

## East Asian Students' Autonomy in EFL Classrooms

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### ABSTRACT

East Asian countries have shifted the pedagogical focus of English education from grammatical components to developing communicative skills in English and positive attitudes towards engaging in proactive communication as a responsible member of a community, both of which can be components in learner autonomy. However, such shifts can not necessarily be found in the reality of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. This paper explores the extent to which East Asian students can be autonomous in EFL classes, and if the gap between the education policies and the reality of EFL education in East Asia can be closed by promoting learner autonomy through certain types of activities, specifically cooperative learning (CL). The paper concludes that reactive autonomy, which is proposed by Littlewood (1999), is congruent with East Asian students, and that CL has potential to promote the students' autonomy and to accomplish Japanese education policies focusing on communicative proficiency in EFL classrooms.

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of learner autonomy has been viewed commonly as the capacity to "take charge of one's own learning" (Holec, 1981, p.3). It has been the interest of many researchers in language teaching and learning, and the interest has grown remarkably since the turn of the century (Benson, 2007). English education in East Asian countries has also followed this trend as the pedagogical focus has shifted from grammatical components towards communicative skills. In the case of Japan, the government's intention is reflected in English education policies by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT, 2003, 2008, 2009a, 2009b). MEXT's (2009a, 2009b) Course of Study attempts to develop students' communication abilities as well as positive and appropriate attitudes toward proactive communication through the English language. Engaging in proactive communication can be considered one component of autonomous learning. Therefore, fostering learner autonomy can be one of the key factors to develop such abilities through cooperation and collaboration with others as a responsible individual in a community or a society.

However, how to implement the concept of learner autonomy associated with Western independence values has raised arguments about the cultural appropriateness of autonomy for East Asian learners in language learning due to the value of collectivist and interdependent views of self. With such cultural backgrounds, East Asian learners in EFL classrooms are often described as passive, quiet, tentative, obedient, or different innately

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from others, namely Western learners (e.g., Xie, 2000; Anderson, 1993; Barnlund, 1975; Condon, 1984; Rohlen, 1983). On the other hand, more recent research (e.g., Harumi, 2011; Xie, 2009; Cheng, 2000) assumes that the learner behaviors come from not only cultural aspects but also teachers' pedagogical strategies and communicative styles. EFL classrooms in East Asian cultures are often observed as conducted with teacher-centered, grammar-focused, and test-oriented instructions that include teacher's roles of holding authority, power, and control (Xuesong, 2006; Munezane, 2007). Littlewood (2000) claims that "if Asian students do indeed adopt the passive classroom attitudes that are often claimed, this is more likely to be a consequence of the educational contexts that have been or are now provided for them, than of any inherent dispositions of the students themselves" (p.33). In the case of Japan, Gorsuch (1998; 2001) points out the use of *yakudoku* as one of outstanding aspects of high school English education, in which a teacher asks students to translate English text word by word into Japanese. Gorsuch (1998) defines the methodology as a "pedagogy that functions as a powerful tool of teacher control" (p.32). With the methodology, they have little chance to produce their own spoken or written English utterances or sentences in and out of the classroom. Further, analyses have found that recent university entrance examinations include very few items testing knowledge of grammar or translation (Underwood, 2012). Learning English for entrance exams with the strong teacher control might promote students' competitive or individualistic learning behaviors and beliefs. Thus, the reality of EFL education in East Asia seems to be an environment opposed to an ideal positive and autonomy-promoting classroom and it seems difficult to achieve what the educational policies claim.

Given that, this paper attempts to explore if East Asian students can be autonomous in EFL classrooms, and if the gap between the educational policies which focus on developing communicative skills and the reality of EFL education in East Asia can be closed by promoting learner autonomy through a certain type of activities, specifically cooperative learning (CL). The focus of subjects will be on students in secondary school and university. This paper has four sections. First, it presents a brief overview of learner autonomy followed by an exploration of East Asian students' readiness for learner autonomy in relation to motivation. The third section introduces studies on the efficacy of CL for enhancing learner autonomy following brief overview of CL. The paper concludes with discussion and pedagogical implications for future research including issues related to teacher autonomy. This review does not aim to provide a certain view of theory, rather its purpose is to create a better understanding of strategies to enhance East Asian students' autonomy.

