

Encouraging autonomous learning through a vocabulary-building out-of-class activity using online spreadsheets: Case studies from translation and exam preparation courses

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Abstract

This study explores the implementation of a vocabulary-building out-of-class activity designed to promote learner autonomy among university-level EFL students in Japan. Drawing on the traditional Japanese practice of shakyo (the meditative transcription of meaningful texts), learners used shared online spreadsheets to create personalized vocabulary databases. They selected lines from subtitled movies or other audiovisual materials that contained words or expressions they wished to learn. The shared format allowed learners to view peers' entries, integrating elements of peer learning and fostering a sense of community. This activity was first implemented in a translation course, and adapted for use in an exam preparation course. Post-course surveys for both courses revealed generally positive attitudes, particularly regarding the freedom to choose vocabulary, the usefulness of the spreadsheet tool, and the motivational effects of peer visibility. While the translation course showed higher engagement overall, the activity was positively received in both contexts. The findings suggest that tasks emphasizing learner ownership and decision-making can effectively promote learner autonomy, enhance contextualized vocabulary learning, and encourage reflective study habits. The study offers a practical, adaptable model for integrating traditional practices and modern technology in EFL learning contexts.

Keywords: learner autonomy; out-of-class activity; vocabulary database; online spreadsheet.

1. Introduction

Learner autonomy has long been recognized as a key goal in second language education. Since Holec's influential definition (1981) of autonomy as the ability "to take charge of one's own learning," and "the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning," numerous researchers and educators have emphasized the importance of enabling learners to make decisions about what and how they learn (e.g., Little, 1991; Dörnyei, 2001). The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly expanded learners' access to language input, opening up unprecedented opportunities for independent and personalized language learning (Adolphs et al., 2018). However, promoting autonomy remains an ongoing challenge, particularly in educational contexts where teacher-centered approaches still dominate.

The traditional lecture-style and passive learning methods continue to be commonplace in Japan and this is frequently cited as a contributing factor to limited learner autonomy (Brent, 2019; Kanazawa, 2020; Smith, 2025). In the case of vocabulary learning, in particular, learners are typically provided with word lists selected by

instructors or textbooks, which tend to promote rote memorization and reinforce a passive mode of study. However, growing research suggests that vocabulary acquisition is more effective when it is accompanied by contextualized learning, as learners are better able to infer meaning, retain new words, and apply them in communicative situations (van den Broek et al, 2022; Zhou & Wu, 2024).

In addition, a number of studies have sought to enhance contextualized vocabulary instruction by leveraging technological resources, such as online platforms and multimedia content. Other attempts include the use of VR and serious games, which aim to situate vocabulary learning within immersive or game-based contexts. While these approaches demonstrate the potential of technology to enrich language learning, they are often resource-intensive or limited in applicability. These findings underscore the need for accessible vocabulary learning methods that go beyond decontextualized memorization and actively engage learners in meaning-making processes.

To respond to this need, the present study introduces a technology-enhanced out-of-class vocabulary learning activity, named by the author “MTD (My Translation Database).” This activity draws on the traditional Japanese practice of *shakyo*—the meditative act of transcribing Buddhist sutras by hand, often regarded as a religious service or a form of spiritual training. In this context, the *shakyo* method refers to the act of carefully copying linguistic material as a means of focusing attention and fostering learner agency. Such transcription-based practice has also been applied effectively in fields, such as programming and translator training, where copying model codes or texts is used to internalize structure, style and usage patterns.

In this MTD activity, learners independently selected vocabulary items they wished to review and recorded them in a shared online spreadsheet. For each entry, they added example sentences and personal learning notes, encouraging them to reflect on their learning and explore the word in greater depth. This design aimed to promote autonomous learning by allowing learners to take ownership of both the content and manner of their study.

