

Using Diaries to Enhance Language Learning

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1. INTRODUCTION

“Diary study” of second language learning is a fairly new field of research, and not many language learning or teaching diary studies have been published to date. According to Bailey & Ochsner, “diary study” is “an account of a second language experience as recorded in a first-person journal” (1983 : 189). The diarist keeps a personal record, including feelings about and reactions to his or her own language experience.

The first diarist-researchers were Francine and John Schumann (1977). They recorded their own second language learning experiences and the thoughts and feelings related to them. Their study suggested strongly that no two persons will acquire a second language in precisely the same way.

Bailey (1980, 1983) and others kept diaries of their own language-learning experiences and analyzed them. For example, Bailey (1983) discussed the relationship between two affective factors, competitiveness and anxiety. She found that she was both highly competitive and highly anxious at the beginning, but her anxiety decreased as she became more proficient than her classmates.

As for diary studies in Japan, the first diarist-researcher was Kazuko Matsumoto (1987). Her article begins with a brief discussion of the recent application of qualitative research methodology to the study of classroom language learning and teaching, and then offers a review of research findings from several previously conducted diary studies. In addition, she discusses three reasons for diary research in Japan. Finally, she makes suggestions for future diary research.

It seems that most of the diary studies conducted to date both in and outside Japan were introspective, self-observational studies of second language learning experienced by the researcher himself or herself. Furthermore, because of the small number of subjects, the amount of data is limited. As Matsumoto (1987) has pointed out, more non-introspective diary studies involving multiple subjects and data quantification will

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have to be conducted.

Therefore, the present study aims to investigate language-learning activities not only in class, but, more importantly, outside the classroom. Very little investigation has been done concerning second language learning or acquisition outside of class, so much remains unknown. Applying diary research to the investigation of students' language learning should yield valuable insights. Thus this study may contribute discoveries about the actual process of second language acquisition (SLA) and about factors influencing language learning activities, both in and out of the classroom.

2. METHOD

2.1. Subjects

Two classes of the first-year Chubu University students were chosen as the experimental group (diary group) and the control group. These groups were two of six classes in the Department of International Studies, whose members had been previously divided on the basis of their scores on a placement test. The six represented two ability levels classes: advanced two classes and general four classes. Two general-class groups were chosen for the study, numbering 33 subjects in the diary group and 32 in the control group. Students were enrolled in English I and II courses, and were taught in the same ways and with the same materials, except that one group used diaries or the other did not. For more detailed explanation, see the next section.

2.2. Procedures

Only the students in the diary group wrote about their daily language-learning experiences, each of whom had a teacher's diary and two students' diaries.

In the teacher's diary, the students wrote basic personal data: their addresses and telephone numbers; their schedules, both in and out of the classroom; their aims for the 1991-1992 year and for their four-year university careers; their reasons for having chosen this university department; and their language-learning histories. Table 1 shows the sample format of their daily schedule. Each cell of a class has the subject's title, the teacher's name, and the room name (or number). After the students finished filling out the teacher's diary, the researcher collected them and used them for several purposes: recording students' office visits to consult about problems, recording striking observations, and so on.

Table 1 : Students' Daily Schedule

		1 · 2	3 · 4	5 · 6	7 · 8	
Monday		English I ①Teacher A LL (No.5)				
Tuesday			English I ②Teacher B 1333			
Wednesday			English I ③Teacher C 1333			
Thursday		English I ④Teacher A LL (No.5)				
Friday						
Saturday						
Sunday						

In the students' diaries, the students wrote about their daily language-learning activities, classifying their activities into four language skills, that is, reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities. Table 2 shows how to write in students' diaries. To simplify data coding, they numbered each activity. Activity Numbers (AN) 1 to 4 are English I and II classroom activities; namely, AN1 is the Monday class, AN2 Tuesday, AN3 Wednesday, and AN4 Thursday. AN5 is at-home review of and preparation for English I and II. The rest of the numbers cover a range of individual activities: for instance, AN6 is listening to NHK radio English conversation, AN7 is attending an English conversation school, AN8 is talking to an American teacher in English, AN9 is reading an English novel, and so forth. If a subject does not want to write the same phrase over and over, like AN6 on April 9 in Table 2, he or she is allowed to omit the phrase. Thus the subjects had to write only the Activity Number and the study time. At the end of the week, the students could sum up the study time in each skill column and write their thoughts, such as reflections on the week, the prospects for the coming week, and so forth. Every Monday, the researcher collected their previous week's di-

ary and gave them another diary for the current week.

