

The Effects of Time Management Strategies on Foreign Language Learning among College Students

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Abstract: As identified by Misra & Mckean (2000), poor time management is the most significant stressor for college students. In this study, the researcher explored how time management strategies affect college students' habits in learning English as a foreign language. A case study approach was employed, and in-depth interview data were analyzed to elucidate the effects of time management strategies on Taiwanese college students' learning habits, as well as their opinions on these strategies. The results revealed that effective time management strategies contributed to good learning outcomes. Students who practiced time management had better time planning skills, which was useful for foreign language learning. The effects of different time management strategies on the students' habits of learning English as a foreign language are as follows: the level of satisfaction toward their learning process and the intensity of continuous learning habits. Their learning habits could be strengthened by practicing effective time management and self-discipline. This study examined the effects of time management strategies adopted by Taiwanese college students during their English language learning process. The results can help students understand more about foreign language learning. The suggestions of time management strategies for foreign language learners are also provided.

Keywords: foreign language learning, higher education, time management

1. Introduction

In collegiate learning environments, college students are not only required to take professional courses related to their academic major, but are also required to participate in extracurricular activities, internship courses, and elective courses. As a result of their hectic schedules, college students should not only possess the drive and motivation to learn a foreign language during their spare time, but also possess excellent time management skills. It is only possible to develop one's lifelong learning skills by developing good learning habits. Aside from participating in classroom-based activities, learners must also maintain a process of self-directed learning long after they graduate from college to foster lifelong learning skills. To understand how college students learn English as a foreign language, this study examined the effects of their time management strategies on their learning habits, thereby providing learning strategies for fellow foreign language learners as well as elucidating their foreign language learning process. This study provides a reference for foreign language learners in order to achieve the best possible learning results.

Based on the aforementioned research motivations, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine college students' opinions toward time management strategies.
2. To examine the effects of time management strategies on college students' habits of learning English as a foreign language.

2. Literature Review

Misra and McKean (2000) pointed out that "time management behaviors had a greater buffering effect on academic stress than leisure satisfaction activities." (p. 41) Numerous scholars have proposed various time management strategies. For example, Knapp and Zeratsky (2018) offered a four-step approach to systematically designing one's schedule: Highlight (select the highlight of the day), Laser (allocate time to achieve the highlight), Energize (invigorate the brain), and Reflect (adjust the system). Gilkey (2019) suggested that one of the key requirements of achieving self-control is heat mapping. Since every person has their own daily routine, performing tasks at the appropriate time of the day increases one's task performance. One objective of this study is to college students' opinions toward time management strategies. The goal of time management is to facilitate the development of foreign language learning habits. According to Clear (2018), rewarding is a key element in the habit-building process. This means that gaining rewards after achieving an excellent performance can repeatedly shape positive and reinforcing behaviors in successful habit building (Daniels, 2000; Davidson, 2003). In addition to time management, some researchers have highlighted the importance of fostering college students' self-discipline and sense of responsibility in enhancing learning quality. (Olowookere, Alao, Odukoya, Adekeye, & Agbude, 2015).

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research participants

The participants in this study were nine Taiwanese undergraduates who were required to undertake college English as a compulsory subject. The students were studying English as a foreign language. The participants were evenly divided into three groups (Groups A, B, and C), and each group applied a different strategy. The observational study lasted for a semester. An evaluation scale was used to examine the participants' learning satisfaction. All research participants were interviewed one month after the intervention to assess whether they retained their learning habits.

Group A: The rewards group. Each student studied for a specific length of time every day and received a reward every week based on their individual performance. Group B: Gilkey's (2019) daily productivity heat map group. Each student studied for a specific length of time every day whenever it was appropriate for them. Group C: The control group. Each student began studying for 30 minutes every day and their study time was increased progressively. Their study times were fixed according to their individual status, and they were neither rewarded nor received the daily productivity heat map intervention.