At the same time, the shared nature of the spreadsheet incorporated elements of peer learning. Learners could view and learn from their classmates’ entries, gaining exposure to a variety of expressions and learning strategies. The visibility of others’ learning processes fostered a sense of community and promoted mutual engagement. Such peer collaboration has been shown to enhance learner motivation, as learners are often driven by the desire to connect with and learn from their peers (Dörnyei, 2001).

This activity was implemented in two university-level EFL courses taught by the author. While both a Japanese-to-English translation class and a TOEIC preparation class were involved, the focus of this study is primarily on the translation class, where learner autonomy and reflection on language use were particularly emphasized. The TOEIC class served as a secondary site to observe how the activity functioned in a more exam-oriented context.

This paper examines how the activity influenced learners’ perceptions of vocabulary learning and their sense of autonomy, drawing on learner submissions and post-course surveys. By combining traditional practices with digital tools, this study explores how learner agency and peer-based learning can be meaningfully integrated into vocabulary learning.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants were 83 second- to fourth-year English-major university students in Japan mostly at CEFR B1-level, enrolled in two classes of a Japanese-to-English translation course offered as a “Course to Improve Foreign Language Skills.” All students had attained a TOEIC score of 550 or higher, as required for course registration. The activity was conducted over 12 weeks during a 14-week semester.

2.2. Procedure

The MTD activity was carried out using a shared online spreadsheet platform. Each student was assigned an individual spreadsheet (hereafter referred as “sheet”) within a shared spreadsheet file (hereafter referred as “file”).

The template for a sheet is shown below as Figure 1. The file was accessible to all students and the instructor, allowing students to view each other's entries. The numbers at the bottom of the file (Figure 1) indicate the numbers given to students. This shared format was intended to promote peer learning through the visibility of classmates' learning processes and strategies.

毎週の課題: MTD (My Translation Database)

映画・ドラマ・ネットなどの動画の日英対訳を見て、自分だけの表現集を作ってください。

- 毎週10個以上の表現を入れろ (番号の空に各週の語数を入れる) → 全12週で120個以上の表現集ができるようになります
- 表現は、原則として、単語単位でなく表現や文で (できるだけ文で、2場面をくっつけてもOK) (単語単位ばかりの場合、減点します)
- 英語は自分で訳さない (英語スクリプトや英語字幕のあるものを選び、正しいものを入力すること。自動生成字幕は間違っている場合が多いので使用しないこと)
- 日本語も自分で訳さない (プロが行った日本語訳を入力しよう。) *TEDトークなど、アマチュアによる翻訳でも、プロのレベルの翻訳ならOK (判断できない場合は相談してください)
- 自分の学生番号のシートを渡し、「シートの保護」で、自分と所有者 (teacher) のみが編集できるようにロックをかけてください。
- 毎週の締切は授業前日の17:00。10個以上のノルマを達成しているかチェックします。単語のみのもの、スペルミスのあるものは数に数えません。
- 自己学習 (ディクテーション、和訳・英訳など) の列を作成しても構いません。自分で学習方法を工夫し、正解やモデル回答を見ながら考えるプロセスは、英語習得にとっても有効です。

MTD (No. Name)

No.	Source	Title	日本語	English	Note
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					

template list Example 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Figure 1. MTD (My Translation Database) template

To prevent accidental edits or deletions by others, students were instructed to protect their individual sheets by setting editing permissions for themselves and the instructor only (The lock icon for each sheet in Figure 1 indicates the sheet is protected and not editable by others). A template was pre-installed on each sheet by the instructor, with columns for the source, title, Japanese subtitles, English scripts, and personal learning notes. Students were instructed to use professionally subtitled English-language videos, such as movies and TV series, that included official Japanese subtitles. By adopting the *shakyo* method, they were required to enter accurate English subtitles from the video, rather than self-translations or transcripts derived from listening alone.

Each week, students were expected to enter at least ten entries (no upper limit), totaling a minimum of 120 items over the 12-week period. Deadlines were set for the day before each weekly class session, and the instructor regularly monitored submissions to confirm timely completion.

