



Self-Regulated Learning Processes Outside the Classroom: Insights from a Case Study of Japanese EFL Students

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This study attempted to delve into out-of-class self-regulated learning processes of students with different English proficiency levels, focusing on their goal-setting and self-evaluation processes as well as their motivational beliefs. Four Japanese university students, two higher and two lower proficiency learners engaged in English self-study outside the classroom for 15 weeks. Their self-regulated learning processes were examined through a weekly English language learning journal kept by the participants. Goal-setting and self-reflection sheets were collected as supplemental data to gain insights into the descriptions in the journal. The textual data were analyzed using systematic content analysis procedures. Students' English proficiency levels and learning progress were measured by the TOEIC Listening and Reading test. Their motivational beliefs (i.e., goal orientations) were investigated through their statements reported on the goal setting sheet. The analyses revealed that the two higher proficiency students, who had both instrumental and international orientations, were more metacognitively aware of their self-regulated learning processes and more actively engaged in self-regulatory processes than the two lower proficiency students, who had only instrumental orientations. In particular, the higher proficiency student showing the most learning progress exhibited effective self-regulatory cycles. Finally, pedagogical implications are discussed based on these findings.

Keywords: self-regulation, L2 proficiency, goal orientation, out-of-class learning setting, qualitative approach

Introduction

It is generally agreed that setting learning goals, self-assessing one's learning outcomes, and self-reflecting on one's learning experiences affect task performance and are important skills for learners (Harris, 1997; Kato, 2009; Locke & Latham, 2006). These skills are increasingly discussed in the framework of self-regulation in second language (L2) research, especially in foreign language (FL) studies. In the English as a foreign language (EFL) context, particularly in a unilingual Asian country like Japan, students are less likely to be exposed to English in their daily lives than those learning English as a second language (ESL) in English-speaking countries, and EFL students are thus encouraged to exploit opportunities for learning English outside the classroom (Yabukoshi, 2018). To attain higher English proficiency in out-of-class FL settings, students are expected to self-regulate L2 learning processes (Kormos & Csizér, 2014). This is because students in such self-instructional settings should "oversee the rate and direction of their learning to a greater extent than classroom students, whose learning is organized by regularly scheduled class sessions" (Bown, 2009, p. 571).

The notion of self-regulation has developed in the field of educational psychology, and it was brought to the forefront of L2 learning research by Dörnyei (2005). Since then, studies on self-regulated L2

learning processes have been conducted, mostly using questionnaires. Findings indicated that self-regulated learning processes and/or self-efficacy beliefs are positively related to L2 proficiency and achievement (e.g., Putra, Saukah, Basthomi, & Irawati, 2020; Seker, 2016; Wang & Bai, 2017) and that learners' motivational beliefs, such as goal orientations, are likely to have some impacts on their self-regulated L2 learning (e.g., Abdulhay, Ahmadian, Yazdani, & Amerian, 2020; Kormos & Csizér, 2014; Tseng, Chang, & Cheng, 2015; Zheng, Liang, Li, & Tsai, 2018). While questionnaire surveys are informative for providing an overall picture of L2 learning processes (Mizumoto, 2018), quantitative research using questionnaires is often limited in terms of the types of self-regulated learning processes investigated (Yabukoshi, 2018).

Meanwhile, studies employing qualitative and mixed-methods approaches have gained popularity (Amerstorfer, 2020), and previous studies using qualitative methods (i.e., diaries and interviews) investigated actual self-regulated learning processes and revealed factors affecting these processes embedded in each learning context (Bown, 2009; Rose & Harbon, 2013; Yabukoshi, 2018). These studies suggest that, other than contextual and social factors (i.e., learning environments, social support, and relationships with others), individual learner differences, such as self-efficacy, metacognitive awareness, and L2 proficiency level, seem to exert considerable influence on self-regulated learning processes. Among these variables, qualitative findings pertaining to the influence of L2 proficiency level are particularly limited. Rose and Harbon (2013) highlighted negative side effects of high proficiency on self-regulation. Their findings indicated that advanced learners tended to lose self-regulation due to frustration caused by the gap between the higher learning goals and their lack of progress. Further studies with a qualitative orientation should thus be carried out to cast light on how higher proficiency learners effectively self-regulate their L2 learning processes, compared with their lower proficiency peers and to gain insights into effective L2 self-regulation. In addition to learners' L2 proficiency levels, the role of goal orientations in self-regulated L2 learning has yet to be explored qualitatively. Thus, L2 researchers have not been well-informed about how learners actually self-regulate their L2 learning processes in relation to their goal orientations.

