Effects of learning context on motivation of university students: Investigating the role of collaborative learning

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Collaborative learning (CL) is supposed to be more effective to raise learners’ meta-cognition than individual or competitive learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). This presentation aims at showing the changes of the university students after having learned in CL style classes for a year. Participants are 21 freshmen in a compulsory listening class at a low-intermediate level.

CL method was mainly introduced into the pre- and the post-listening stages. Students were encouraged to do outside the classroom learning, such as watching DVD of the lecture, joining discussion with English-speaking teachers, and watching TED story on the internet.

Participants answered two kinds of questionnaires about CL and motivation at the end of each semester. They wrote their reflection after each class and recorded their outside the classroom learning on the listening log.

This study employed a mixed method: A quantitative analysis of the questionnaires showed the changes of the students’ learning attitudes. The reasons for the changes of their learning attitudes were confirmed by a qualitative analysis of the students’ writings.

It was found that CL made the biggest effect on building a close relationship among classmates in the spring semester, while CL made more effects on getting students interested in listening class, and deepening their thinking in the fall semester. In addition, students contributed to CL more largely in the fall semester. Students’ comments showed that setting clear goals would help learners get motivated. CL would also make an effect on learners’ motivation when a close relationship is established in the learning context, where learners would find near peer role models who sometimes stimulate learners to greater efforts.

Finally, CL style classes are considered to be able to create an effective learning context where learners work together to promote their motivation to study, and moreover, to cultivate autonomous learning attitudes.

Keywords: autonomous learning, motivation, collaborative learning.