In EFL contexts, such as Japan, students need to spend a great amount of time outside of class studying if they wish to master English. As the amount of input students can receive in their daily lives is quite limited, students are required to self-regulate their learning (e.g. Cotterall & Murray, 2009). In other words, students need to establish clear learning goals to monitor their learning process and to reflect on and evaluate their learning. Through this cycle of learning, students develop as language learners, taking responsibility for their own learning (Nakata, 2015).

As studies of individual differences show, each L2 learner learns differently, and more than one route exists to success or failure in L2 learning (e.g. Hiromori et al. 2012). Concerning self-regulated learning, some learners are good at it, but others are not. Many students, in fact, find it difficult to regulate their learning.

This presentation will present the results of a longitudinal study investigating the individual learning trajectories of seven Japanese university students. Data, which were collected through face-to-face interviews over a ten-month period, suggest that those participants who understood the importance of studying English for their own purposes were able to study independently. However, those who were unable to discover their own purposes for studying struggled. Like the motivated students, they believed English was important, but they were unsure as to whether or not they would like to continue with English after completing mandatory classes. Their learning behavior differed from the independent learners, and it tended to mirror that of their junior high school days. They did not adopt new language learning strategies, which might have been more appropriate for them as university students. The presentation will conclude with concrete suggestions for EFL teachers to help such students develop independent learning skills.

Keywords: EFL, individual differences, self-regulated learning.