Given this research context, this case study closely looked at out-of-class self-regulated learning processes of Japanese EFL university students with different English proficiency levels, focusing on their goal-setting and self-evaluation processes as well as their motivational beliefs (i.e., goal orientations). Collecting and analyzing each student's qualitative data (i.e., diaries and other written texts), the study will make a significant contribution to the literature and add value to our current understanding of effective self-regulated L2 learning because in-depth investigation will shed light on particular differences in self-regulated learning processes and motivational beliefs between higher and lower proficiency learners and will provide further insights into prior quantitative evidence as to the relationship between self-regulation, motivation, and L2 proficiency.

Literature Review

Social Cognitive Perspective of Self-Regulation

Self-regulated learning involves “the processes whereby learners personally activate and sustain cognitions, affects, and behaviors that are systematically oriented toward the attainment of personal goals” (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011, p. 1). Zimmerman (2001) presented the following seven theoretical frameworks of self-regulation: operant, phenomenological, information processing, social cognitive, volitional, Vygotskian, and cognitive constructivist. Among them, models based on the social cognitive perspective of self-regulation (e.g., Zimmerman, 2011; Zimmerman & Moylan, 2009) have been validated in the field of education (Ito, 2009) and have drawn a great deal of attention from L2 researchers (i.e., Mizumoto, 2013; Teng & Zhang, 2016; Wang & Bai, 2017; Yabukoshi, 2018). These models are based on Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which views self-regulation as an

interaction of “personal, behavioral, and environmental triadic processes” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 13). In the social cognitive model, self-regulated learning comprises three cyclical phases: forethought, performance, and self-reflection. The forethought phase involves processes before learners engage in learning tasks. These processes include task analysis (i.e., goal setting and strategic planning), which is influenced by learners’ motivational beliefs, such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, task interest/value, and goal orientation. In the performance phase, which involves processes during learning tasks, learners engage in self-control processes (i.e., task strategies, volition strategies, self-instruction, time management, and environmental structuring) and self-monitoring processes. In the self-reflection phase, learners engage in self-evaluation, causal attribution, and self-reaction processes after finishing learning tasks. These self-reflection processes are reflected in the subsequent forethought processes, creating a self-regulatory cycle (Zimmerman, 2011). As discussed by Yabukoshi (2012), the three-phase cyclical process seems to be adaptive in L2 research, as the process is likely to be comparable to Oxford’s (2011) Strategic Self-Regulation (S²R) Model of language learning that includes a sequence of phases of “strategic forethought,” “strategic performance,” and “strategic reflection and evaluation” (p. 25).

Self-Regulated L2 Learning

In L2 learning research, the theory of academic self-regulation was brought to the forefront by Dörnyei (2005) as a new construct in the field of L2 language learning strategy (LLS) research. He proposed that the concept of LLSs be replaced with that of self-regulation due to the definitional and categorical ambiguities of LLSs as well as the psychometric problem regarding their measurement by an invalid strategy questionnaire (i.e., the *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* by Oxford [1990]). Since then, researchers have shown more interest in holistic, integrated approaches—rather than focusing on a single aspect of learning such as cognitive or motivational process—to the investigation of strategic learning (Mercer, 2015; Oxford, 2011; Takeuchi, 2010). Following Dörnyei’s (2005) proposal, several attempts have been made to devise an instrument to measure self-regulated learning processes in L2 writing and vocabulary learning (Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2012; Teng & Huang, 2019; Teng & Zhang, 2016; Tseng, Dörnyei, & Schmitt, 2006). Tseng et al. (2006) developed an instrument, the *Self-Regulating Capacity in Vocabulary Learning Scale* (SRCvoc), which was later adapted and validated in a Japanese EFL context by Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2012). Teng and Zhang (2016) devised an instrument, the *Writing Strategies for Self-Regulated Learning Questionnaire* (WSSRLQ), for Chinese university students based on Zimmerman’s sociocognitive theory. The WSSRLQ was later validated with Chinese secondary school students in Teng and Huang’s (2019) study.

