FROM MENTORING TO MONITORING: 
SELF-STUDY RECORD FILING 
TOWARD SELF-REGULATED LEARNER DEVELOPMENT 

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Abstract

Established in 1988, the Self-Instruction (SI) Room at the Language Center, Chubu University, Japan, has been encouraging self-regulated language learning. The SI Room has been a place where students can concentrate on language self-instruction with over 1,800 materials and language training facilities to fit various styles of self-study. The author embarked on a mentoring program in 2001 to support learners’ better outcomes. The roles of the mentor includes giving learners chances to reflect on their own learning strategies, guiding them to set short-term/long-term goals, designing individual self-study plans, helping them make adjustments whenever necessary, seeking appropriate scaffolding to make self learning less stressful, and letting them feel capable of self-study. After the author sought ways to equip after-counseling self-study in and out of the SI Room, another supportive program was launched in 2010: self-study record filing and feedback from the mentor. On the paper-based record, the learners have kept records of dates/time, study objectives, material-related information and their reflective comments toward fulfilling their learning goals. In this paper, the format of and the cycle of self-study record filing as well as how it benefits to the development of self-regulated EFL learners will be discussed.

1 Introduction

The Self-Instruction (SI) room at the Language Center, Chubu University, has been encouraging autonomous learning for 26 years to over 10,000 students who frequent the SI room in order to engage in independent study to fulfill a variety of English language learning goals. One of the primary goals of the SI room is to provide students a path to learning independently as it pertains not only to language self-study but also to self-directed learning skills that can be applied in any area of study as the students move into academic adulthood. Table 1 shows how the SI Room added new services over the years. This paper explicates essential attempts the SI Room has made to assist language learners especially of English as a foreign language to become more self-regulated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Service Initiated</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>SI Room opened at the Language Center, Chubu University</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>SI Room material periodical inventory started</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Self-study counseling service started</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>SI Room self-study material peer review started</td>
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1.1 What SI room offers

To support students’ independent efforts toward language acquisition, the SI room is furnished with the followings:

- a) a wide variety of published materials such as textbooks and audio CDs
- b) textbook related DVDs and movie DVD with closed captioning
- c) graded readers, paperbacks and other reading materials
- d) newspaper and language learning related magazines
- e) computers with language learning software, Internet access and headphone
- f) a large flat screen TV with movie seating for viewing movies
- g) two person sound booths outfitted with computers and technology for recording speaking tasks

The physical environment has been designed and renovated since 1988 by the full-time technical staff and the language teaching professional at the Language Center. The learning resources have been carefully selected and kept updated every year by the language teaching professional to suit the needs of self-study learners. The data on SI Room use such as the number of visitors, the purpose of their study, their choices of materials and their levels of self-study satisfaction are recorded daily. The significant differences between the university’s library and the SI Room is the material selection which fits various styles of language self-study as well as self-study strategy workshops and individual mentoring and monitoring services.

1.2 Who uses the SI room?

The SI room provides a place for all students at Chubu University in the 7 departments (30 majors) as well as staff across campus to engage in self-directed language learning. Information on the SI Room is distributed in a brochure or at the Language Center website. Students use the SI room both for teacher assigned tasks and independent language learning. The original belief with which the SI Room was established in 1988 is still in effect: Self-initiated and directed learning are the keys to the success of language learning.
Figure 1 shows the number of SI Room visits from 2009 to 2013. The SI Room was used an average of 3,162 times over the past 5 years as shown in Figure 2. The average number of use for the past 5 years counts 3,612. Figure 2 shows the number of students using the SI Room from 2009 to 2013. A change in the services provided resulted in a sharp drop from 2012 to 2013. The reason for a rather sharp drop from 2012 to 2013 is because we changed some parts of service. The removal over graded readers from the SI room in 2013 resulted in a significant change in 2013 was the removal of graded readers from the SI Room. Before 2013, many students from particular English classes organized by the Language Center came in only to take out the graded readers. In order to differentiate the roles of the library and the SI Room, the graded readers were moved to the library where the students started to borrow the readers as a part of regular library service. The number of visits in 2013, therefore, shows that of students who came to the SI Room to study.
1.3 The reasons for using the SI room

On their first visit, students must be registered in the SI Room service. It is important to know as much as possible about the educational context of learners to achieve monitoring in self-access learning. (Gardner & Miller) The SI Room tries to understand who the users are and what they come for by collecting data regarding students’ specializations, motivations, interests in language(s), their short and long-term goals, and their levels of language skills.

There are various reasons why students choose to use the SI room. They visit independently with various intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Group tours directed by language teachers or advisors from their departments are often the first encounter with the SI Room. It has been emphasized, however, that the students make the decision to actually use the environment.