## **BRIEF OVERVIEW OF LEARNER AUTONOMY**

Several researchers have defined learner autonomy, but most notably, Holec (1981) defines it as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p.3). In his most cited definition (Holec, 1981), ability operates in determining learners' own objectives, defining learning contents and progressions, selecting learning methods and techniques to use, monitoring acquisition, and evaluating what the learners achieve. Benson (2011) further states autonomy should have "a social aspect to control over learning content, which involves the learner's ability to negotiate over goals, purposes, content and resources with others" (p.60).

Much of early work on learner autonomy focused on individualized learning in the field of adult self-directed learning, and researchers saw learner autonomy as irrelevant to classroom learning directed by teachers. However, recent research has developed a view of classroom contexts as a society and emphasized the importance of collaboration and

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interdependence for developing autonomy (Benson, 2011). Additionally, the way of interpreting the concept of learner autonomy associated with independence has raised arguments about the cultural appropriateness of autonomy for East Asian learners in language learning due to a view of East Asian cultures as collectivist (Littlewood, 1999). However, to those that believe learners who study languages separated from teachers or peers would not necessarily develop autonomy, the concept of autonomy can be interpreted as the notion of interdependence (Benson, 2011). Kohonen (1992) mentions that "autonomy ... includes the notion of interdependence, that is being responsible for one's own conduct in the social context: being able to cooperate with others and solve conflicts in constructive ways" (p.19). Relatedness with others is crucial for facilitating learner autonomy in language learning as well as people's needs to be interdependent with others and to be a responsible and critical member of a community or a society.

The argument in favor of group work and with emphasis on collaboration for developing learner autonomy is sometimes associated with Vygotskian theory. A frequently cited definition of the Vygotsky's zone of proximal development is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1980, p.86). Interaction with others is an essential factor for the individual development process. Connecting to Kohonen (1992), Brown (2003) argues that "the individual's internal development ... is inextricably linked with her/his social and interpersonal development: The role of interdependence in the development process is central" (p.269).

The influence of adults and peers is seen as one of the most important factors in self-regulation (Benson, 2011). Zimmerman (2008) defines self-regulated learning as "the self-directed processes and self-beliefs that enable learners to transform their mental abilities ... into an academic performance skill" (p.166). This means that learners are active agents of controlling whole learning processes rather than passively receiving linguistic input. Zimmerman (2008) states that self-regulated learning is "proactive processes that students use to acquire academic skill, such as setting goals, selecting and deploying strategies, and self-monitoring one's effectiveness rather than as reactive events that happen to students due to impersonal forces" (p.166). Self-regulated learning can be viewed in not only self-directed forms of learning but also social forms of learning.

Zhou, Ma, and Deci (2009) identify four types of motivation or regulation specified in Self-Determination Theory (i.e., intrinsic, identified/integrated, introjected, and external) in the order from highly autonomous to highly controlled. The original focus of this theory is on the source of human motivation and how psychological needs towards growth which human beings possess innately progress or decline through interaction with surrounding sociocultural factors. The theory assumes that among three psychological needs (i.e., for autonomy, for competence, and for relatedness) as prerequisites to increase learners' intrinsic motivation, the need for autonomy plays the most important role (Tanaka & Hiromori, 2007). Deci and Ryan (1985) state that Self-Determination Theory involves sets of motivational processes that help learners to improve their intrinsic motivation. Autonomy-oriented behaviors are experienced by one's own choices and would allow self-determined functioning, while control orientated behaviors has no experience of being aware of choices, and thus, it does not support self-regulation because it is regulated by controls.

Littlewood (1999) proposes a distinction between two levels of self-regulation in language learning: proactive autonomy and reactive autonomy. With proactive autonomy, learners regulate activities and the directions of their learning, which is associated with the individuality of Western culture. With reactive autonomy, on the other hand, learners do not create directions; however, once directions have been established, they are expected to