Several studies have examined the relationship between self-regulatory strategy use and L2 proficiency and achievement (Putra et al., 2020; Seker, 2016; Wang & Bai, 2017). Seker (2016) demonstrated that self-regulated learning strategy use (i.e., evaluation and the combination of evaluation and orientation) was a significant predictor of English achievement test scores. Wang and Bai (2017) found that students’ use of self-regulated learning strategies and self-efficacy were significantly related to English test scores. More recently, Putra et al. (2020) found that students’ self-efficacy for self-regulation has a significant contribution to their L2 writing quality. Other studies have quantitatively explored the interplay between L2 learning orientations and self-regulation. For instance, Abdulhay et al. (2020) demonstrated significant contributions of goal orientations to the prediction of self-regulated L2 writing. Using structural equation models, Kormos and Csizér (2014) suggested that learners’ increased use of self-regulated learning strategies was mediated by their goal orientations (i.e., instrumental and international orientations). Tseng et al.’s (2015) multiple regression analysis further indicated that L2 learning orientations (i.e., integrative orientations) and implementation intentions explained significant variance in self-regulatory capacity for L2 learning. More recently, Zheng et al. (2018) presented a structural relationship model of motivation (i.e., instrumentality-promotion and cultural interest) and self-regulation for online learning.

Quantitative studies using questionnaires are informative for providing an overall picture of learners’ strategic learning processes (Mizumoto, 2018) and empirical evidence as to the relationships between

self-regulation, motivation, and L2 proficiency. However, Likert-scale questionnaires are “selected-response assessments” measuring “top-down theoretical constructs” in a fixed format (Gu, 2019, pp. 25-26), and most of the previous studies were cross-sectional research that examined self-regulated learning processes at the time of data-collection (Yabukoshi, 2012). Thus, the types and scope of self-regulated learning processes investigated by means of questionnaires are limited in such studies (Yabukoshi, 2018). Moreover, Zheng et al. (2018) acknowledged that questionnaire items assess learners’ perceptions on their strategy use rather than their actual self-regulated learning processes, and they urged researchers to collect qualitative data (i.e., interviews, textual, aural, or visual data) to unveil learners’ actual processes of L2 self-regulation.

Qualitative Inquiries into L2 Self-Regulation

Unlike studies employing quantitative research methods, “case studies with a qualitative orientation” enable researchers to focus on individual learning processes and capture rich descriptions of situated L2 learning processes (Amerstorfer, 2020, p. 24). In particular, Takeuchi (2019) recommended using longitudinal qualitative data collection methods (i.e., diaries, portfolios, and interviews) in L2 strategic self-regulation research. In this research field, several studies have been conducted using such qualitative methods to investigate actual self-regulated learning processes in terms of contextual as well as individual differences (Bown, 2009; Rose & Harbon, 2013; Yabukoshi, 2018). Bown (2009) examined the self-regulatory strategies used by 20 learners learning Russian in a self-instructional learning context. Analysis of interviews and diaries showed that self-regulated strategy use was mediated by social factors such as students’ relationships with others and the support they received from them and by students’ self-beliefs, including self-efficacy. Bown (2009) emphasized that self-efficacy is the foundation of human agency and plays an important role in self-regulated learning.

More recently, Yabukoshi (2018) highlighted that learners’ metacognitive awareness of L2 learning processes might exert a more critical impact on effective self-regulation than self-efficacy. This study compared two learners who had strong self-efficacy but showed different learning progress. The analyses of diaries and interviews showed that the higher achiever was more aware of his learning goals in the forethought phase, identified more specific learning problems in the self-reflection phase, and then set more specific learning goals to overcome these shortcomings in the subsequent forethought phase than the lower achiever. These results suggest that even if students have stronger senses of self-efficacy, their self-regulated learning processes might differ metacognitively, especially in the forethought and self-reflection phases, leading to varying L2 achievement. Further, the concepts of metacognition and self-regulation have a great deal of overlap (Gao, 2007). According to Zimmerman and Moylan (2009, p. 299), metacognition is defined as “knowledge, awareness, and regulation of one’s thinking,” and metacognitive processes, such as planning and self-monitoring, are incorporated as key components of self-regulation.