The students come to the SI Room in order to:

a) do classroom assignments
b) build basic language skills
c) overcome weak points in language learning
d) maximize language study during school breaks
e) prepare for study abroad
f) continue language gains after they return from study abroad
g) prepare for examinations such as the TOEIC, TOEFL, and Eiken (Test in Practical English Proficiency in Japan)
h) prepare for international scholarship applications.

Fig. 3. Reasons for the SI room visits (2013)
As Figure 3 shows, over 60% of the students come to use the SI Room materials. Table 2 shows the resources available in the SI Room. As the volume of self-access materials increases, just building up a stock of them does not aid students who wish to engage in self-study. Some methods to assist students identify effective materials and ways to use them are necessary.

Table 2. Number of SI room materials by type (2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening/Speaking</th>
<th>Reading/Writing</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Vocab.</th>
<th>TOEIC</th>
<th>TOEFL</th>
<th>Eiken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>434</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (English)</td>
<td>Other Languages</td>
<td>Movie</td>
<td>Dictionary</td>
<td>total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1,927</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the SI-room, while peer advising is not done face to face at the present time, experienced learners share their expertise and knowledge through developing reviews of materials available to learners in the SI Room. These reviews are filled with information that is invaluable in assisting students to select materials on their own from such a large body of possibilities. Student-created summaries and ratings of materials are available for new self-directed students to assist in making decisions about the materials that might best support students’ self study endeavors. The reviewers have been carefully selected and trained to develop reviews that will assist self-directed learners toward selecting materials that best suit them and their language learning objectives. (Stotts & Oguri, 2012a).

2 SI room mentoring service

After observing the students’ behaviors in the SI Room over 10 years, the author has found that just accommodating the students with resources was not sufficient. Students did arrive at the SI Room motivated to use its resources; however, more and more students have shown concerns and anxieties about their language learning methods. They did not seem satisfied by just using the materials. They were not confident in what they had been doing with the materials. The number of students who came to the SI Room to do their class assignments increased. The SI Room materials started to be left on the shelves without many customers. The SI Room, therefore, started the counseling service just informally in 2001 to offer advice to those who were not content with their long journey in language learning. To make the array of abundant resources for self-study be used more effectively, the author started the mentoring service to assist students move toward their goals effectively and satisfyingly. In 2010, a standardized counseling process was organized to better serve both students and staff in the counseling process.
2.1 Counseling service

![Fig. 4. Self-directed learning application form](image)

The SI Room counseling process starts when a student fills out the application form shown in Figure 4. It is designed for the applicant to reflect on and describe him/herself regarding past self-study. Metacognitive ability can be shown on the application where they are asked about their previous trials and errors made in language learning, their choice of strategies, and their reason for counseling. Before the first counseling appointment, the mentor can be prepared with options available for that specific student. It helps mentors to identify issues, to start material selections, and to define new approaches.

The SI Room self-study counseling service attempts to:

1) give learners chance to overview their past learning strategies with the mentor  
2) help learners set short-term and long-term goals  
3) design and adjust individual self-study program  
4) seek appropriate scaffoldings to make self learning less stressful  
5) make learners feel they are capable of self-study by letting them take initiatives in choosing a strategy from the options offered by the mentor  
6) assist them set time schedule to use the SI Room on a regular basis especially when students are just starting to self-study
As the students’ levels of the target language vary and each learner has different learning and personal goals, suggestions differ from one student to another. There is no best model or suggestions to fit all. Even with the same student, suggestions are not all the same over certain period of time because students enhance, discover and develop their capabilities. After the students begin to try out the plans discussed through counseling, they may feel the need to adjust or change the plans. If so, the students may apply for additional counseling.

From 2001 to 2013, 164 individual students received counseling. The followings are some of the reasons they received counseling:

1) a sense of not studying efficiently
2) disappointment in target language improvement
3) difficulty maintaining motivation
4) changes in availability of previous learning methods
5) a new commitment to language learning goals
6) (English or department) teacher recommendation

Figure 5 shows the path of the SI Room mentoring service. The advisory role in the SI Room has become increasingly formalized in order to encourage student reflection and self-evaluation which leads to greater autonomy in language learning, as well as providing information that leads the advisor/counselor toward effective selection of materials and recommendations for the most fruitful ways in which materials might be used. (Stotts & Oguri, 2012b)