2.3. Learning task

Students independently selected videos of personal interest and identified English expressions or vocabulary they wished to learn. For each target item, they entered a Japanese subtitle, the corresponding English script, and notes based on their own learning points. This transcription-focus, or *shakyo*, task aimed to deepen vocabulary understanding by encouraging contextual learning and reflection.

This approach represented a shift from a fully autonomous model to a “semi-autonomous” one. In previous trials using offline spreadsheets submitted only at the midterm and end-of-term points, many students failed to engage meaningfully with the task—some neglected it altogether, others submitted with rushed or superficial entries. These experiences highlighted the need for moderate teacher involvement to ensure task effectiveness. Therefore, in this implementation, weekly minimum quotas and shared digital monitoring were introduced to provide structure while still allowing learner control over content and pacing.

2.4. Data collection and analysis

At the end of semester, students completed a post-course survey that included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The multiple-choice items used a four-point Likert scale: “Strongly agree” (4), “Agree” (3), “Disagree” (2), and “Strongly disagree” (1). For each item, M, SD, and a 95% confidence interval was calculated. The survey was conducted in Japanese, and all questions and responses presented in this paper have been translated into English by the author. For the purposes of this study, responses to items related to learner autonomy, peer

learning, and the use of digital tools were extracted and analyzed. The analysis focused on how students perceived the impact of the activity on their vocabulary learning habits and sense of ownership over their study process.

Although this activity was implemented in both a Japanese-to-English translation course and a TOEIC preparation course, the present paper focuses on the translation course, where learner autonomy and language reflection were more central to the instructional goals.

The procedure and learning task used in the TOEIC course were similar in structure to those in the translation course; however, the specific implementation and learner responses in that context will be discussed later in the Discussion section, as a reference for how this activity might be adapted and applied beyond the translation-focused context.

3. Results and discussion

As described above, learners were required to add at least ten entries per week (with no upper limit), for a total target of 120 items over the 12-week period. Although weekly deadlines were set for 5:00 p.m. on the day before each class, the final evaluation was based on the submission status at the end of the semester rather than on a week-by-week basis. Evaluation criteria focused on the total number of vocabulary items collected, as well as the quantity and quality of the learning notes provided.

Throughout the semester, after each deadline, the instructor monitored whether learners had submitted their entries and marked them by adding color to the number of entries as confirmed. While it was not feasible to review all content in detail, the instructor provided individualized comments in green next to the learners' learning notes, in order to indicate they were the instructor's and to offer suggestions and learning tips wherever possible. Some learners also used the learning notes space to ask questions directly to the instructor. As a result, 66 out of 83 learners (79.5%) met the target of 120 entries by the end of the semester, with the highest number recorded being 180. The number of entries was $M = 116.48$ ($SD = 18.84$), with a 95% confidence interval for M ranging from 112.37 to 120.60. The MTD of one student is presented below as an example (Figure 2).

