as self-instruction, attention focusing, and self-monitoring. In the self-reflection phase after learning, self-judgment and self-reactions occur. The actions in these three phases take place cyclically. Zimmerman (2000, 2013) further explained that SRL develops in four levels. First, at the observational level, a learner carefully watches a model learn or perform. Next, at the emulation level, a learner imitates the model's general pattern or style. Third, at the self-control level, a learner can use a self-regulatory skill in structured settings without the presence of models. Finally, at the self-regulation level, a learner can perform skills and adapt to changing conditions in naturalistic settings. Learners develop self-regulatory skills best when they learn progressively from Levels 1 to 4.

SRL in the language-learning context has been studied recently. Wang and Bai (2017) developed the Questionnaire of English Self-Regulated Learning Strategies (QESRLS) and examined Chinese secondary school students in an EFL context. They reported that students' use of self-regulated learning strategies was weakly related to their English proficiency midterm exam

scores (r = .19. p < .01) and final exam scores (r =.25, p < .01). Kim et al. (2015) found that the QESRLS was valid for Korean students and the results showed that students with higher self-efficacy used more SRL strategies in language learning. The Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ; Pintrich et al., 1991) has been administered widely to investigate the relation between SRL and language learning. In Garrido-Vargas's (2012) study of Hispanic students in the United States, the results suggested that SRL was related to the academic achievement of these second language learners (reading score r = .41, p = .03; writing score r = .49, p = .007). Fukuda (2017) also found that SRL was related to language proficiency among Japanese university students. Three factors of learning strategies (Metacognitive strategies r = .307, p < .01, Effort regulation r = .332, p < .01, and Coping with problems r =. 270, p < .01) were significantly correlated with TOEIC scores. The results also showed significant differences in SRL between low- and high-proficiency learners in the motivational and learning strategy factors. Fukuda (2019) interviewed these students and elaborated on the characteristics that these low- and high-proficiency learners showed. These studies have added to the understanding of SRL and its relation to language learning. However, many of the studies are correlational studies and more research using qualitative methods is needed to capture the dynamic nature of SRL in language-learning contexts.

Research Questions

Previous studies have investigated SRL in language-learning contexts, but many studies are cross-sectional, and few have focused on the context of the first year in a two-year college in Japan. This study aims to demonstrate the development process of SRL skills among first-year students in a language-learning context at a two-year women's college in Japan based on longitudinal observation through interviews. This study focuses on the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the trajectories of SRL skill development for first-year college students?

RQ2. How do SRL skills impact students' time management for language self-study?

Method

The research reported was part of a doctoral project that investigated the SRL trajectories of students' first year in college. The participants of this

study were eight first-year students at a two-year women's college in Japan. The students were recruited in 2015 from a cohort of 250 students from English and business majors. One of the compulsory English courses for all first-year students met twice a week in eight course sections grouped according to students' TOEIC scores upon entrance to college. Four students from the top two groups, two from each major, were randomly selected and invited to participate in the study by email. They were categorized as "higher proficiency" and had TOEIC scores ranging from 300 to 400. Four students from the 6th and 7th groups from the top, two from each major, were also randomly selected and invited to participate in the study. They were categorized as "lower proficiency," with TOEIC scores below 300. Students from the 8th group were not chosen to avoid any issues associated with positionality as the author taught this class. Although it is rare that the researcher becomes a complete participant or a complete observer, it is important that the researcher be attentive to the effect of power that they might have on the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All of the eight students who were invited agreed to participate in the study and completed five interviews. Participants 1-4 were in the higher proficiency group and Participants 5-8 were in the lower proficiency group. Participants 1, 3, 5, and 6 were business majors and Participants 2, 4, 7, and 8 were English majors. The research proposal was submitted to and approved by the college's Institutional Review Board and informed consent was obtained from each participant before their first interview.