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autonomously organize their resources or themselves into groups without being pushed to engage in assignments or to achieve their goals. Littlewood (1999) suggests that while proactive autonomy is seen as the only type of autonomy by many researchers, reactive autonomy can be "a preliminary step towards to the first or a goal in its own right" (p.75) and affirms that reactive autonomy is congruent with East Asian learners, for he considers these types of autonomy in relation to group-oriented versions of autonomy: proactive autonomy and collaborative learning, and reactive autonomy and CL. Pointing out three sociocultural sources of influence that supposedly have an effect on East Asian learners' beliefs and behaviors (i.e., collectivist orientation, acceptance of authority, and belief in the value of effort and self-discipline), Littlewood (1999) goes on to propose generalizations including "[East Asian] students will have a high level of reactive autonomy, both individually and in groups," "groups of students will develop high levels of both reactive and proactive autonomy," and "the language classroom [in East Asian countries] can provide a favorable environment for developing the capacity for autonomy" (p.87-88). Consequently, this paper is primarily interested in reactive autonomy.

## **EAST ASIAN STUDENTS' READINESS FOR LEARNER AUTONOMY**

### **Relationship between Learner Autonomy and Motivation in EFL Classrooms**

Since autonomy and intrinsic motivation are seen as interrelated forces affecting language learning (Chang, 2010), exploring connections between motivation and learner autonomy is important to understand East Asian students' readiness for autonomy. However, arguing which of learner autonomy and intrinsic motivation is the prerequisite of the other is beyond the scope of this review.

Tanaka and Hiromori (2007) examined which psychological need in Self-Determination Theory plays the most remarkable role for students' motivational improvement. In this study, 78 university students in Japan answered a questionnaire before and after a set of sessions where a group presentation activity, which had potential to stimulate the three psychological needs (i.e., for autonomy, for competence, and for relatedness), was implemented. The results support what Self-Determination Theory affirms: Among the three psychological needs, the need for autonomy plays the most important role to improve learners' intrinsic motivation. More precisely, the need for relatedness is effective at the lower intrinsic motivation level, and the need for competence correlates with an increase at the middle level but is negatively correlated at the higher level. The need for autonomy correlates at all the levels.

On the contrary, Spratt, Humphreys, and Chan (2002) argue that motivation may lead to autonomy. This study was conducted with 508 university students in Hong Kong to assess students' readiness for learner autonomy. The research indicates that students' perception of their decision-making abilities is influenced by necessity, opportunity and/or prior experience of decision-making, confidence, and especially motivation. The researchers state that "a motivated student would have a greater interest in what is to be learnt and thus be more ready and able to take on responsibilities in the language learning process" (p.255). That is to say, the level of motivation affects students' willingness and ability to practice autonomy.

Similarly, in Chan, Spratt, and Humphreys (2002), a lack of intrinsic motivation caused a lack of learner autonomy. The results indicate a lack of the students' awareness of their responsibility in the learning process as well as a lack of knowledge and skills of autonomous learning due to heavy reliance on teacher control in their prior learning

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experience. The interviews showed that the students who perceived themselves as motivated had only certain autonomous learning behaviors to complete required workloads and showed little willingness to expand their learning beyond the classroom. The implication of the study is that the students had high levels of instrumental motivation, and thus, they were not willing, or ready for autonomous learning.

Chan (2001) shows that motivation levels influence students' attitudes and expectation of classroom learning. In this study, the observed students were highly motivated and had clear goals in language learning, preferred learning styles and activities. This result may imply that students strongly desire more exposure to authentic use of the target language and involvement in group work with collaboration, a key element that fosters learner autonomy. Though it is likely that the students had little or no previous experiences of such learner training, they showed a preference for being given opportunities to exercise decision-making in their learning process as well as self-discovery in learning. Thus, the students were considered as, in Chan's (2001) words, being "at the early stage of learning to work autonomously where they saw the situation having a high degree of novelty or even uncertainty" (p. 514).

However, the view of Spratt, Humphreys, and Chan (2002) that autonomy and motivation are always intrinsically linked somewhat resonates with Tanaka and Hiromori's study (2007). The study argues as follows: "It may ... be that the relationship between motivation and autonomy works in both directions, changing in direction with different stages in a learner's progress and in learners' lives in general. ... [It] could also be dynamic and operate in different directions depending on the kind of motivation involved. We cannot assume that the relationship between autonomy and motivation is always one in which autonomy leads to motivation" (p.262). While the need for autonomy plays important roles to develop students' intrinsic motivation at any levels, students whose motivation is relatively high would be ready for and have the ability of practicing autonomy. This is also supported in Chan (2001) and Chan, Spratt, and Humphreys (2002). Awareness and successful experiences of learner autonomy can be triggers for facilitating intrinsic motivation, and high levels of motivation with metacognitive skills can lead students to prepare for practicing autonomy.