No.	Source	Title	日本語	English	Note
Wk2	1	TED	Inside the mind of a master procrastinator	先延ばし癖の脳とそうでない人の脳にはまったく違いがあるはずとある	Now, I had a hypothesis that the brains of procrastinators were actually different than the brains of other people.
	2		それで当季一様だから悪いけど今日はもう仕事を入れる余裕がないね	All of that's going to take a while, so we're not going to really have room on the schedule for any works today.	take a while = 時間がかかるを季一様と訳すことで、"やることばっかりあるから先延ばしにしてしまおう。理由がより伝わりやすい"
	3		お馴染みの先延ばし癖の脳に落ちています	All of those good procrastinator feelings.	文脈：先延ばしにしてしまおうメカニズムを脳を指して説明している
	4		今すぐ寝るなんて思いつかない！	We need to sit down and work on this right now.	sit down = 寝る（文中）
	5		何かがプロジェクトで失敗しているわけではありません	It's not that they're examining for some project.	exam = 目の込み具合 → 度合い
	6		私みたいなメカニズムではないにしても	Now, you might not all be a mess, like some of us.	
	7		でもお馴染みの脳が一緒ならいいのは確かです	But remember: The Monkey's sneaking trick is when the deadlines aren't there.	sneak = 隠らしい
	8		そんなに凶悪なわけではありませぬ。おまけに私たちがはるかに賢いからです	That's not that many boxes, especially since we've already used a bunch of those.	文脈：人生90年の各週を一つの箱で表した「人生カレンダー」を指して説明している。
	9		まあ今日くらいじゃないにしても、できれば遅くないうちに	Well, maybe not today, but...you know, sometime soon.	みな先延ばし癖だと説明している中で、近いうちに（早めによ）よりも遅くないうちにと訳されている
Wk3	10	Movie	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	No business at the dinner table.	
	11	YouTube	Vogue Japan 「ハリウッド」のファッション編、星野家の解説	Today, I'm breaking down the architectural details of Hogwarts in the Harry Potter films.	break down = 壊す → 組み立てて → 分かりやすく説明する
	12		ダンブルドア校長からお話です。	Professor Dumbledore would like to say a few words.	say a few words = ちょっと発言する。簡単な挨拶をする
	13		ここに魔法の存在が感じられます。	So that's emphasizing the magic here.	emphasize = 強調する。目立たせる
	14		ホグワーツでは実際に壁紙と化しているのが面白い。	It's funny how it's been translated here at Hogwarts where it's actually been translated as wallpaper.	translate = 訳や翻訳などを訳す → ここではタペストリーを壁紙として使っていることと魔法のメンタ
	15	TED	TEDxで観そうにプレゼンする解決	And damn, I'm gonna see it through.	see through = 見透す（文中）で、そこから「見透す、見抜く」へ転じて「最後までやり通す」という意味にもなった。
	16		こうして準備が完了するという感じがしていいです。	Now, I'm doing this because I'd like to make it seem like I've done my homework.	make it seem = に見えようにする
	17		人生ってどう変わるかわかりませんよ。	Life's a roller coaster.	ジェットコースターのように揺る揺るしく変化を指して使われる
	18	Can You Solve the Wizard Staveoff Riddle?	魔法のルールは厳格であり隠されておらずに失格と失敗と	The rules of magic duels are strict, and anyone who casts out of order immediately forfeits the duel.	out of order = 違反して
	19	TED	How to Spot a Liar	On a psychological level, we lie partly to paint a better picture of ourselves.	絵を描く → 表現を直す → paint a better picture = 自分をよりよく見せる
	20	Strange Answers to the Psychomorph Test	彼は自分の3割を削減しました。	He'd close down 30 percent of the workforce.	close down = 閉じ、閉鎖する、閉鎖する → 労働者の削減を指している
	21	TED	The Art of Misdirection	But it's only a start.	
Wk4	22	Book	Beauty and the Beast	Where you off to?	どこへ行くの？
	23		ええ、途中でやめられなくて、一気に読み進めました。	Oh, I couldn't put it down.	put down = 下に置く "Oh, I couldn't put it down" = 一気に読み進めた

Figure 2. One student's MTD

Following the activity, learners completed a post-course survey consisting of both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. From this survey responses related to learner autonomy, peer learning, and the use of digital tools were extracted and analyzed. Tables 1 and 2 below present the results.

Table 1. Results of the multiple-choice survey (n = 80)
(4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly disagree)

	Statements	M	SD	95% CI (Lower-Upper)
1	It is good to choose vocabulary to learn by myself.*	3.26	0.65	3.32-3.41
2	I remember vocabulary better when I choose it myself rather than when it is given to me.*	3.39	0.61	3.25-3.52
3	It was good to be given a weekly quota.*	3.16	0.91	2.96-3.37
4	It was good to be able to see what other student were learning.**	3.33	0.69	3.17-3.48
5	I was able to learn something by looking at what other students were learning.**	2.56	0.86	2.37-2.75
6	I didn't mind that other students could see what I was learning.**	3.26	0.78	3.09-3.44
7	Using a shared online spreadsheet file was a good idea.***	3.48	0.57	3.35-3.60
8	I want to continue MTD even if it's not part of a class assignment.	2.80	0.75	2.63-2.97