Five semi-structured interviews took place over two years: at the middle and the end of the first semester, after the summer break, at the end of the first year, and at the end of the second year. Each interview was conducted in Japanese and lasted approximately one hour. The interview questions covered the participants' learning history, experiences adjusting to college, study skills they used for their coursework and English self-study, and reflections on each semester (see Appendix for interview outline). Interviews were recorded and data were logged immediately after each interview. The interview recordings were transcribed and coded by the researcher using eclectic coding and hypothesis coding (Saldaña, 2013). For the first cycle coding, I used eclectic coding, a combination of two or more compatible coding methods where the researcher's "first-impression" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 188) responses serve as codes. For hypothesis coding, codes were developed based on Zimmerman's (2000, 2004) SRL model. First, single-case analysis was conducted to examine each participant's development and use of SRL skills over the first year. Then each participant was shown a brief description of the analysis and asked if any data were mistaken or if they wished

to have any data deleted from the analysis. After participant checking was finished, cross-case analysis was conducted to investigate similarities and differences within and across each proficiency group.

Findings

SRL Trajectories of Higher Proficiency Group

Among the four students in the higher proficiency group, the developmental trajectories of Participants 1 and 2 were consistent with the trajectory patterns of the highly self-regulated learners described by Zimmerman (2000). The trajectories of Participants 1 and 2 showed clear cyclical patterns of the three phases of SRL. For example, both participants had clear goals at the point of Interview 1, in the middle of their first semester. Participant 1 wanted to study abroad and find a job immediately after graduating from college. Participant 2 wanted to transfer to the college's affiliated university. At an early point, they had learned they needed high GPAs and higher TOEIC scores by the end of the first year to achieve their goals. They searched online for the TOEIC test center schedule and registered to take the TOEIC test every two to three months. They were able to organize their goals by setting key subgoals and planning ahead, which are key strategies in the forethought phase of SRL (Zimmerman, 2004). Participant 1 said: "I want to reach the TOEIC score 500. By the time I apply for the study abroad program, I figured I have three chances to take the TOEIC test. So, I immediately registered for the TOEIC test in June" (Interview 1). Participants 1 and 2 also showed effective use of the self-study strategies typically used by self-regulated learners in the performance phase. Participant 1 described her self-study methods:

> It is actually good to study with friends, laughing together and letting out stress. It is better studying that way on campus. Then after going home, I concentrate on reviewing materials on my own. It is like a two-stage structure. I study like this these days. (Participant 1, Interview 2)

This comment represents her use of SRL performance phase strategies such as self-instruction, help-seeking, motivational strategies, and environmental structuring (Zimmerman, 2000). Similarly, Participant 2 exemplified using motivational strategies:

> Recently, I set something to look forward to. I tell myself 'I can work hard because I will enjoy myself afterwards.' Otherwise,

> I cannot study hard….Even while I'm studying, I say 'I will eat chocolate if I finish this task.' I set these small rewards from time to time. Food is my incentive. (Participant 2, Interview 4)

After the performance phase, Participants 1 and 2 showed successful self-reflection behaviors. They reflected on which strategies were effective after each TOEIC test. Participant 1 considered reviewing her textbook just before the test was effective in June, and she found memorizing parts of speech effective in September. Her score continued to improve. She achieved her goals of reaching a TOEIC score of over 500, studying abroad, and getting a job as she had planned at the beginning of the first year. Participant 2 thought the test-taking skills she had learned in class in the first semester were effective for the TOEIC tests she had taken in June and September. Thus she continued using these skills, but her score improved only by 10 points in November. She realized that she should study more specifically for the TOEIC tests and that only doing coursework was not enough. She started studying a TOEIC textbook outside of class. Her TOEIC score improved by 130 points, and she was able to achieve her goal of transferring to a university. The trajectories of Participant 1 and 2 showed successful completion of one cycle of the SRL phases.