Reviewing the research implies that teachers should carefully monitor students' intrinsic motivation levels and implement activities that include elements to stimulate students' psychological needs appropriate for their motivation levels. For students with low motivation, teachers should give activities that encourage students collaboration and positive interdependence with peers. This way their fear of making mistakes in the whole class, which can cause their passive and reticent learning behaviors in class (Kurihara, 2006; Cheng, 2000), will not hinder their active participation. For students at moderate levels of motivation, teachers should focus on providing opportunities for students to have the successful experience of achieving goals and to feel a sense of accomplishment so that students can be more confident in their language competence. For students with high motivation, as they already feel secure and confident about their competence to conduct autonomous learning, activities for students that require little teacher assistance are appropriate. Concerning the higher level of East Asian students' instrumental motivation in competitive learning (Sakai and Kikuchi, 2009); Leung, 2006; Chan, Spratt, & Humphreys, 2002), encouraging collaboration and positive interdependence should receive a primary focus in East Asian EFL classrooms.

## **Group Processes in EFL Classrooms**

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Collaboration in group work is one key aspect of fostering learner autonomy. In order to explore how two group processes (i.e., group cohesiveness and group norms) affect individual students' level of autonomy beliefs and behaviors, Chang (2007) carried out a comparative study in Taiwan with 152 university students. Questionnaires and semi-structured individual interviews were conducted. 3 interviewees from each group were selected: one who showed a positive view of the group in the questionnaire, one with a neutral view, and one with a negative view. The study identifies a correlation between group processes and individual learner's autonomous behavior, but not between group processes and individual learner's autonomous beliefs. Chang (2007) states that in a group with positive norms and cohesiveness, "classmates' behaviors motivate [individual learners] to follow suit" (p. 332).

A later study by Chang (2010) administered questionnaires to 152 Taiwanese two-year university students and semi-structured interviews to 12 students for the purpose of exploring how group processes (i.e., group cohesiveness and group norms) influence individual students' motivation (i.e., self-efficacy and autonomy). This study considers autonomy as one aspect of motivation. The students formed 4 groups: 2 junior year groups and 2 senior year groups. The results show a slight to moderate correlation between group process and the students' level of motivation. The interview data reveals that while the most of the interviewees perceived that learning in groups had influenced their motivation, they believed self-determination was the most significant factor in establishing their motivation. On the other hand, the study also suggests, referring to the senior interviewees stating that group process was more influential when they were younger, that if the age of learners at the time of group interaction is lower, the group exerts more of influence to their learning.

These findings in Chang (2010) support Head's (2006) findings about the age factors. In Head (2006), the majority of the 117 university students in Japan assumed that autonomous learning should be introduced at elementary or junior high school, where students should be given opportunities to develop their learning behaviors and beliefs as well as interpersonal and metacognitive skills in order to be responsible members in the community. Learning with collaboration and interdependence in cooperative group work can exert positive influences upon individual learners to set their learning goals, to reflect on their learning, and to decide learning strategies.

Taking the view that collaborating with peers in supportive environments and that taking charge of responsibilities to achieve a goal can be powerful elements to enhance learner autonomy in East Asian EFL classrooms, this paper supports Littlewood's (1999) argument: CL, a group-oriented version of reactive autonomy, is congruent with East Asian classroom learning.

## **EFFICACY OF CL FOR ENHANCING LEARNER AUTONOMY IN EAST ASIA**

### **What is CL?**

According to Olsen and Kagan (1992), CL refers to "group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others" (p.8) while Oxford (1997) defines it as "a particular set of classroom techniques that foster learner interdependence as a route to cognitive and social development" (p.443). Consequently, it is considered the most structured end of the collaborative learning continuum.

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CL is often compared to competitive and individualistic learning in terms of interdependence. In competitive learning, students are forced to work against peers, and rewards are given only to the best students, which creates negative interdependence among students. In individual learning, students have little or no opportunities for social interdependence between peers and rewards are given according to set criteria. On the contrary, CL is often characterized by a positive interdependence among students, which is considered to be an essential element (Dornyei, 1997).