*: autonomy, **: peer learning, and ***: the use of digital tools

The results of the survey indicate that participants generally responded favorably to this learning activity. Most items in the multiple-choice section had $M > 3.0$, with the lowest $M = 2.56$, suggesting a broadly positive perception of the activity as a vocabulary learning method. In particular, responses to items related to learner autonomy revealed that learners appreciated having the freedom to choose the vocabulary they wanted to study.

Comments from the open-ended section further support this interpretation. Some examples are as follows:

- It was good to be able to learn from topics and genres I'm interested in.
- Since I selected vocabulary with possible real-life use in mind, I found it more applicable in conversation and helpful in raising my motivation to learn.
- I began to actively look up the meanings of words and expressions I was curious about.
- It feels like I may have wasted my time by not recording this kind of knowledge before.
- Rather than reluctantly memorizing impersonal vocabulary as a study task, I was able to learn from content I genuinely enjoy.
- Because I studied the expressions voluntarily, they were easier to remember and seemed more usable in conversation.

While these responses highlight the positive impact of self-selection, some learners also expressed a preference for a degree of instructor control, particularly in the form of a weekly quota (Q3, $M = 3.16$). Open-ended responses related to this issue included the following comments.

- I used to watch videos just for fun, but once a quota was set and it became an assignment task, I became more conscious of learning and was able to retain more knowledge.
- I had a similar assignment in another class without a quota. Compared to that, the ten-word-a-week quota for this course was manageable and worked better for me.

Several participants commented that the requirement of ten entries per week was “neither too much not too little,” and that the combination of instructor-set minimums with learner-driven choices allowed for an appropriate balance of structure and autonomy. Nonetheless, a small number expressed negative views, such as:

- Because of the quota, I felt forced into it and couldn't stay motivated.

- It felt more like an obligation, so I don't remember much of what I studied.

Regarding peer learning, participants generally expressed openness to sharing the spreadsheet file with other students ($M = 3.26$), and responded favorably to being able to view their peers' learning progress ($M = 3.33$). However, responses to the item on learning directly from peers were less positive by comparison, with a lower score ($M = 2.56$), although still above the neutral point. One participant explicitly mentioned this benefit in the open-ended responses, commenting, "It was helpful because I feel my vocabulary increased by looking at the work of others."

Another participant noted that being able to view others' progress on the shared spreadsheet helped them confirm whether they were on the right track, working on the assignment in the way they were expected. While these responses highlight the practical benefits of shared documents, they implied that the activity may not have strongly fostered an awareness of collaborative learning in a virtual online environment. The interaction may have been perceived more as passive observation than as active peer engagement.

As for the use of the digital tool, participants responded quite positively to the use of the shared online spreadsheet ($M = 3.48$). Although open-ended comments were limited, a few participants mentioned practical advantages, such as "I could review it repeatedly," and "Having it in a list made it easier to revisit." One participant described the activity as "something I had never done before," which may reflect the novelty of being allowed to select content themselves. However, it is worth noting that among English majors at the author's institution, opportunities to use spreadsheets are relatively rare. Many students are likely to graduate with only limited computer skills, such as creating documents and slide presentations. In this activity, the spreadsheet may have attracted attention specifically due to its novelty, as the author also uses it for communication, information sharing, and other class activities beyond this project.

Responses to the statement, "I want to continue MTD even if it's not part of a class assignment," were generally positive ($M = 2.8$), but not particularly strong. Nonetheless, the perceived novelty of the activity may have served as a meaningful learning experience and provided insights for future independent study.