Participant 3 showed partial use of SRL skills but did not achieve her original goal. In Interview 1, her goal was to pass a certificate test each semester and thus get a recommendation from the college for a company. She had decided on this goal prior to entering college, because she had heard from some graduates that acquiring certificates would help her get a job and that the college provides students with good support for acquiring certificates (e.g., bookkeeping, business writing). She decided which certificate she would aim for each semester, took a Saturday course at the college for each certificate, and went to the learning support center when she needed help. However, she was not able to get either of the certificates she wanted and did not get a recommendation for a company. Looking back at her first year, she considered one reason for her failure:

> It was definitely a lack of study time. I took both the Saturday course and the certificate course in the curriculum, but I hardly ever studied other than in class. This college provides substantial support for passing these certificates, so I thought I would get them easily. It did not change the fact that I need to study by myself. (Participant 3, Interview 4)

Participant 3 also regretted that she had not studied hard to improve her TOEIC scores, which would be advantageous in job hunting (Interview 4). She had a clear goal and was able to set key subgoals, plan strategically, and seek support when necessary. She was able to reflect on her own learning; however, she could not plan based on the reflection and take action. It seemed that she was not able to develop the skills to self-instruct in the performance phase.

Participant 4 showed no development of SRL skills in the first year. In the middle of the first semester, her goal was rather vague: she wanted to get a job using English. Although she did not plan well and did not specifically reflect on her performance, her TOEIC scores continued to improve. This was due to the influence of her dormitory roommate. Her roommate was hard-working, and Participant 4, who described herself as a competitive person, started studying hard to compete with her. However, dormitory students had to change roommates each semester. With a different roommate in the second semester, Participant 4 suddenly had difficulty in keeping motivated to study. She had anxiety about not performing very well and felt depressed by the end of the second semester.

Zimmerman (2000) suggested that learners develop self-regulatory skills by learning them from Level 1 to 4 (observation, emulation, self-control, and self-regulation). Of the four participants in the higher proficiency group, Participants 1 and 2 seemed to reach the self-regulation level. Both had built on the skills they acquired and adapted to new needs. In contrast, Participants 3 and 4 seemed to be at the levels of emulation and self-control, respectively. Participant 3 may have seen some graduates successfully passing certificate tests and getting a recommendation from the college for a company. She thought she would do the same; however, she did not use skills that were necessary to actually study for and pass the exams. Thus, her SRL skills were most likely at the emulation level. Participant 4, who did not seem to develop any SRL skills, was easily influenced by the people surrounding her. In the first semester, when she had an inspiring roommate, she just followed what she did. Although she mentioned in interviews that she had used some self-instruction skills in high school (e.g., highlighting key words, watching movies in English), she did not adopt them in college, even when she had difficulty motivating herself in the second semester. Therefore, some of her SRL skills were at the self-control level, in which learners display a skill under structured conditions.

SRL Trajectories of Lower Proficiency Group

The participants in the lower proficiency group showed how lack of success in one SRL phase leads to dysfunction in the following phase. The participants in the lower proficiency group had unclear or unrealistic goals in the forethought phase. Throughout her first year, Participant 5 was troubled that she could not feel the purpose of studying and lacked a clear goal. She was sure that she did not want to continue studying and wanted to work after graduating from the two-year college, but she was unsure what kind of job she wanted. At the end of her first year, she said "I hear that GPA is very important even for job hunting. However, I am not intending to transfer to university…I wonder why I study" (Participant 5, Interview 4). She could not concentrate on studying and did not perform well academically. Participants 6 and 7 were also uncertain what they wanted to do after college, so they wanted to decide after taking some courses and studying abroad in the first year. However, this posed a great challenge for them as the college pressures students to choose their career plans early. At two-year colleges, most students who plan to work after graduation have to start the job-hunting process by the end of the first year. For students who wish to transfer to a university, the option of transferring depends on their first-year GPA. If students are unsure of their career plans and do not do well academically from the first semester, it is difficult to attain goals that become clearer in the second semester. Participant 6 described her confusion:

> [I came to this college] because I can study business [as a major] as well as women's studies and philosophy as general studies subjects. If I want to study either of them more, I may think of transferring to the university. I'm still debating…. However, I found out that these subjects [women's studies and philosophy] are basically for the second year students….I also wanted to study abroad. Then I was going to think about transferring after studying abroad. But I found out the timing is not very good…. The decision-making process was not done the way I had thought. It was very shocking. (Participant 6, Interview 1)

As for Participant 8, her original goal was to retake an entrance examination she had previously not passed for the public university she wanted to attend. However, by the end of the second semester, she realized that this goal was too difficult for her and decided to aim for a transfer to the college's affiliated university, which was a more achievable goal. Not having clear

goals leads to difficulty in setting key subgoals and planning strategically in the forethought phase of SRL. Only Participant 8 employed self-reflection and set a goal by adapting to new needs.

Another challenge that three participants (Participants 5, 6, and 7) in the lower proficiency group had was not being able to use effective self-instruction skills in the performance phase of SRL. Both Participants 5 and 6 showed light use of organizing and transforming skills in the beginning (i.e., note-taking). Participants 5 and 6 tried to find note-taking skills that suited them in the first semester. Participant 5 had heard from a senior student about taking notes using the iPad memo function and tried it. However, she stopped and did not mention note-taking in the second semester. Participant 6 also tried organizing lecture notes for her business courses, but she always crammed at the last minute. She barely finished organizing her notes before the first semester final exams. She also did not mention note-taking in the second semester. As for English studies, Participants 5 and 6 both recognized studying for the TOEIC test was important. Participant 5 bought a TOEIC textbook and tried to study outside class in the first semester, but her motivation did not continue as she had problems with friends in the second semester (as described later in this section). Participant 6 also had difficulty in persisting. She tried many self-study methods as taught by a professor but could not continue any of them. She took a Saturday course for the TOEIC reading section but could not stop sleeping during class. She said, "I don't even do homework, so my score cannot be improving" (Interview 3). Participants 7 and 8 majored in English and believed that the coursework would not lead to TOEIC score improvements. Participant 7 thought self-study was more important than learning in class. She did not do class assignments but focused on vocabulary learning outside class. At first, she used an English-English dictionary to look up words. Then she used a smartphone application for this purpose instead, but her usage gradually declined because her part-time job decreased the time she had to study. Participant 7 tended not to take the coursework seriously and found persistence and time management difficult. Unlike Participant 7, Participant 8 recognized the good points of the coursework and managed to balance the coursework and self-study in the second semester. She did dictation exercises for homework every day, saying "Dictation homework takes much effort, but if I listen to the teacher, my score is likely to improve" (Interview 4). However, she did not feel dictation was enough to increase her TOEIC score, so she studied reading comprehension questions for the TOEIC test and vocabulary on her own. These study methods (i.e., rehearsing and memorizing) were not frequently used

among high achievers in Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons' study (1986), but they belong to the SRL strategies of the performance phase.

Another notable characteristic of the participants in the lower proficiency group was how they coped with emotional stress. Participant 5 felt that her roommate was very intelligent and that she could not keep up with her when studying together in the morning. In addition, in the second semester, she found herself having trouble with friends in her school club and could not concentrate on her studies. She could not develop effective strategies to cope with her emotional stress. Participant 5 described her situation:

> After the college festival, I was motivated to study hard, but so many things happened. I had trouble with friends and I felt depressed. Since then, I have not been able to move forward… because of many troubles, I keep thinking during class, so I could not listen to the lectures attentively. (Participant 5, Interview 4)

Participant 6 used to worry about keeping up academically when her dormitory roommate studied until late at night. However, she decided that sleeping was more important to her and stopped competing with her roommate. Participant 6 stated:

> Some friends study on no sleep or study until 2 or 3 o'clock during the night and wake up at 6 o'clock in the morning. But I have never stayed up through the night and I try not to, because both sleeping too much and little sleep cause migraines. But when I hear friends studying like that, I feel really nervous. (Participant 6, Interview 2)

In the first semester, Participant 6 also joined a morning study group. However, she could not keep up with the other students and became sleepy in class, so she stopped attending. She did not make an additional effort to make time to study during the day instead and she regretted this at the end of the first year, saying "I should have made more study plans" (Participant 6, Interview 4). Participant 7 did not worry about friendship as much. However, she seemed to have difficulty in asking for help when she needed support. She was thinking of studying abroad but she hesitated to visit the college office to obtain the necessary information until the end of the first year. Her indecisiveness and lack of persistence seemed to be rooted in her lack of confidence and in her self-efficacy, seemingly preventing her from

taking action, exhibiting how self-efficacy is closely linked with SRL (Pajares, 2008; Zimmerman, 2011). Participant 8 used to be distracted by her noisy dormitory mates and worried if they excluded her. During the second semester, she eventually decided not to worry about her dormitory mates and started focusing on her studies.

In the self-reflection phase of SRL, three of the participants (Participants 5, 6, and 7) of the lower proficiency group did not reflect on themselves well and tended to attribute their results to external factors such as teachers and staff members. Participants 5 and 6 regretted not being proactive as well as being sleepy during class but blamed their teachers for their sleepiness. Participant 5 said, "The lecture pace is so fast…he [the professor] explains everything so fast, so I cannot even take notes" (Interview 1). Similarly, Participant 6 also claimed her professors had poor teaching skills, saying, "They do not have a license to teach, so…I should not say this, but some teachers teach badly. I do not understand [their explanations], to be honest…then I eventually feel sleepy in class" (Interview 1). Participant 7 also did not reflect on her own behavior and tended to blame others for her results. She faulted the office for not informing her of the job hunting orientation schedule in advance, because she already had scheduled her part-time work hours. In contrast, Participant 8 tended to put responsibilities on others as well in the beginning, she started self-reflecting more and changed her behavior based on her reflections later in the first year. Participant 8 gradually started to exhibit the self-analysis skills that self-regulated learners use in the reflection phase of SRL (Zimmerman, 2000).

Of the four levels of SRL development (Zimmerman, 2000, 2013), three of the participants (Participants 5, 6, and 7) in the lower proficiency group seemed to be able to do some observation and emulation, but only Participant 8 progressed to the self-regulation level. Participant 5 seemed to observe other students and tried to emulate some skills. However, she did not reach the level of self-control, in which learners utilize the skills under structured conditions (Zimmerman, 2000, 2013). Participant 6 also observed other students, but she did not continue studying like them. Participant 7 did not seem to observe or emulate some skills of others. In contrast, Participant 8 was able to independently find self-instruction strategies based on self-reflection as well as strategies to cope with emotional stress.

SRL Skills and Self-Study

The trajectories of the eight participants showed that their SRL skills were related to allotting time for independent language learning. All of the

participants found it challenging to balance their coursework and self-study, particularly the business majors. At this college, improving TOEIC test scores was important for students because the scores were used in the selection processes for transfers to the affiliated university and enrollment for study abroad programs. Additionally, a high TOEIC test score would be advantageous in job hunting. This greatly affected the participants' goal setting and planning about their studies. However, the participants who reached the self-regulation level were successful in balancing their course studies and language learning outside class. Participant 1 (higher proficiency), who majored in business, structured her self-study method, and learned to set aside time to study English. Similarly, Participant 2 (higher proficiency) and Participant 8 (lower proficiency), who both majored in English, put priority on their coursework and also managed their self-studies. However, Participant 3 (higher proficiency) and Participants 5 and 6 (lower proficiency), all business majors, had difficulty in structuring their environments to study both business and English outside of their coursework. Participant 7 (lower proficiency, English major) did not set aside enough time to self-study and had difficulty in persisting. Participant 4 (higher proficiency), who majored in English, was only motivated to study when she saw her friend studying.

