# IMPROVING THE ONDOKU-DOJO PROGRAM AND ITS EDUCATIONAL EFFECTS

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## Abstract

This is a part of a 4-year study to investigate whether English language pronunciation training support improved self-monitoring skills and learning aptitude in novice Japanese English as second language students. We examine the changes in each participant's self-monitoring awareness of their oral reading through practice activities of reading English aloud. This study aims to establish a training system that promotes the proactive after-school independent study. This paper reports on the second year of the operation of a training system aimed at improving students' attitudes toward learning.

Keywords: *language support, English, oral reading, self-monitoring, autonomy*

## Introduction

The second year of this research focused on the improvement of the Ondoku-Dojo project, a new after-school English language training initiative developed as part of this research project. In 2015, the first year of this study, 10 second-year students with deficient English grades were selected for the research and trained in Ondoku-Dojo sessions. The after-school training was held 24 times from Monday to Friday for 45 minutes, October to November 2105, just prior to the school year's third examination week. The first Ondoku-Dojo training had little effect on student's English test scores, leading us to conclude that Ondoku-Dojo may have caused the disappointing results. Two findings of the first-year's Ondoku-Dojo training (Okuzaki and Narumi, 2017) were applied as improvements to Ondoku-Dojo for the next training period, held in 2016. The program's goals were to promote learning autonomy by cultivating a flexible view of time, place, and academic workload and activating students' group dynamics.

In the second Ondoku-Dojo training, 14 students (including 10 students who had participated in the first Ondoku-Dojo) attended the training sessions from April, 2016, to January 2017, and all passed the supplementary examination of English Communication, the subject they had failed in 2015.

This paper examines the educational impacts of the improved second-year Ondoku-Dojo program and discusses the findings of the second-year Ondoku-Dojo project.

## Improvement of the Ondoku-DojoProject

### (1)Physical flexibility

The first Ondoku-Dojo sessions held in 2015 were conducted within a fixed time frame (after class, 16:30 to 17:15, from Monday to Friday) in a closed environment (the first Language Laboratory). Those fixed conditions hindered students who were taking extra supplementary tests and tutoring sessions and resulted in low participation. Furthermore, in the first Language Laboratory, each participant was required to sit in the same seat as in their regular class. However, during the supplementary training, they had to learn scattering in the room. The physical distance among participants limited their ability to interact with each other and thus stifled the learners' group dynamics (Okuzaki and Narumi, 2017). Therefore, the second Ondoku-Dojo training in 2016 allowed the participants both physical and temporal flexibility: It was set up in an open space in a hall next to the teacher's study room. Four laptop PCs were available for participants, and students were able to use one anytime they wanted to at school. Figure 1 shows the improved Ondoku-Dojo arrangement in 2016 and some of the participants.



Figure 1    The second Ondoku-Dojo training
and its participants

### (2) Flexible learner workload

According to Minagawa (2015), self-directive learning should be promoted to enhance a learner's intrinsic motivation. In addition, for learners to believe that they are managing their own learning, the learning plan should be conducted by the learners themselves. However, participants in the first Ondoku-Dojo training were found to be weak in persistence and self-control (Okuzaki and Narumi, 2017). In short, they had trouble completing long-term assignments by segmenting the whole task into small steps and thus completing the

assignment through the steady application. Therefore, in the second Ondoku-Dojo training, each student made a learning plan in consultation with the teacher. They chose when to take tests as well by negotiating their test schedules with the teacher. At the beginning of April, 2016, school fiscal year, the second year Ondoku-Dojo participants submitted their learning schedules based on the school curriculum. Their schedules were put on a whiteboard in the open space for easy access by both the participants and the teacher (Figure 2).



Figure 2　Participants' scheduling
for the second Ondoku-Dojo training

The supplementary test was also designed as a "step-by-step" program (Table 1). Students were allowed to proceed through each step at their own speed from April, 2016, to January, 2017, while seeing other participants' progress.