Table 2 : Examples of Students' Diary Entries

April 8 (Mon.)		(min.)			
AN	Contents	R	W	L	S
6	Listening to NHK radio English Conversation			15	5
1	English I (Teacher A)	20	20	30	5
7	〇〇English Conversation School five students in this class contents of today's lesson : -----			30	20
5	Review of and preparation for English I	30	20	20	10
April 9 (Tues.)					
6				15	5
2	English I (Teacher B)	15	15	25	15
8	talking to Mr.〇〇(American teacher) in English This was my first time to talk to a teacher in English, and I was so impressed to communicate with him in English.				10
5		30	10	15	10
April 10 (Wed.)					
April 14 (Sun.)					
Total		230	150	310	100

AN : Activity Number, R : Reading, W : Writing, L : Listening, S : Speaking

Before the study was conducted, the Michigan Test was administered to the subjects as a pre-test. One of the purposes of this pre-test was to determine whether or not there was a significant difference among the two groups. The results of the test indicated that these two groups did not differ significantly ($t=0.075$, n.s.). To analyze the effects of their English proficiencies, a post-test was also administered to the subjects.

For convenience' sake, class numbers were allotted to each student in the diary group. Each class number was written on the front page of their three diaries (one teacher's diary and two students' diaries). These numbers will also be used in Table 3 and Table 4.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Quantative Data Analysis

The results of the experiment are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 : Michigan Test Scores, Diary Group vs. Control Group

(Diary Group)					(Control Group)		
	No	PreT	PostT	D	PreT	PostT	D
1	22	63	76	13	42	66	24
2	10	57	74	17	57	60	3
3	25	64	74	10	66	60	-6
4	33	65	71	6	50	58	8
5	32	68	67	-1	44	58	14
6	29	65	66	1	42	58	16
7	21	58	65	7	53	56	3
8	27	61	63	2	38	55	17
9	28	57	61	4	53	55	2
10	5	57	61	4	55	54	-1
11	16	66	61	-5	53	53	0
12	7	47	60	13	60	53	-7
13	8	46	60	14	53	53	0
14	11	45	58	13	51	52	1
15	3	51	55	4	48	50	2
16	12	51	54	3	64	50	-14
17	18	51	54	3	51	49	-2
18	13	41	54	13	46	48	2
19	23	42	52	10	72	47	-25
20	26	59	51	-8	48	46	-2
21	20	47	51	4	34	43	9
22	24	40	50	10	53	42	-11
23	31	50	50	0	52	42	-10
24	2	53	48	-5	49	37	-12
25	17	41	48	7	38	35	-3
26	6	47	45	-2	45	35	-10
27	15	48	45	-3	38	15	-23
28	9	22	44	22	(46)		
29	4	47	43	-4	(45)		
30	19	35	41	6	(47)		
31	14	43	39	-4		(60)	
32	30	26	37	11		(41)	
Mean		50.4	55.6	5.2	50.2	49.3	-0.9
SD		11.0	10.4		8.7	10.2	

$r=0.78$

$r=0.31$

This table indicates the scores, the means, and the standard deviations (SD) of pre- and post-tests, and the differences (D: the scores of the post-test minus those of the pre-test) for each group. Both of the data in the diary group (using diaries) and the control group (without diaries) are arranged from the highest score of post-test to the lowest one in order. All the subjects except one in the diary group took both pre- and post-tests. Subject No.1 enrolled, but he did not attend the class or take either of pre- or post-tests. Therefore, data in the diary group comprise 32 subjects. In the control group, 27 subjects out of 32 took both pre- and post-tests, but five did not. The scores of these five subjects are shown in parentheses.

As noted above, the results of the pre-test indicated that the two groups did not differ significantly ($t=0.075$, n.s.). However, the results of the post-test indicated that the average language proficiency score of the diary group was significantly higher than that of the control group ($t=2.30$, $p<0.05$). Furthermore, the relationships that exist among the pair-scores of pre- and post-tests of every subject in each group were analyzed by the Pearson correlation. In the diary group, the obtained correlation coefficient was very high ($r=0.78$). On the other hand, that in the control group was very low ($r=0.31$). Judging from these results, it can be said that using diaries had a great effect on language learning.

Table 4 shows the totals of each kind of language learning time and the totals of learning activities except AN1 to AN5 (namely, ANs outside of class) in the diary group during the experiment.