Although not included in the multiple-choice survey, several comments in the open-ended section reflected aspects of contextualized learning. These included:

- Rather than using a vocabulary list to memorize words in isolation, I could learn vocabulary of my choice along with authentic examples.
- By looking at the lines before and after the one I selected in the scene, I came to understand the meaning of the vocabulary more deeply.
- Comparing the English and Japanese counterparts, I discovered translations I hadn't thought of, which made it enjoyable.
- Since we used movies and dramas, it didn't feel boring.

These responses suggest that the use of video content and narrative context helped learners associate vocabulary with concrete imagery and experience greater authenticity, which may have contributed to increased enjoyment and motivation.

Finally, as an application of the out-of-class vocabulary activity introduced in the Japanese-to-English translation course, a modified version of the MTD (My Translation Database) was also implemented in a TOEIC preparation course taught by the author. This time, it is "My TOEIC Database (MTD)," and involved a different approach tailored to the goals of the TOEIC class.

The participants in this course were 63 undergraduate students majoring in English, mostly at the CEFR B1 level. The course used an official TOEIC preparation textbook consisting of two mock tests. In this version of the activity, as a review of vocabulary covered in class, students chose words or phrases they wanted to master further, writing out example sentences including these words or phrases from sources they found by themselves. They were not allowed to create their own examples, and enter example sentences by transcribing from the source using the *shakyo* method. Each database entry required the student to input the vocabulary item's part of speech, definition, an example sentence, the source of the example, and learning notes. An instructor-created template and

model (Figure 3) was provided prior to the start of the task, to clarify expectations and guide students in how to complete the database.

No.	Q No.	Word(s)	PoS	Meaning	Example	Example Source	Notes (relative words, synonyms, antonyms, etc.)
1	2	distribute	v.	配布する	These vaccines have been distributed at 863 vaccination sites around the country.	Asahi Shimbun (Aug. 27, 2021)	distribution (n)
2	3	organize	v.	組織する、整頓する	Here's where we organize all the files alphabetically.	Erin Brockovich (movie)	organization (n)
3	5	load	n., v.	荷重、積み込む	A man is loading supplies into a wheelbarrow.	公式問題集9 TEST1	
4	5	luggage	n.	手荷物	Please hold on to your luggage at all times in order to prevent them from moving around.	京都市バス アナウンス	=baggage 集合名詞
5	6	locate	v.	置く、(場所を) 見つける	Surrounded by green spaces, Avery Hill Campus is located in Eltham, south-east London.	University of Greenwich (UK) ウェブサイト	be located in ... (受身にして) = ...にある
6							
7							

Figure 3. MTD (My TOEIC Database) — Instructor's example

Compared to the translation course, where students transcribed bilingual dialogue lines from audiovisual materials, the TOEIC version placed greater emphasis on independent vocabulary selection and contextual understanding of individual lexical items. While both activities shared a common goal of promoting learner autonomy through digital tools and peer visibility, the TOEIC version was more test-oriented and focused on reinforcing vocabulary in preparation for high-stakes assessment.

This out-of-class activity was assigned over ten weeks in the 14-week semester, and their quota was ten entries a week, which meant 100 entries a semester. As a result, 33 out of 63 learners (52.4%) met the target of 100 items by the end of the semester. The highest number recorded by an individual learner was 253 entries. There were two participants who recorded 0 entries. The number of entries was $M = 85.75$ ($SD = 39.72$), with a 95% confidence interval for M ranging from 75.74 to 95.75.

Table 2. Results of the multiple-choice survey ($n = 58$)

(4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly disagree)

Statements		M	SD	95% CI (Lower-Upper)
1	It is good to choose vocabulary to learn by myself.*	3.17	0.86	2.94-3.40
2	I remember vocabulary better when I choose it myself rather than when it is given to me.*	3.33	0.80	3.12-3.54
3	It was good to be given a weekly quota.*	2.74	0.89	2.51-2.98
4	It was good to be able to see what other student were learning.**	3.02	0.85	2.79-3.24
5	I was able to learn something by looking at what other students were learning.**	2.50	0.96	2.25-2.75
6	I didn't mind that other students could to see what I was learning.**	2.78	1.04	2.50-3.05
7	Using a shared online spreadsheet file was a good idea.***	3.28	0.70	3.09-3.46
8	I want to continue MTD even if it's not part of a class assignment.	2.74	0.95	2.49-2.99