The sharp increase from 2009 to 2011 reflects the increase in the number of students who continued to use the SI Room until they graduated and the number of those who studied abroad. Mentoring is available to the students if they seek for intervention so that they can re-orient themselves to sustain cognitions, affects and behaviors in their self-study. However, relying too heavily on the counselor does not lead the students to be self-regulated learners. When the number of counseling increased sharply from 2010 to 2012, as shown in the Figure 5, the author inspected the purposes of the counseling and the students’ progress in self-study. The drop in numbers from 2012 to 2013 reflects the change in our attitude toward counseling service. We now try more to show students how to make use of material-related information
so that they can embark on self-study first. As a counselor, the author monitored some students who apparently became too independent on the mentoring service. In such case, they tried receiving counseling too often, for example, once a month or every time after they took proficiency tests. When students become more dependent on counseling service, they may fall into a learning situation quite similar to teacher-led classroom teaching. Instead, the self-access learning facility should sustain an environment where students can be more self-regulated rather than more dependent on the mentors; they should be assisted in ways so that they can gradually improve their metacognitive ability and to activate their learning behaviors themselves in the future. As in the case of the SI Room, for example, students must graduate from university at some point. They should not feel too comfortable within the atmosphere of being guaranteed that someone else leads their study and do not have to get over any hardships by themselves at any moment.

2.2 SI room magical workshop for better self-study

In the SI Room, there is no teacher available, but receptionists are there to attend the SI Room users. After a while, the counseling service seemed to be functioning well and the students who frequented the SI Room seemed more content with what they were trying to do. From time to time, however, the author felt it necessary to observe closely how students were carrying out their plans in the SI Room. The author also watched how students were using the materials and tried to find out if the counseling resulted in making self-directed learning more stable and students more confident.

In response to students’ request for special classes, another venture began in 2011. The author organized a series of hands-on workshops per semester to demonstrate some practical ways to use the materials in the SI Room. Each workshop is entitled according to the focused skills or strategy in language learning such as improving pronunciation in self-study, how to enjoy learning culture and language with movies, how to enjoy learning verb tense, how to acquire reading strategies and so on.

From February 2011 to July 2014, 32 workshops have been held with 288 participants. The workshop welcomes students from any major and year as well as teachers and staff. It has become a forum where self-study learners get to know each other, encourage and stimulate each other as well as to build more immediate motivation to continue studying. The author organizes the workshops and usually navigates through large volume of materials in the SI Room. In some workshops, however, students or alumni with successful self-regulated language learning habits are invited to share their experiences. Photo 1 shows the 32nd Magical Workshop where alumni studying at a master’s program in the U.S. demonstrated how he’s enjoyed learning languages and cultures through films.
Diaries have been found to be useful tool to facilitate students’ self-regulated learning. They are an effective method to measure self-regulation processes as well as to influence self-regulation in a desired direction (Schmiz, Klug & Schmidt, 2011). From mentoring session to another, the author found some methods to monitor the students’ learning stages. After they receive counseling service, some students just disappear. Some students become regular SI Room users. The author developed a format of study-record filing in 2009. The folder consists of a calendar, a list of materials in use, and the study record sheets. It depends on students whether or not to use the filing.

In order for the students to strengthen self-assurance in their self direction and for the mentor to be able to monitor the quality of learning and progress, the author began to offer another option in the SI Room in 2009: maintaining accountability by using paper-based study record folders. In the folders, students track their language learning habits with the SI Room mentors. The self-study folders provide both student and mentor a visual tracking of study time, frequency of study, material use, students’ self-evaluation, and mentor’s brief and spontaneous feedback. The counselor plays a direct role in making the folders interactive and keeping the students aware that someone is observing their behaviors. The interaction is focused on simple response to retain the autonomous nature of each student’s activity. The goal of the interaction is not to create voluminous information from the counselor, but to maintain an environment of accountability. In the self-study files, students can fill in such records as the dates, time, total minutes of study, places of study, names of materials, content of study as well as their conditions and findings. The mentor in the SI Room monitors the files, and if necessary, the mentor writes brief feedback on the same sheet.
In September 2014, the author conducted a questionnaire survey among 13 most active self-study record file users now and in the past. All of them responded the filing was necessary for them in their self-directed study. Especially of note, all of them answered the written feedback from the mentor is influential to their performance. As for the form of filing, 5 answered they prefer the paper-based, 5 answered they have no particular preference, and 3 showed interests in having the file both paper and digital.

Twelve users replied that they look back what they have written down in the record to orient themselves in the succeeding days. One student, though, answered that he scarcely looks back to his record but says the filing is necessary for him to maintain his motivation. Since he started this record in September 2013, his progress slowed down afterwards. Although he shows little stability in his self-study, he has shown a progress in scores. In November 2012, he started with 384 in CASEC (300 in TOEIC conversion) and in August 2014, the score moved up to 599 in CASEC (545 in TOEIC conversion. This case represents a sample of a student who tends to use the study record file so that he can keep the feeling of connection with someone monitoring him. Some alternative ways may have to be sought to help out such students if they seek assistance to become really self-regulated.
One student began keeping his study record in December 2011 after he received counseling for the first time. Until January 2014, two months before his graduation from Chubu University, he continued his self-study both at home and in the SI Room. Over 2 years, his length of study counted 41,227 minutes or 687 hours. He received counseling 4 times; once in 2011 and three times in 2012. As shown in the Figure 7, the student improved his score on TOEIC from around 450-500 to 700 over 25 months. The student majored in engineering and had already been a well-motivated, self-regulated learner since high school. However, his efforts had shown little progress toward his goals. Through mentoring and monitoring his self-study, he slowly began to modify his learning behaviors and started to feel efficacy.