Table1　Step-by-step program
for the supplementary test

| STEP1 | Vocabulary Quiz (100 words pronunciation test and comprehension test from previously learned eight lessons) |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| STEP2 | Reading aloud of summaries of previously learned eight lessons and translation |
| STEP3 | Dictation of summaries of previously learned eight lessons |
| STEP4 | Recitation of one summary of previously learned eight lessons |

**Discussion**

(1) Efficiency of oral reading

Takahashi (2012) argued that oral reading practice is an effective support for improving attitudes toward autonomous learning. In Takahashi's study, a non-Japanese high school student was given after-class learning support to master Japanese. The student's self-affirmation improved through reading comprehension practice of Japanese school texts with appropriate Japanese prosody. Oral reading reveals to both the teacher and the student what a student can and cannot read. In practice, students can gradually become able to read aloud appropriately what they had not been able to in the past. The students then realized their achievement by demonstrating what they can read aloud, and the teacher's approval enforces their intrinsic motivation and promotes positive attitudes toward self-learning. In our learning support, we observed similar learning attitudes to those reported by Takahashi among the participants. Focusing on English oral reading, which was at the center of the supplementary test, participants gradually became able to fine-tune their English prosody and earn their teacher's approval. The first participant, who finished his supplementary test in April 14, 2016, reported to the teacher after the test that he had become more confident in English learning. He finally understood how to study English. By listening to his comments, the teacher realized that oral reading was effective for fostering learner self-affirmation, self-control, and self-fulfillment.

(2) Acts of Procrastination

All 14 participants were required to submit their learning schedules by the second week of April, the first month of fiscal 2016 school year, to facilitate their independent completion of the step-by-step program for the supplementary test. Table 2 shows each participant's failing test score in their second year, their date of final completion of the supplementary test, and their final evaluation score.

Table2　14 participants' failing scores,
supplementary test achieving date, and the final scores

| Participant | Class | Failing Score (out of 100 scores) | Supplementary Test Achieving Date (STEP4Completion) | Final Score (out of 100 scores) |
|-------------|-------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A | 3 SE | 44 | April 14 | 99 |
| B | 3 SM | 56 | April 25 | 68 |
| C | 3 ZZ | 54 | July 25 | 79 |
| D | 3 ZZ | 58 | July 25 | 86 |
| E | 3 ZZ | 49 | July 25 | 78 |
| F | 3 SE | 57 | August 10 | 82 |
| G | 3 SM | 50 | October 18 | 69 |
| H | 3 SE | 42 | October 19 | 94 |
| I | 3 SM | 52 | December 18 | 71 |
| J | 3 SJ | 48 | December 18 | 89 |
| K | 3 SJ | 26 | December 18 | 97 |
| L | 3 ZZ | 51 | December 18 | 81 |
| M | 3 SE | 59 | January 9 | 89 |
| N | 3 SE | 48 | January 9 | 77 |

The minimum score for receiving credit in the class is 60 out of 100. Participants A, B, C, D, E, and F finished their tasks using time after class by the end of the first semester. Participants G and H finished their

tasks using time after class just before the school festival in October. However, participants I, J, K, and L procrastinated until the second week of December. They finally finished their steps by working on a Sunday, during which the teacher proposed an intensive training program from 9:00 a.m. to 18:00 p.m. Although participants M and N were also offered the intensive program along with participants I, J, K, and L, they rejected the teacher's offer because of a lack of self-confidence. After hearing that their friends had passed the supplementary test, participants M and N approached the teacher and asked for another intensive training program on a holiday in January. This time, they convinced themselves with the knowledge that if their friends did it, they would be able to do it. Indeed, they successfully passed the supplementary test much earlier than the group in December.

Mori (2005) noted that learners with higher self-efficacy tend to use comprehension strategy and planning strategy more often to avoid prolonging tasks. In contrast, learners with lower self-efficacy tend to prolong tasks and not to use comprehension or planning strategies. Self-efficacy is defined as a person's belief that he can perform a particular behavior that will produce a particular outcome (Bandura, 1977). Bandura demonstrated that belief in one's own efficacy to perform a particular behavior strongly predicts whether or not this behavior will be realized. This belief proves to be a more potent influence on future behavior than an individual's past behavior (Peterson, Maier, and Seligman, 1993).