The basic principles of CL proposed by Johnson & Johnson (1994; 1999) are positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, social skills, and group processing. According to Johnson and Johnson (1994; 1999), positive interdependence exists with a positive correlation among individuals' goal achievement. As it links students, one cannot succeed without the other group members' success. In individual accountability, students are responsible for attaining individual goals as well as the group's and contribute to accomplishing their shared work by taking charge of a given role. Johnson and Johnson (1994; 1999) define face-to-face interaction as the interaction among group members with trust to complete tasks with help, support, and encouragement. Social skills help group members work smoothly. As these skills are not instinctive, learners need to develop social skills not only to be successful in CL but also in any situations in their daily life (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; 1999). Group processing involves students' metacognitive awareness: reflecting on their group process, assessing the effectiveness, and discussing how it can be improved. The five elements of CL correlate with one another, thus it can be more effective in promoting intrinsic motivation and positive attitudes towards learning, and developing cohesiveness with peers and the teacher.

## **Studies on CL Implemented in East Asian EFL Classrooms**

This section explores five studies on CL conducted in secondary school and university to understand the efficacy of CL to enhance learner autonomy.

Yoshino (2011) implemented CL in a 'language and culture' class with 34 students at a university in Tokyo, Japan. Students formed groups of 2 or 3 and worked together choosing and researching a topic about English and Japanese language and culture. Then, each group gave a presentation on the topic in class. Each presentation was peer-assessed. They completed two questionnaires: a dichotomous questionnaire at the beginning of the course and open-ended one at the end. Yoshino (2011) notes that she, as the course instructor, found it necessary to encourage the students to believe that they could complete preparing the presentation by giving advices on how to gather and analyze information, which partly implies a lack of the students' learning strategies. Her observations reveal that as she encouraged the students to peer-assess in a constructive and critical manner, the audience of each presentation created a supportive atmosphere. Further, the results of the questionnaires show a shift of students' perception of learning language and culture. While at the beginning of the course there was a tendency for the students to perceive language learning as language acquisition, later they were more aware that language learning includes understanding the culture related to the target language. Given such results, Yoshino concludes that the experience of CL requiring responsibility for their learning and engagement in critical thinking within a supportive group environment developed the students' cooperative and autonomous learning abilities.

Similarly, Hart (2002) implemented CL in an English course for freshman at a university in Japan for the purpose of fostering Japanese students' reactive autonomy and developing intellectual and social skills in learning English as a global language. The aim of

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the 4-year course was "to stimulate students to use real language that resulted from the exchange of opinions about real life ... and that would model activities they will be engaged in real life" (Hart, 2002, p.39). The target class of 94 non-English-major students met twice a week for two semesters of 13 weeks. The students were divided into small groups, and each chose a topic to research, prepared written and oral statements in English, and gave a poster presentation in class. In the process, the students decided how to accomplish tasks while identifying and reporting in diaries their own learning strategies referring to a list of strategy headings given by the teacher. The students' diaries show that they increased their communicative confidence in English by the experience of pursuing common goals in the secure context of their working groups without the teachers' help. Analysis also revealed the students' better understanding of their own learning strategies such as using English as a tool of gathering information, which led them to be aware of the importance of English for participating in global communication and continuing their life-long learning.

Takagi (2003) conducted a study in a reading course at a university in Japan to determine how CL can increase students' motivation and autonomy. One of the course aims was to promote critical thinking skills and students cooperation. The study involved introducing 5 jigsaw reading activities. The main objective was to increase the level of two key elements of CL, individual accountability and positive interdependence. In the activity, the teacher first divided the students into groups based on individual student's English level, gender and personality traits so as to create balanced groups. The students in each group were assigned either one of 4 roles: facilitator, timekeeper, recorder, and checker. Data was collected by the teacher observation, students' weekly journals and interviews at the end of the course. Takagi's observation (2003) finds that at the beginning the students were unfamiliar with CL due to no or little experience of it and that they became accustomed to and more confident with communicating in English as the week passed, just as Hart (2002) and Yoshino (2011) observed. The interviews revealed an increase in the students' motivation because they were aware that in CL they needed to take more responsibility to reach common goals than other reading courses they had taken as well as assumed the individual given roles with clearly defined responsibilities. In addition, they had more fun in learning within groups than during competitive or individualistic learning described as teacher-centered, grammar-focused, and test-oriented learning with teacher's roles of holding authority, power, and control (Xuesong, 2006; Munezane, 2007), which many high schools in East Asian countries appear to implement in English classes. Takagi (2003) implies that students' prior learning experiences of being expected to provide grammatically perfect answers resulted a lack of productive language training and a fear of making mistakes in discussions caused their low communication skills in English and made it difficult for the students to conduct discussions in English. In addition, Takagi states that student autonomy increased regardless of the students' English proficiency level due to and emphasis on the importance of making students aware of autonomy.