Another learner variable worth investigating is L2 proficiency level, which is highly associated with metacognitive awareness or metacognitive strategy use and self-regulated learning processes: higher proficiency learners tend to employ more metacognitive strategies (i.e., problem identification) than lower proficiency learners during the language task (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). The self-regulated learning processes in terms of L2 proficiency levels were qualitatively examined by Rose and Harbon (2013) in a kanji (Japanese written characters) learning setting. The analysis of interview data showed the somewhat surprising result that advanced learners tended to lose self-regulation in this context because they had relatively higher learning goals and felt stressed about their lack of learning progress. These findings suggest that there are some negative side effects of high L2 proficiency on self-regulated processes. Regrettably, effective self-regulation among higher proficiency learners has yet to be clarified and thus requires further study. Moreover, researchers focusing on EFL learners have not paid enough attention to self-regulation outside the classroom although engaging in out-of-class self-study is essential for EFL learners to attain higher L2 proficiency, as discussed in the Introduction.

In addition to L2 proficiency level, students' motivational beliefs, such as goal orientations, are worthy of in-depth investigation since self-regulation is a goal-directed process and self-beliefs are incorporated as key constructs in the forethought phase of academic self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2011; Zimmerman & Moylan, 2009). The quantitative studies reviewed in the above section suggested that there are significant relationships between self-regulated L2 learning processes and goal orientations (Abdulhay et al., 2020; Kormos & Csizér, 2014; Tseng et al., 2015; Zheng et al., 2018). Despite the aforementioned findings, the types of self-regulated learning processes and strategies investigated using quantitative methods were limited, and there is still a lack of qualitative exploration of how students with different goal orientations self-regulate their L2 learning processes.

In summary, self-regulated learning processes consist of multidimensional, cyclical and socially mediated processes. Although conventional quantitative studies using questionnaires are informative, the types and scope of self-regulated learning processes examined by instruments are limited in such studies. Moreover, questionnaire items assess learners' perceptions on their strategy use rather than their actual self-regulated learning processes. Therefore, the application of qualitative research methods seems to be a successful way to investigate these dynamic and actual processes of self-regulation situated in a specific learning context. The previous qualitative studies reviewed here suggested that together with contextual and social factors, individual learner differences, such as self-efficacy, metacognitive awareness, and L2 proficiency levels, are likely to affect self-regulated L2 learning. However, among these variables, qualitative findings pertaining to self-regulation in terms of L2 proficiency levels are particularly limited. Moreover, while a wealth of quantitative research evidence has shown the link between learners' self-regulatory strategy use and motivational beliefs (i.e., goal orientations), the role of goal orientations in self-regulated L2 learning processes remains unexplored qualitatively. These variables should thus receive more attention, and in-depth investigation is needed to have a deeper understanding of L2 learners' effective self-regulated learning processes.

Method

Purpose of the Study

Considering the research context discussed above, the present study was set up to delve into out-of-class self-regulated learning processes of students with different English proficiency levels, focusing on goal-setting and self-evaluation processes as well as their goal orientations in the forethought and self-reflection phases. These two phases were likely to be essential for avoiding the breakdown of self-regulatory cycles and facilitating self-regulated language learning as suggested by previous studies (Rose & Harbon, 2013; Yabukoshi, 2018).

Participants

The present study involved four Japanese university students (aged 19 to 21) majoring in humanities at a private university in eastern Japan. They enrolled in an elective course on introductory applied linguistics offered by the author as part of a general education program. Four students were selected based on the availability of data on their English proficiency levels and learning progress measured by the official TOEIC Listening and Reading test. They took the TOEIC test twice, before and after this study (pretest and posttest). Table 1 shows the participants' TOEIC listening, reading, and total scores on the pretest. The two female students obtained higher scores on the pretest than the two male students at the onset of this study. According to the official TOEIC organization (Institute for International Business Communication, 2012), students with scores of 470 and over are considered Level C, which is roughly equivalent to the pre-intermediate level (close to reaching the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Based on the proficiency scale, the two women who obtained a

score of 470 and over were designated as higher proficiency learners (henceforth HP1 and HP2), and the two men, whose scores were below 470, were classified as lower proficiency learners (LP1 and LP2) for the purposes of this study. Before beginning this research project, preliminary individual interviews were conducted with each participant. According to the interviews, the participants had been learning English in formal settings for seven to eight years, beginning from secondary school education. They had no study abroad experiences, and none of them had extensive access to English native speakers outside the classroom.