Table 4 : Learning Time and Totals of Non-Class Learning Activities

No	R	W	L	S	Total	TofAN
2	1255	1970	2670	637	6532	4
3	1985	1545	5225	536	9291	1
4	1220	1320	3730	755	7025	3
5	2797	2210	3023	848	8878	2
6	1585	1910	2775	900	7170	4
7	3838	3575	4497	1297	13207	4
8	3052	4330	8413	4175	19970	4
9	2381	3225	5775	816	12197	3
10	10041	2200	9723	2181	24145	7
11	3135	1855	5521	2020	12531	5
12	700	2300	3440	1130	7570	2
13	1528	1985	5435	1652	10600	4
14	882	1455	1903	834	5074	0
15	1692	1925	2365	530	6512	2
16	3205	2300	5755	1305	12565	2
17	1790	1705	3116	375	6986	2
18	1455	2570	3812	450	8287	2
19	3710	2990	5865	1080	13645	5
20	1735	2790	4320	1320	10165	3
21	2905	1850	4883	736	10374	1
22	3177	5640	11371	4312	24500	7
23	1554	1715	5445	1443	10157	4
24	1839	1552	4686	526	8603	2
25	3130	1935	4441	1176	10682	3
26	1585	1660	1790	245	5280	2
27	3215	2778	6750	896	13639	3
28	3075	2025	4628	1157	10885	3
29	740	3395	3480	934	8549	1
30	2682	1511	3060	270	7523	3
31	1455	160	5075	150	6840	0
32	2355	1030	4280	495	8160	3
33	2936	1990	4440	689	10055	1
Mean	2457	2231	4740	1120	10549	2.8

R : Reading W : Writing L : Listening S : Speaking

TofAN : Total number of non-class learning activities

It can be seen that the students learn English in 2.8 ways on average, which are not related to English I and II. The substance of their activities and the percentage each represents are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 : Learning Activities Outside the Classroom

N (%)	Contents
1. 17(18.5)	: Listening to NHK radio English programs
2. 13(14.1)	: Studying for English certification tests
3. 11(12.0)	: Learning with NHK TV English programs
4. 10(10.9)	: Watching TV programs in English
5. 7(7.6)	: Watching movies in English
6. 7(7.6)	: Talking with foreign people in English
7. 6(6.5)	: Listening to and singing English songs
8. 6(6.5)	: Reading English books, newspapers, magazines
9. 5(5.4)	: Learning English grammar, English words with English reference books used before
10. 4(4.3)	: Listening to English cassette tapes
11. 3(3.3)	: Attending the OPELT* English class
12. 1(1.1)	: Going to a private English conversation school
13. 1(1.1)	: Attending an ESS Club
14. 1(1.1)	: Exchanging letters written in English with foreign people (a Canadian in this case)

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As shown in Table 5, 30.5% students learn English with NHK radio or TV programs (No.1 + No.3). Adding in the percentage of No.4 (watching TV programs in English), results show that 41.4% students learn English through radio or television. No.2 shows another interesting phenomenon: 14.1% students study English in order to pass several English certification tests like the first or the second grade STEP test or B grade of the United Nations Association's Test of English, and for getting a high score on TOEFL or TOEIC. These results coincide with many students' aims as noted in the teacher's diary such as passing the first or the second grade STEP test or getting 500 points on the TOEFL.

3.2 Qualitative Diary Analysis

To investigate the causes of the effect of diaries, the contents of the students' di-

aries are examined and the following factors seem to influence the actual language learning.

a) Keeping diaries gets language learners to encourage themselves to study English, as these diary entries show:

(1) Student A, July 7:

... , but I will try to do my best. If I didn't do that, it wouldn't be good for me.

(2) Student B, November 17:

... , anyway, I have to tide over this situation. I want to accomplish my first purpose. So I think over what I should do. If I can overcome this situation, it seems that I can concentrate on studying English much more than before. It's the only way to do so, isn't it?

For language learning, it is very important to study every day. However, students tend to take the path of least resistance, and their good intentions fade. One of the significant roles in having language learners keep diaries is the built-in daily reflection on their learning attitudes and motivations and a daily reminder or the need to keep plugging away.

b) Using diaries in language learning is effective, especially for Japanese students.

(3) Student C, October 28:

... Recently I have not been late for English class and have done homework, so I feel satisfied. To tell you the truth, in the first semester I didn't do homework or keep diaries, it means I wrote the whole week language activities once a week, only in Sunday evening. But these days I've kept diaries everyday and done homeworks seriously, then I feel like writing in my diary as soon as possible. Diaries ... I look forward to writing in ... when I calm myself. Then I have so many things to tell you and write them ...

As Matsumoto (1987) has pointed out, Japanese learners of EFL tend not to be good at taking an active part in classroom activities verbally, and such "quiet" learners seem to constitute the majority of EFL students in Japan. However, they do well in one-on-one situation. In the same way, they feel comfortable writing their feelings, questions, and opinions frankly in their diaries. Adding this distinctive feature to practical methods, we teachers can guide each student in his or her learning through diaries. This study proved that using diaries has a great effect on language learning, especially for Japanese EFL students.

c) Through diaries, we teachers can find out our students' problems precisely and solve them quickly. In particular, it is effective in the case of team teaching.

(4) Student D, May 29:

Ms. X taught us in a louder voice than usual. She was walking among us and talking to us. I was glad because I felt the distance between the teacher and us got shortened.

(5) Student E, November 14:

I'm so happy because I could understand about SRA¹ well.