Sachs, Candlin, Rose, and Shum (2003) support these about students' perception of the difference between CL and traditional teacher-oriented approach. This study implemented CL in a Hong Kong secondary classroom in order to explore and examine efficiency of CL as an alternative teaching mode that may provide students with more active and engaged learning rather than teacher-centered instructional teaching. In this 1-year project, eight Hong Kong Chinese speaking teachers participated in workshops to deepen their understanding of CL as well as implemented one or two CL activities every month in class at three local secondary school. The tasks were designed by either the researchers or the teachers based on their course books or syllabi and by referring to students' feedback. Feedback from the teachers and the students indicates the efficiency of CL in terms of students' active interaction and learning. The students' feedback showed that most of them enjoyed using

English in group discussions but found they had difficulty accomplishing some tasks. They felt more relaxed and were happy with learning English in CL. It provided capable students with more chances to try challenging tasks and students at lower level with more chances to communicate with others, a detail mentioned by both the students and the teachers. Furthermore, the teachers pointed out lower students' insufficient language proficiency to actively join discussions.

The teachers also faced difficulties introducing CL due to the tight syllabus as well as limited planning and teaching time. This teaching environment caused the teachers to provide the students inadequate language exposure, which caused the students' problems when attempting to accomplish some tasks. It also affected restriction of data analysis on pre- and post-tests (i.e., an individual role-play task and a small-group interaction task) given to 120 randomly selected students in order to compare the students' oral proficiency in CL with that in traditional deductive teaching. The test analysis had to be restricted to only the students in one school that had a nominal exposure to CL because the teachers in two schools were not able to successfully offer the students sufficient exposure to CL due to the teaching environment. Despite that, the analysis found no significant differences between the groups with the two different pedagogical styles. These findings imply that teachers should be given greater flexibility and autonomy in determining what and how to teach in class as well as how to assess students as well as teacher training. Sachs, Candlin, Rose, and Shum (2003) state that the study context "is the preliminary stages of adopting CL" (p.351). That is to say, teacher autonomy should be enhanced in order to develop learner autonomy in CL implemented in EFL class.

Kurihara (2006) argues the importance of choice and decision in terms of students' active participation in class. The study was conducted in a class of 38 female high school juniors in western Japan. The students had instrumental motivation due to the focus on university entrance exams. They were offered 2 activities to work on in groups: a group talk activity and a presentation project. For the first group talk activity, the teacher formed groups of four or five students by name order and gave three roles to each group: presenter, reporter, and listener. After each student experienced all the roles, they formed groups according to their preference. Then, the students worked in groups for the presentation project. For data collection, Kurihara (2006) gave two questionnaires, one on student' goals and expectation at the beginning of the course and the other to see their attitudinal change through the activities at the end. The researcher also analyzed the students' journal for reflection on their activities as well as her own journal and interviewed volunteer students at the end of the course. Findings reveal that in the first round students were quiet because they feared losing face in the whole class. Kurihara (2006) points out that the fear was attributed to peer relationships in the group, as well as the gap between the students' English ability they perceived and the ability the textbook required. Referring to Benson (2001), Kurihara (2006) emphasizes that "the elements of choice and decision [of the peers in the group and the materials] have enabled students to become more active speakers in the classroom [, and] this capacity to control one's own learning is ... autonomy" (p.54).