3.2. Qualitative research approach and analysis

The objective of this qualitative study was to examine the effects of different time management strategies on college students' habits of learning English as a foreign language. Five semi-structured in-depth interview sessions were conducted over a semester. The participants (coded A-1, A-2, A-3, B-1, B-2, B-3, C-1, C-2, C-3) narrated their status in learning English as a foreign language based on the questions posed to them. After collecting their opinions, the researcher performed protocol analysis (a content analysis-based approach) to analyze the interview data, researchers' notes, and statistics. The observational data collected by the researchers during classroom lessons were also analyzed alongside the interview data during protocol analysis.

4. Results and Discussions

Poor time management is the primary stressor among college students (Misra & McKean, 2000). By analyzing in-depth interviews and observational data, the researcher investigated the effects of different time management strategies on college students' habits of learning English as a foreign language. The results revealed that all participants agreed that proper time management is a necessity and were willing to adopt effective strategies for learning English. The effects of different time management strategies are reported as follows:

- A. Developing a weekly reward system to promote learners' motivation to pursue continuous learning. However, the learning hours sometimes decreased when there were no rewards or incentives.

Feedback from students in the rewards group:

I am extremely glad to earn substantial rewards from learning. I hope that the joy of getting rewarded is present throughout the learning process. (A-1)

After the study has concluded, I had more time to prepare reports for other subjects. (A-2)

- B. The students in the daily productivity heat map group had a high level of satisfaction with learning English as a foreign language. However, many students were unable to sustain their learning habits due to the demands of their daily lives and other academic responsibilities.

Feedback from students in the daily productivity heat map group:

I hope that I am able to overcome my procrastination and improve and optimize my learning outcomes and performance by building positive habits and determining the right things to do. (B-1)

I was able to identify the periods when I am most efficient based on the heat maps, and I realized that I have wasted so much time doing things I shouldn't be doing... (B-1)

By participating in this study, I learned about the importance of time management. I always complain about the lack of time to study, and I only had time to study foreign languages before going to sleep. It is possible to achieve excellent learning outcomes through effective time management and time planning. The result is better than digging away aimlessly, which impairs the ability of the brain to absorb new information and leaves one feeling muddled in the end. (B-3)

I usually prepare for my exams when instead I should be learning English, and this often happens before the final exams. (B-2)

C. Even though they received no external incentives, the students in the control group sustained their learning habits. The synergism of their self-discipline and learning motivations allowed them to understand the importance of maintaining effective habits in learning a foreign language.

Feedback from students in the control group:

Regardless of whether or not I have the drive, sometimes I even take 30 minutes to study even when I'm tired. This is because I am quite interested in this subject. (C-2)

I have developed a habit during my daily commute, and that is to listen to audio files of English texts in magazines. (C-3)

Conclusion

Time management is essential in foreign language learning among college students, especially when they need to schedule self-directed learning sessions outside of the classroom. Regarding the most effective means of organizing time to achieve the best learning outcomes, our results revealed that the students were most satisfied with the daily productivity heat mapping strategy because it allowed them to handle complex issues during the most productive part of their day. However, learning habits may not be sustained. Although students who were rewarded for their learning progress achieved positive learning outcomes, their learning habits decreased after they were no longer rewarded. Students who were neither rewarded nor studied during their most productive hours were able to continue their learning habits. Therefore, regardless of the time management strategy adopted, students can improve their outcomes in foreign language learning by sustaining their learning habits. Overall, students' learning satisfaction and subsequent self-directed habits differ marginally. Adjusting time management strategies based on each learner's status also achieves good learning outcomes. Aside from the importance of proper time management, other factors such as learning methods and learning objectives also affect learning outcomes. Fostering one's self-discipline and sense of responsibility (Olowookere, Alao, Odukoya, Adekeye, & Agbude, 2015) fulfills a sense of achievement that stems from self-realization and positively affects learning abilities.

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