Among the eight participants, five (Participants 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) lived in a dormitory and experienced living away from family for the first time. They had to manage chores, dormitory responsibilities (e.g., cleaning public spaces, keeping the curfew) as well as interpersonal issues. The other three participants (Participants 1, 2, and 3) lived with family but had to adjust to long commutes of 1 to 2 hours that took time and energy from them. Thus, their new circumstances posed additional physical and mental challenges. Some participants tried to balance their studies and extracurricular activities. A few participants (Participants 1 and 2) managed to engage in club and student government activities and still set aside time for study. However, for many of the participants (Participants 3, 5, and 7), club activities and part-time jobs took most of their time and energy outside of class.

SRL skills played an important role to manage competing demands. Use of effective SRL skills enabled participants to make the time for self-study and other responsibilities. Some participants had difficulty in making the balance between these needs due to lack of SRL skills.

Discussion

The trajectories of the eight participants in their first year of college suggest that various emerging demands affected their SRL development.

Zimmerman (2008) explained that goal setting is important in SRL as it is relevant to all three of its learning phases. Goals set in the forethought phase affect strategy implementation and self-observation, and self-reflection leads to goal setting in the next cycle. Setting goals in the forethought phase also affects self-motivation beliefs, which in turn affect the performance phase. This explanation corresponds to the findings of this study.

The participants who struggled to self-regulate their learning tended to have vague goals at the beginning of the first year. Having unclear goals made the transition to college particularly challenging in the context of this study, a two-year college in Japan. Although students at this college could delay deciding on their plans until the end of the first year, deciding earlier is better as the selection is based on GPAs, TOEIC test scores, and certificates achieved in the first year. Although the participants in this study were under pressure to make choices about their future early, some needed time to understand what they wanted (e.g., Participants 6 and 7). The pressure led these participants to be unable to focus on how they would spend their first year.

Academic demands that college places on students are one of the biggest emerging stresses. Students often struggle to adjust to lecture-style courses and the number of assignments. The participants in this study had to deal with these demands and find time for self-study. To gain advantages in transferring to a university and job hunting, they had to improve their TOEIC scores and pass exams for certificates in subjects such as bookkeeping and business writing. The participants needed to carefully plan to structure their environments to organize their self-studies so they could achieve these key subgoals.

Many first-year students have to deal with other emerging demands in adjusting to college. All of the participants in this study struggled to adjust to new living environments and new social obligations. Unless they had effective planning and environmental structuring strategies, it was difficult for them to manage all of these demands.

Interpersonal issues sometimes became a source of emotional distractions. Participants mentioned various struggles in dealing with their dormitory mates. As Frenzel and Stephens (2013) pointed out, negative emotions can lead to less effective use of strategies. Among the participants in this study, comparing their performance to that of others often caused negative emotions (e.g., Participant 5 and 6). Such comparisons can deemphasize self-observation as it reflects using normative criteria in the self-reflection phase rather than comparisons to one's own previous performance (Zim-

merman, 2000). A lack of SRL strategies can cause difficulty in controlling emotions and managing distractions from goals; the effective use of SRL strategies is essential to balance these demands.

What Teachers Can Do

This study suggests that SRL skills are important for a successful transition to college in the Japanese context. Teachers can be aware of the importance of understanding the context of their first-year learners, especially the difficulties that lower proficiency learners may be facing. There are some approaches that teachers can take to help first-year students develop into self-regulated learners. They can explicitly teach motivation and learning strategies in the first semester. Seli and Dembo (2019) wrote a comprehensive textbook about self-regulated learning strategies for first-year students; teachers can adapt the strategies where necessary and teach them in the Japanese context. Teachers can also have first-year students review their time use and emphasize time management to prioritize self-study. Teaching time management skills may be more valuable if it is done at the beginning of the second semester because this is a good time for students to reflect what they would have done differently in the first semester (Thibodeaux et al., 2017). In addition, teachers can make learning materials available before class so that students can preview the materials in the forethought phase. Providing a curriculum with a transparent structure can help students to plan and prepare for the class beforehand (Zhou & Rose, 2021). Fukuda (2019) suggested helping students with setting short-term goals may be important for lower-proficiency learners. By setting short-term, achievable goals, students can gain self-efficacy (Fukuda, 2019).