TABLE 1
Students' TOEIC Listening, Reading, and Total Scores on the Pretest

Student	Gender	Listening ^a	Reading ^a	Total ^b
HP1	F	240	230	470
HP2	F	260	270	530
LP1	M	215	200	415
LP2	M	190	160	350

^a Maximum possible score = 495; ^b Maximum possible score = 990.

Abbreviations: HP = higher proficiency; LP = lower proficiency; F = female; M = male.

Setting

The elective course on introductory applied linguistics met once a week for a 90-minute class. The course focused on methodologies and techniques of learning L2, particularly EFL, effectively. As out-of-class assignments, the participants engaged in English self-study outside the classroom for 15 weeks to observe their own EFL learning experiences and processes and to improve their scores on the TOEIC Listening and Reading test. The TOEIC test was targeted in this course because the preliminary individual interviews with each participant revealed that all of them were interested in the TOEIC test and planned to take it before and after the present study. The TOEIC test is one of the most popular English language certification exams among Japanese college students. This could be because its scores are widely utilized by companies as part of the criteria for hiring new college graduates in Japan. During the 15-week self-study, the participants utilized several TOEIC materials, including TOEIC test preparation textbooks recommended by the author and other materials, including books for TOEIC vocabulary, listening, and reading, selected by the participants themselves.

Data Collection and Analyses

The diary method was employed to gather data on students' self-regulated learning processes based on the claim that diaries enable researchers to capture the cyclical processes of self-regulation (Schmitz, Klug, & Schmidt, 2011) and to have access to out-of-class self-regulated processes (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). The participants were requested to write a weekly English language learning diary entry about their out-of-class self-study experiences for 15 weeks. An open-ended format for the diary was provided to gain informative descriptions of self-regulated learning processes (Appendix A). On the forms, they wrote their goals and plans at the beginning of the week and recorded their self-reflections on their learning experiences at the end of the week.

Additionally, prior to their 15-week self-study, a goal-setting sheet was provided to the students, in which they were asked to set their short-, medium-, and long-term target TOEIC scores and describe why they study English with the aim of obtaining these target scores (Appendix B). The short-term goals refer to those that the students strived to reach by the end of the semester, the medium-term goals by the end of next year, and the long-term goals by graduation. The participants' motivational beliefs (i.e., goal orientations) were investigated through their statements of their reasons for studying English recorded on the sheet. These statements were analyzed based on comprehensive L2 motivation and goal orientation studies focusing on Japanese EFL university students (Yashima, 2000, 2002). The participants also wrote

a 15-week brief study plan on the goal-setting sheet. After finishing the 15-week diary keeping, they were asked to reflect on their entire learning experience on the self-reflection sheet provided by the author (Appendix C). These goal-setting and self-reflection sheets were collected as supplemental data to gain further insights into the participants' weekly diaries. All the descriptions were written in Japanese to ensure that the participants' comments were detailed and clear. The excerpts presented in the Results of this paper were translated to English by the author. The original excerpts written in Japanese are shown in Appendix D.

The textual data were analyzed using the systematic content analysis procedures suggested by Dörnyei (2007). The author first conducted the initial coding, in which she read all the descriptions recorded in the diaries and the goal-setting/self-reflection sheets numerous times, highlighted the descriptions related to self-regulated learning processes, and added an informative label to each description based on the predetermined definitions of self-regulated learning processes (Zimmerman, 2011; Zimmerman & Moylan, 2009). In the second-level coding, all codes identified in the initial coding were listed, and closely related codes were grouped together under a broader label, producing a hierarchy of codes. These coding processes often involved writing memos, in which the author recorded ideas and thoughts about the codes. Finally, the content analysis was completed by interpreting the data and drawing conclusions based on the hierarchy of coding categories and memos. Each process and its relationship to others was summarized, and patterns of the participants' self-regulated learning processes were established. As for data confidentiality, the participants were assured that their data would be kept anonymous and would be used for research purposes only. All the participants signed a consent form for the use of their data.

Results

This section first profiles the participants' learning progress and goal orientations and then reports on the higher and lower proficiency students' self-regulated learning processes in the forethought and self-reflection phases.