Another example is a business major student. He received a counseling in September 2012 for the first time after he attempted self-directed study in library. Although he spent hours in library studying toward TOEIC, his score successfully improved from 230 to 400. He wanted to make sure his choice of materials and his methods of learning were effective. When we met, we reviewed his skill-specific strategies he had tried. He re-directed himself to the SI Room from the library in order to take advantages of resource in the SI Room. His study paced up as he experimented some of the suggestions made at the counseling. Also, he began his study record filing, which assisted him in re-building his self-esteem. He participated in many of the self-study workshops where he learned about the quality of the SI Room resources and how he should pay attention to while studying. From October 2012 to December 2014, his
self-study record showed the total hour of 5,936 minutes, or 98 hours. Figure 8 shows his progress in TOEIC.

![Fig. 8. Student example B’s progress in TOEIC](image)

From 2009 to 2014, around 90 students attempted to use the self-study record. Every semester, we file 40 to 50 records, which counts for about 25% of the students registered in the SI Room. There are some students who never come back to the SI Room to pursue the plans discussed and suggested in the counseling services. Thus, the average number of the study records fairly actively used is 15-20 files, or 40% of the files in our cabinet.

The following shows some feedback from the survey in September 2014:

- “By myself, I was anxious whether material and level selection or ways to study had been right or wrong. The self-study record file helped me feel assured and made me easier to focus on the self-study without worrying.”
- “Especially when I failed in reaching my goal at a language exam, it had been much more difficult to keep my motivation to carry on studying on my own without the self-study record.”
- “The record made it easier for me to look back at the track of my self-study over months and years. The mentor’s feedback made it possible for me to modify everyday study behaviors.”
- “Comments written on the record from time to time by the mentor helped me recognize my weaknesses and find ways to improve. It changed my study habits.”
- “I learned how to keep the record of my activities and how the record affected my next actions. With such experience, I use my record keeping habits at work after I graduated.”
4 Conclusions and future directions

Successful language learners typically develop this self-awareness either subconsciously through experience and/or natural ability, or through conscious processes that may be stimulated by a teacher, textbook, a guide to language learning (Brown, 2007). The SI Room attempts to support students in need but only with least intervention. We are prepared to assist them only when students seek guidance. Brown (2007) states as follows:

A fully functioning learner is aware of styles, personality variables, the effect of early socialization, ego factors, self-efficacy, intellectual capabilities, cultural schemata, belief systems, and more. Such self-knowledge then leads to action in the form of strategies: direct, metacognitive, socio-affective, skill-specific, and proficiency-based strategies, along with appropriate doses of compensating for weaknesses and capitalizing on style advantages.

One of the primary goals of the SI Room is to provide students a path to learning independently as it pertains not only to language study but also to self-regulated learning skills that can be applied in any area of study as the students move into academic adulthood. In the survey mentioned earlier, the self-study record filing system has affected the students’ attitudes and habits not only in language learning but also in other areas. Figure 9 demonstrates how the SI Room attempts to activate and sustain cognition, build self-oriented feedback loops and opportunities to adapt so that they can engage themselves in self-regulatory cycle.

![Fig. 9. Elements in self-regulated learner development](image)

With or without measures such as mentoring service, study record filing, workshops, language teachers both inside and outside classrooms play quite influential roles in learners’ setting goals, in selecting and deploying strategies, and in developing self-esteem as an autonomous language learner. Gardner (1999) states:
In educational contexts it is important to know as much as possible about the learners: their needs, their wants, their learning styles, their beliefs, their attitudes and their abilities. Monitoring learners is relatively easy in classroom-based learning. It is more difficult to achieve in self-access learning because of the individualized nature of the work and because of the reduced level of teacher contact (p. 83).

Self-regulatory processes deal with a sequence of challenging learning states. To be well prepared to take a role as mentors, language teachers should be equipped with professional knowledge of published language learning materials, types of self-access materials as well as effects of language learning facility use. Still, the effectiveness of mentoring to monitoring service depends largely on how students initiate their self-study. They can be informed about the service, but receiving the service should not be made mandatory. In the SI Room, we wait for the students to decide to make first step forward. We do offer, but we never force. As Dr. Yoshinobu Niwa, the founder of the SI Room and the second director of the Language Center, viewed in 1988, students’ wish to grow to be self-directed is the most essential to their success in foreign language acquisition.

References