Yoshino (2001), Hart (2002), Takagi (2003), Sachs, Candlin, Rose, & Shum (2003) and Kurihara (2006) all identify some barriers to implementing CL in East Asian EFL classrooms: necessity to encourage students to believe in achievement, and a lack of students' metacognitive skills and experience of learning in CL. However, compared to students' prior learning experience, CL can allow students to be aware of the necessity of taking more responsibility for accomplishment, developing skills of collaborating with peers, having more fun in learning, increasing intrinsic motivation by filling roles with required responsibilities, as well as developing critical thinking and metacognitive skills. Learning English through CL can also help students develop positive attitudes towards understanding different cultures and

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raise awareness regarding the importance of English proficiency to participate in global communication and to continue their life-long learning.

## DISCUSSION

This paper has explored East Asian students' readiness for autonomy. As Tanaka and Hiromori (2007) argue, it is important for teachers to monitor students in order to implement tasks appropriate for students' intrinsic motivation level. For students with low motivation, activities which allow them to develop collaboration and positive interdependence in cooperative group work can be effective because students' anxiety and fear can be lightened, and because the experience of practicing autonomous learning can raise their awareness of the responsibility. To those with relatively high motivation, teachers should provide more choices and freedom so that they can be more confident with their ability to be the subject of their learning. The importance of giving choice is emphasized in Kurihara (2006). For those with higher motivation, it will be appropriate for teachers to provide activities that require more responsibility and respect their autonomy. Thus, in East Asian EFL classrooms, where competitive learning would develop students' instrumental motivation rather than intrinsic motivation, teachers should put primary focus on developing collaboration and positive interdependence among students.

This review has also explored the efficacy of group processes on their motivation and autonomous behaviors and beliefs. Learning behaviors and beliefs developed in cooperative group work are powerful factors to enhance intrinsic motivation as well as autonomous learning. Taking this view, the paper supports the congruency of reactive autonomy and CL with East Asian students, as Littlewood (1999) argues.

This project has also explored the examples of the studies on CL at high school and university levels in Japan. The studies indicate that it successfully develops collaboration and positive interdependence among East Asian students while reducing the fear of making mistakes and to help them aware of the responsibility. Learning in CL can allow students to develop their learning proficiency as well as interpersonal and metacognitive skills. CL can also help students develop communicative competence and positive attitudes towards understanding different cultures, a goal toward which Japanese education policies aim (MEXT 2009a; 2009b). Thus, this paper argues that East Asian students can be autonomous in EFL classrooms through CL, and that the educational policies that focus on developing students' positive attitudes towards communicating in the target language and understanding different cultures can be accomplished by promoting learner autonomy through CL.

The review suggests the necessity of future research on the viability of CL at an elementary or a junior high school level. In Head (2006), the majority of 117 university students in Japan assume that autonomous learning should be introduced at elementary or junior high school. Students should be trained in autonomy in early stage of learning so that the learning experience can develop their interpersonal and metacognitive skills for the purpose of being a critical member of the society. In addition, Chang (2010) suggests age may be a factor in terms of group processes that if the age of learners at the time of group interaction is lower, the group exerts more influence on their learning.

Furthermore, the paper suggests the necessity of improving teaching environment with tight syllabus and limited planning time as well as the importance of teacher trainings and teacher autonomy in order for teachers to be more flexible and be more capable educators to implement CL and achieve the educational policies. Several studies have indicated East Asian EFL teachers' negative attitudes towards learner autonomy (e.g., Cheng and Dornyei, 2007; Koutselini, 2009). Hu (2012) states that "a methodology is only effective to the extent

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that teachers and students are willing to accept and implement it with good faith, and whether it is accepted or not is largely determined by the set of values and beliefs that these teachers and students have been socialized into" (p.102). Thus, teachers' awareness of their own autonomy should be raised in order to raise students'.

At the conclusion, in order to foster learner autonomy in East Asian EFL classrooms, we, teachers should develop teacher autonomy for implementing strategies that can raise students' awareness of autonomy, creating collaboration and interdependence among students in supportive learning environment which can reduce learning anxiety and fear of making mistakes and enhance their intrinsic motivation as well as interpersonal and highly cognitive skills. By achieving this, EFL education will be a vehicle for enhancing East Asian students' reactive autonomy, which would be a prerequisite stage of developing their proactive autonomy.

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