Conclusion

This case study investigating the SRL development of eight first-year students mainly suggests three points. First, Zimmerman's (2000, 2004) social cognitive model of SRL is applicable to first-year college students in the Japanese context. The SRL developmental trajectories of the participants also fell into one of the four levels of SRL development: observation, emulation, self-control, and self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2000). Those who were able to set key subgoals, based on their long-term goal in the forethought phase, were able to utilize effective self-instruction strategies in the performance phase. Based on self-reflection, they successfully set their next goals and the strategies to achieve them. In contrast, those who had vague goals

in the forethought phase struggled to set key subgoals and strategies, could not find self-instruction skills suited for them, failed to self-reflect, and tended to attribute their failure to others. Second, SRL skills influenced their self-study in English. Both business and English major students struggled to balance their coursework and language learning outside class. However, the participants who were good at setting goals and using strategies showed the use of effective environmental structuring strategies to set aside time for self-study. Third, many emerging demands (e.g., academic demands, the pressure of making career choices, new living environments, and interpersonal issues) affected or interfered with SRL development, and at the same time, SRL skills were essential to manage these demands. SRL is greatly influenced by environmental factors.

Although this longitudinal observation of eight first-year students helped gain a deeper understanding of the transition to college and the SRL development process in the Japanese context, the sample is still limited. More investigation with a broader sample can enhance the understanding of SRL development in Japan. Furthermore, effective intervention should be explored to support students' successful transition to college.

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Appendix

Interview Outline

First Interview

(Adjusting to college)

1. How is coming to college different from high school? What do you find most challenging in your college life now? How do you deal with the challenge?
2. Which classes do you find most enjoyable and which do you find most difficult?
3. Are English classes here different from high school English classes?
4. What is your personal goal? Are you doing anything to reach that goal?

(Learning history)

1. Experience in high school. Which subject did you like the most? How did you study for the subject? What was the English class like?
2. Experience of the entrance exam. How did you enter this college? Was it a recommendation by your high school? Which did you take, the Japanese or English test? How did you prepare for the entrance exam? Did you go to a cram school?
3. Experience of studying English. Did you go to lessons outside school? How long did you go to these lessons?
4. Experience abroad. Have you been abroad? Was it a study abroad or a short trip with family? Where and how long did you go? Did you use English there?

Second Interview

1. Reflecting on the first semester, which area would you like to change? Did you see any changes in yourself compared to the beginning? In what area did you do well? Who did you talk to when you had a problem?
2. How did you manage your time, doing assignments outside of class? What learning style did you find suitable for yourself? Where did you spend your time most after school? Did you have any strategies to keep your motivation to study?

3. What kind of support would you like to have in college?
4. What is your plan for summer? Based on your experience in the first semester, do you have any goals from now?

Third Interview

1. Please tell me your experience in summer etc. after we met last time. Did you see any changes in yourself since last time? How did the experience change your study habits and motivation to study? How did you deal with the change?
2. What were your study habits like during the summer and the college festival?
3. Did you have any strategies to keep your motivation to study?
4. What are your goals from now?

Fourth Interview

1. Looking back at your first year in college, how did you change over the year? What would you have done differently?
2. What were your turning points during the first year? What was the biggest challenge you faced? What was the biggest difference academically from high school?
3. Which study habits and motivational strategies do you think you acquired in the first year?
4. What advice would you give to incoming students? What kind of support do you think would be helpful for incoming students?
5. What are your goals for the second year?