



Big brother is helping you: Supporting self-access language learning with a student monitoring system

Hayo Reinders

University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland, New Zealand

Received 9 March 2006; received in revised form 25 July 2006; accepted 10 October 2006

Abstract

Self-access and language advising are relatively recent and increasingly common types of language support offered in schools and tertiary institutions around the world. There is a great deal of anecdotal support for the positive contribution of such support to student learning. Self-access and language advising hold strong potential as learner-centred and highly flexible approaches. In addition, there are many sound practical reasons for offering self-access as complementary to or as an alternative to classroom teaching, especially in situations where existing learning needs are too great or diverse to be met by traditional methods. At the same time, there are concerns about the effectiveness (how well they help students learn) and efficiency (how quickly students learn) of these approaches and more research is clearly needed. This article reports how one centre has attempted to take into account some of the challenges reported in previous literature by developing an electronic learning environment that better prepares students for and guides them in their self-directed learning. In addition it reports on the implementation of an extensive monitoring system of student learning, that allows for the provision of more tailored language support than previously possible.

© 2006 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Learner autonomy; Self-access; Language advising; Learning environments

1. Introduction

With the increased interest in self-access and language advising as alternative forms of language support, a number of issues have emerged in recent years that challenge their effec-

E-mail address: system@hayo.nl

tiveness (how well they help students learn) and efficiency (how quickly students learn). Research and experiences from practitioners show that learners are often unprepared for the type of learning they are asked to engage in (Reinders and Cotterall (2001), as are teachers for providing the necessary support (de los Angeles Clemente, 2001). There is little monitoring of student learning, partly as a result of a lack of knowledge of what students actually do in self-access (Sturtridge, 1997), and there is little in the way of assessment against objective criteria (Star, 1994). Materials are often not suitable for self-access (Reinders and Lewis, 2005, 2006), and frequently there are no clear links between students' learning in the self-access centre and their actual language use outside the centre (Cotterall and Reinders, 2001). Evaluating self-access learning is notoriously difficult (Star, 1994, 158) and few firm conclusions have so far been drawn about its success. Yet, self-access and language advising hold strong potential as learner-centred and highly flexible approaches to supporting student learning. In addition, there are many sound practical reasons for offering self-access as complementary to or as an alternative to classroom teaching, especially in situations where existing learning needs are too great or diverse to be met by traditional methods. This article focuses on how one centre has tried to overcome some of the challenges mentioned above by (1) developing an electronic learning environment which guides students in their self-directed learning, and (2) implementing an extensive monitoring system of student learning, allowing for the provision of more tailored support than had previously been possible.

2. Background

The University of Auckland is the largest tertiary educational provider in New Zealand. A survey in 2004 indicated that approximately 40% of its 35,000 students self-reported having a first language other than English. As part of an ongoing effort to better understand these students' needs, the University has developed a Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment, now taken by most first year students at the University. The assessment results in an overall score and band scores for listening, writing, and reading skills (ranging from 4 to 9). Scores of 8 or 9 are deemed sufficient to cope successfully in the academic environment. Students with scores of 6 and 7, which indicate some language deficiencies, receive a recommendation to improve their English through self-access or self-study. Students with scores of 4 or 5, indicating a need for 'immediate and intensive language support' are encouraged to enrol for English credit courses offered by the University, in addition to self-access.

Of a total of 2000 students assessed in 2002, only 27.8% scored in bands 8 or 9, the top two bands. This means that 71% of students need to improve their English. Furthermore, 41% of all students scored in the lowest two bands and thus had urgent language needs. Writing skills are the most common problem area, followed by reading and listening. Extrapolating these figures to the 40% of the entire university population who have a first language other than English, up to 10,000 students need some form of language help, clearly an enormous task.

Interestingly, further investigation done through the English Language Self-Access Centre (ELSAC) established that of these students, only approximately 500 enrolled for credit courses, around 800 made use of our self-access and another 500 joined short English courses offered through the university's learning support centre that also offers language support, (especially to first language speakers). This means that (1) only about 18% of all students who need to improve their language seek support, and (2) that flexible support

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/373645>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/373645>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)