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An Exploratory Study of Motivation and Self-Regulated Learning in Second Language Acquisition: Kanji Learning as a Task Focused Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify motivational factors affecting self-regulated learning (SRL) in the context of second language acquisition. Rather than investigating learners’ overall disposition toward their learning, it focused on a particular task, the learning of kanji in Japanese, in order to provide a clearer picture of the complex relationship between motivation and SRL. Using quantitative methods, the underlying structure of motivation and SRL was explored and the relationships among the extracted factors were examined.

On the basis of a self-administered questionnaire specifically developed for this study, the data were obtained from 381 tertiary students studying Japanese at one of the seven cooperating institutions in New Zealand. Principal components analyses identified three motivational orientations (intrinsic, instrumental mastery, and performance orientation), four sources of motivation (self-efficacy, self-concept, extrinsic value, and intrinsic value), and four types of self-regulation (behavioural, environmental, cognitive, and metacognitive regulation) involved in kanji learning.

The results of correlational analyses revealed a number of significant relationships suggesting the interdependence of the identified constructs. However, instrumental mastery, performance orientation, and extrinsic value did not predict students’ use of SRL. Further investigation of individual and situational factors indicated that learning opportunities outside the classroom possibly confounded the significant relationships between these non-predictors and SRL.

On the other hand, intrinsic orientation, self-concept, self-efficacy, and intrinsic value were identified as significant predictors of SRL in general. These significant predictors displayed a unique contribution to different types of SRL. The results show that intrinsic interest in kanji learning is necessary for cognitive and metacognitive regulation. A sense of positive self-concept, on the other hand, influences environmental regulation while self-efficacy beliefs facilitate behavioural regulation.

Overall, self-concept was found to be the best predictor of the use of SRL. However, self-efficacy is another important factor since students who used behavioural regulation tend to use a wider variety of strategies to self-regulate their own learning. In this study, the interactions of identified motivational constructs and their possible effects on SRL are discussed. The study concludes with a discussion of practical and theoretical implications of the findings along with suggestions for future research.
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