An Intelligent EFL Learning Platform for the Cultivation of Students’ Autonomy

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Abstract - English language learners need individualized guidance and effective supervision in their autonomous learning. This paper reports a study on the use of an intelligent EFL learning platform by a group of students of English as a foreign language (EFL) in China. Via a methodology that included the survey questionnaires and open-ended oral interviews, the study examines learners’ perceptions of the use of an intelligent EFL learning platform—the Website of Shanghai Jiao Tong University English Learning Center by a group of 80 Chinese college students learning English by themselves out of class.

Keywords: intelligent, EFL, learning platform, cultivation, students’ autonomy

1 Introduction

Learning a foreign language only in classroom is far from enough for non-English majors at colleges and universities. Autonomous learning out-of-class is of greater importance. Therefore, individual guidance and effective supervision should be provided to cultivate students’ autonomy.

Theoretically speaking, as adult language learners, college students should be strongly self-motivated and self-disciplined in their English learning out of class. However, the fact is that many of them are at a loss what to learn besides their textbooks, let alone how to learn efficiently. Many of them used to make self-study plans for their out-of-class learning, but they usually ended up failing in carrying out the plan due to poor self-discipline as well as non-effective supervision.

In order to help Chinese college students to learn English out of class efficiently, an intelligent EFL learning platform (http://202.120.60.18) was developed for the cultivation of their autonomy. This platform is able to obtain the initial status of a learner by a “Learning Style Test”, a “Motivation Test” and a series of “Proficiency Tests” of different language skills, such as listening tests, reading tests, writing tests and translation tests, with which the system would provide the learner with the overall recommendations of his/her online study plans and content arrangements. It is also able to automatically guide the learner to learning according to the results of his/her learning style, based on the “Learning Style Test”, the “Motivation Test” and the Proficiency Tests, by intelligent management and classification of learning materials. In addition, it can present automatic feedback to learners by regular email reminders of the contents to be covered and tests to be taken before the deadlines. Furthermore, when students finish the online tests, it can instantly present their scores (both of objective questions and of subjective ones) as well as the key answers to them.

2 Rationales

Both the classroom learning and out-of-class learning of a foreign language form a complete learning process. For adult foreign language learners, out-of-class learning is more important because well-planned and efficient autonomous learning leads to an ultimate success of foreign language learning.

However, autonomous language learning out-of-class requires individual guidance and effective supervision which can be done by an intelligent system. With the current technology of Artificial Intelligence and Natural Language Processing, the task of automatic supervision can be fulfilled at will.

3 Methodology

80 non-English majors from two natural English classes at Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) participated in the experiment. When these subjects entered SJTU in September 2012, they were asked to make their own out-of-class English learning plan. Without any interference, they were asked to complete the questionnaire concerning the implementation of their self-study plan at the end of the first semester. Then, at the second semester which began in February 2013, they were asked to learn English out of class by log in the online intelligent EFL learning platform, as shown below.
At the end of the semester in June 2013, a survey questionnaire will be given to obtain the students’ perceptions of the use of the learning platform. Open-ended oral interviews will also be given to collect the data.

Then a comparison will be made to draw the conclusion of the effectiveness of this intelligent EFL learning platform in guiding and supervising students’ out-of-class English learning as well as the cultivating of students’ autonomy.

4 References


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