*: autonomy, **: peer learning, and ***: the use of digital tools

Compared to the translation class, participants in the TOEIC course showed slightly lower scores across all items. In particular, Q3 ($M = 2.74$) and Q6 ($M = 2.78$) had the lowest means, with Q6 also exhibiting the highest SD, indicating greater variety in responses. The overall achievement of quota was also lower in the TOEIC group, and two participants did not engage with the activity at all. These findings suggest that the class, in general, was less motivated. One possible explanation may be that the task lacked the entertainment value and contextual richness provided by audiovisual materials in the translation course.

Nevertheless, even the lowest score remained at $M = 2.50$, suggesting that learners' perceptions of the activity were generally positive. Participants who fully engaged with the activity provided highly favorable comments in the open-ended section. Some of them also expressed regret for not having put more effort into the task, despite recognizing its potential value. This indicates that the activity was seen as worthwhile, even by those who did not actively participate.

Several participants commented specifically on the example sentences. While many used dictionary-provided examples, others attempted to find authentic examples from online text or audiovisual sources. One participant noted that the act of "searching" for examples helped commit the vocabulary to memory, while others mentioned that seeing the expressions used in real-world contexts made them feel more relevant and useful. A few participants also commented on the physical act of entering data into the spreadsheet, describing it as a "productive effort" that helped them retain vocabulary more effectively. Rather than passively memorizing words, they saw the process of inputting and reflecting on vocabulary as cognitively engaging. Additionally, several participants reported encountering the vocabulary they had selected during actual TOEIC tests or in other classes. These moments seemed to reinforce the perceived effectiveness of the activity and contributed to a stronger sense of learning achievement.

4. Conclusions

This study explored the implementation of a technology-enhanced, transcription-based vocabulary learning activity—referred to as "MTD" in two different university-level EFL contexts: a Japanese-to-English translation course and a TOEIC preparation course. Drawing on the concept of *shakyo*, the activity encouraged learners to take ownership of their vocabulary learning by selecting and recording lexical items from authentic audiovisual materials (in the translation course) or from TOEIC-related materials (in the exam-preparation course), while also engaging in peer learning through share online spreadsheets.

The findings suggest that learner autonomy was generally supported across both courses. In particular, the translation course yielded higher levels of engagement and perceived achievement, likely due to the more intrinsically motivating and context-rich nature of the materials. The combination of learner choice, structured quotas, and digital tools appeared to provide an effective balance between autonomy and instructor support. Participants responded positively to the novelty and flexibility of the activity, and some noted that the process of entering and reflecting on vocabulary contributed to deeper retention and motivation.

Although the TOEIC course saw lower engagement overall, especially in meeting weekly quotas, many participants still recognized the value of the activity and reported positive learning experiences. Several noted the usefulness of example sentences drawn from authentic sources, as well as the cognitive benefits of the transcription process. Moreover, reencountering selected vocabulary in other places appeared to reinforce their learning.

In both contexts, this activity provided an opportunity for learners to connect classroom learning with personal interests and real-world use, thereby narrowing the gap between formal instruction and autonomous language development. The results support the idea that even modestly structured, self-directed activities using digital tools can foster learner autonomy, especially when learners are given agency over the content and process of their learning.

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations. The findings are based on two groups of participants, all of whom were English majors at the CEFR B1 level in a single institution, which restricts the overall generalization of the results. Moreover, the activity was only implemented over a period of one semester, so longer-term effects on learner autonomy could not be assessed. Future research could explore how similar database-building tasks might be integrated longitudinally or across multiple courses to further promote sustainable learning habits. In particular, it may be useful to investigate how peer learning can be made more active and collaborative in online environments, and how varying levels of instructor scaffolding affect learner outcomes across proficiency levels.

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