Table3　The learning factors (1―5 scale) contributing to the learning examined in the AAI

| 10 students approving the data use | Date finishing all of the tasks | ① learning motivation | ② time management | ③ class participation | ④ note taking/reading comprehension | ⑤ memorization skills | ⑥ examination taking skills | ⑦ learning environment at school | ⑧ learning environment at home | ⑨ persistent application | ⑩ self-control | ⑪ meta-cognition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | 4/14 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| B | 4/25 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| C | 7/25 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| D | 7/25 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| E | 7/25 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| F | 8/10 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| G | 10/18 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| H | 10/19 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| J | 12/18 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| K | 12/18 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

In December, 2016, the third Academic Adjustment Inventory survey was conducted with 10 participants with their approval (Table 3). Scores of 1 were conspicuous for students J and K, who had been reluctant to take the intensive program. In particular, student K assigned a score of 1 to every factor except factor ⑧ (learning environment at home). His learning condition was very poor.

The items to which students J and K gave lower scores than the other eight students were ① learning motivation, ② time management, and ⑥ test-taking skills. Minagawa (2015) described a mechanism that drives a learner to take an action to achieve a goal based on Bandura's theory (p. 193, 1977) of self-efficacy, which employs the concepts of efficacy expectancy and outcome expectancy. Outcome expectancy is defined as a person's prediction that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes. Efficacy expectancy is the belief that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes. Outcome and efficacy expectations are distinct because individuals can believe that a particular course of action will produce certain outcomes but still entertain serious doubts about whether they can perform the necessary actions. In this conceptual system, expectations of personal mastery affect both the initiation and persistence of coping behavior. The strength of people's belief in their own efficacy is likely to affect whether they even try to cope with any given situation. Applying this theory to students J and K, we can conclude that they avoided their English tasks until December because of their low expectations of efficacy as well as outcomes.

(3) Teacher support fosters learner autonomy

Learner autonomy is defined as the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec1983, Nakata 2011). The concept of learner autonomy, promoted by Holec and others in the context of language education in Europe, has in the last 20 years become influential as a goal in many parts of the world (Ivanovska 2015). Through the language learning process, learners take responsibility for their learning and develop practical life skills by experiencing positive interdependence with their learning community. According to Wong and Nunan (2011), effective language learners display high degrees of autonomy and are able to reflect on and articulate the processes underlying their own learning. In addition, Kojima, Ozeki, and Hiromori (2013) argued that a teacher who fosters autonomy among learners needs to play versatile roles beyond the traditional authoritarian role. Oxford (1990) noted that the specter of role change may be uncomfortable for some teachers, who may feel their status is being challenged. Others, however, welcome their new functions as facilitators, helpers, guides, consultants, advisers, coordinators, idea persons, diagnosticians, and co-communicators. New teaching capacities also include identifying students' learning strategies, conducting training on learning strategies, and helping learners become more independent. Oxford stated that in this process, teachers do not necessarily forsake all their old managerial and

instructional tasks, but make these elements much less dominant. These changes reinforce teachers' roles, making them more varied and more creative. Teacher status is no longer based on hierarchical authority, but on the quality and importance of their relationship with learners.

Students I, J, K, L, M, and N were all chosen to participate in a special intensive training program held on Sunday just before their second winter vacation, and four students (I, J, K, and L) accepted the offer. Those four students knew each other from their previous homerooms and some were friends from their dormitory. They seemed to share the same feeling of coming from behind as well as friendly rivalry. On the training day, they encouraged each another to step up to the tasks. The teacher's advice to one student in the open space was shared with others as hints for success in the tasks. Students who advanced in their work willingly assisted the others. In addition, their attitude gradually became competitive as they strove to finish their tasks faster than the others, speeding up their work pace. Reflecting on their learning attitude that day, we feel the special training program succeeded by activating a learning community of students facilitated by the teacher's role as a facilitator, helper, adviser, and coordinator of the learning group. While it was a full-day exercise, all the participants finally completed their final tasks.

Two students who had given up participating in the training before the winter vacation heard from one of the four participants that the four students had passed the supplementary test. They asked the teacher to hold another intensive program at the end of winter vacation. The student's encouraging words to those two students changed their attitudes about the tasks from negative to positive. The two students, M and N, finally succeeded in passing the supplementary test as well. In the final analysis, the improvements to the Ondoku-Dojo program effectively enabled the participants to develop the self-efficacy needed for their English study.

## Summary

This paper reports on the second year of the Ondoku-Dojo training program and shows that it resulted in educational improvement in the participating students' learning attitudes. In the next study, the students' self-monitoring skills in oral English reading and the relationship between their monitoring skills and learning aptitudes will be investigated. Based on these findings, This research aims to establish a training system that promotes proactive after-school independent learning.

## Acknowledgments

## Additional Statement

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