(6) Student F, November 14:

It was so good to have been explained about SRA in today's class. I had misunderstood it like Mr. E.

Reading their diaries, we always find unexpected experiences and thoughts. This information can be very useful in studying the effectiveness of various teaching methods, especially in the case of team teaching. It seems difficult for Japanese students to ask teachers to improve class conditions, especially the ones related to the teaching way. However, if such an existing problem were not known and were still going on, students might lose their motivation or the situation might get worse. During this diary study, some students wrote their troubles or worries in their diaries. Through diaries, we could find out their problems and solve them quickly. Finally, the situation got much better, and students became satisfied with and enjoyed our lessons.

d) Analyzing students' diaries gives us students' response or accurate feedback.

(7) Student G, April 18:

... The content of this English lesson is not an entrance examination type but a very practical one, so I get interested in learning English. I found out that English is such an interesting subject!

(8) Student H, April 23:

English class of Ms. Y is so interesting. It is good to learn English through some activities.

(9) Student I, May 9:

I'm so satisfied to learn English in a Language Laboratory.

(10) Student J, November 5:

Today's lesson was to use new reading materials with different levels. I think that it's a good thing to learn at each student level and at his or her own pace.

Getting and analyzing learners' response or feedback are important parts in language teaching. However, it seems difficult to get them only from verbal or facial signals in class. By analyzing students' diaries, we can get our students' direct response or accurate feedback and improve our teaching ways or methods in good time.

e) Through diaries, students' real thoughts can be discovered and their motivation can be developed.

(11) Student K, October 28:

... As you pointed out, I didn't study English well and lost my precious ability of English. I regret that! It is difficult to recover lost ability for a short period, but I will do my best to do it! If I hadn't got your advice, I couldn't realize that or study hard. Thank you for your advice.

During the first semester, this student seemed lazy and was losing interest in studying English. Her TOEFL² score had fallen by the largest margin in the diary group (minus 47 points during six months). Her first TOEFL score was among the best, but conversely her second score became the last fourth lowest one in the group. Worrying about that, this researcher wrote some comments and advice in her diary. The example (11) is her comments just after reading this advice. After writing (11), distinctive changes occurred in her learning approach. She started to greet this researcher with cheery words and to look lively in and out of the classroom. Another change occurred also, that is, the contents of her diaries became enriched, and the vocabulary in it increased, too. Not only her learning but also her TOEFL score has improved since then. In two months her score improved the most in the diary group (plus 37 points). This proved that learners' motivation can be developed and good results can be obtained with diaries.

Ellis (1986) claims that there can be little doubt that motivation is a powerful factor in second language acquisition. Motivation is dependent on the learner's learning goal. Through diaries, we can discover the goals and give students appropriate advice. If students have trouble, we can discover their real thoughts, for example, their various anxieties, hopes, and satisfactions. As was mentioned, Japanese students tend to be quiet learners, non-assertive in public settings, like in class. It is not easy to find out their thoughts in detail. However, this diary study proved that using diaries can solve these problems smoothly and can heighten learners' motivation.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has sought to investigate language learning activities not only in class but also outside the classroom using diaries effectively. Analyzing students' diaries, this writer found unexpected experiences and thoughts. The study found that this information can be very useful in studying teaching methods, especially in the case of team teaching. By reading diaries, we teachers can find out our students' precise problems and solve them quickly. Furthermore, keeping diaries gets students to encourage themselves to study hard. Letting students keep diaries makes them reflect on their learning attitudes by themselves and develops their motivation.

Ellis (1986) points out that language learners vary on a number of dimensions to do with personality, motivation, learning style, and so forth. In particular, personal factors are difficult to observe by a third person. This methodological problem can be solved through the use of diary studies. This study showed that every learner's factors such as language-learning history, aim, goal, motivation, learning style are different. It also found that each learner has various anxieties, hopes, satisfactions and so forth. It can be said that it is difficult to find out those personal factors and real thoughts of every students within limited regular classes. Therefore, one can conclude that using diaries is very effective in solving several problems and improving certain situations, and that the use of diaries can develop learners' motivation and make our classes more attractive, enjoyable, and effective.

As Matsumoto (1987) suggests, the diary study is a relatively young field of SLA research, and its methodology needs to be further refined. This project was a new type of diary study with multiple subjects, quantified test data both in and out of the classroom. However, further study will be necessary to investigate the factors influencing language learning activities through the use of diaries.

NOTES

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 31st JACET annual convention held in September, 1992.

1. The SRA Reading Laboratories are kits of graded workcards designed to motivate an interest in reading, improve comprehension ability, provide remedial skills development where appropriate, and increase reading speed. Students read at their own level and progress at their own pace, checking their comprehension with questions that appear at the end of the story.

2. Besides the Michigan Test as pre- and post-tests, TOEFL was also administered three times: in April, in October, and in December.

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