Learning Progress

The participants TOEIC listening, reading, and total scores on the pretest and posttest are shown in Table 2. Changes from the pretest to posttest show each student's progress in English proficiency. HP1 demonstrated the greatest progress on both the listening and reading tests. HP2 improved her listening score but decreased her reading score, resulting in almost no progress in the total score. Concerning the lower proficiency students, LP1 improved his listening score but slightly decreased his score on the reading test, and LP2 showed minor progress only on the reading test. The participants' learning outcomes are later discussed in relation to each student's learning processes in the Self-Regulated Learning Processes section.

TABLE 2
Students' TOEIC Listening, Reading, and Total Scores on the Pretest and Posttest

Student	Gender	Listening ^a			Reading ^a			Total ^b		
		Test1	Test2	Changes	Test1	Test2	Changes	Test1	Test2	Changes
HP1	F	240	295	+55	230	255	+25	470	550	+80
HP2	F	260	300	+40	270	235	-35	530	535	+5
LP1	M	215	260	+45	200	185	-15	415	445	+30
LP2	M	190	190	0	160	175	+15	350	365	+15

Notes. Test1 = pretest; Test2 = posttest; Changes = score changes (pretest to posttest).

^a Maximum possible score = 495; ^b Maximum possible score = 990.

Abbreviations: HP = higher proficiency; LP = lower proficiency; F = female; M = male.

Goal Orientations

Table 3 shows each participant's short-term, mid-term, and long-term target TOEIC scores and the reasons why s/he studied English with the aim of achieving these scores, which were reported on the goal-setting sheet at the onset of the 15-week self-study. These statements indicated that while the lower proficiency male learners (LP1 and LP2) seemed to have only instrumental orientations (i.e., getting better jobs and improving test scores), the higher proficiency female learners (HP1 and HP2) were likely to have not only instrumental orientations but also international orientations (i.e., going overseas and interacting with intercultural partners), which are defined as "international posture" in Yashima (2002, p. 57). These results are consistent with previous L2 research findings that female learners tend to have international orientations or value communication activities than their male peers (e.g., Iwaniec, 2019; Yashima, Nishida, & Mizumoto, 2017). Yashima et al. (2017) discussed the gender issue in relation to Japanese women's identity and the sociocultural context as follows: "female students in Japan may find using English liberating as a way to construct a self that is more self-expressive than their L1 self...English opened a way to participating in an imagined international community" (p. 705). In the following sections, the self-regulated learning processes of these higher and lower proficiency learners, who also differed in motivational orientations, are closely examined.

TABLE 3
Students' Target Scores and Reasons to Aim at Achieving Them

Student	Gender	Target scores and reasons
HP1	F	Short-term goal: 550, Mid-term goal: 650, Long-term goal: 700 <i>That (i.e., 700) is the minimum score, which would give me an advantage for employment (instrumental orientation).</i> <i>I want to use English and see the outside world for myself, and I also want to have conversations with people from different countries (international orientation).</i>
HP2	F	Short-term goal: 650, Mid-term goal: 750, Long-term goal: 780 <i>I want to achieve higher scores because it is important in order to succeed in job hunting (instrumental orientation).</i> <i>I am often asked for directions by foreigners who get lost. I want to be able to respond to them smoothly in English (international orientation).</i>
LP1	M	Short-term goal: 520, Mid-term goal: 630, Long-term goal: 680 <i>To succeed in job hunting and gain basic English skills (instrumental orientation).</i> <i>To score higher on a qualification exam that includes English as one of its subjects (instrumental orientation).</i>
LP2	M	Short-term goal: 500, Mid-term goal: 650, Long-term goal: 700 <i>To improve my English skills and to get advantages in employment (instrumental orientation).</i>

Abbreviations: HP = higher proficiency; LP = lower proficiency; F = female; M = male.

Self-Regulated Learning Processes

Analyses of each learner's journal entries revealed striking differences in self-regulated learning processes between the higher and lower proficiency learners in both the forethought and self-reflection phases.

The higher proficiency learners

Forethought phase. In the forethought phase, learners mainly engage in self-regulated learning processes such as goal setting, task analysis, and strategic planning before carrying out language tasks.

During this phase, one higher proficiency student (HP1), who had both instrumental and international orientations, was very active and reported a variety of specific self-regulated processes, demonstrating the most learning progress. For example, Excerpts 1 and 2 show that the student appeared to set goals about the specific achievement levels and the target language elements as follows:

Excerpt 1 (HP1, Week 7)

I'm going to increase my rate of correct answers in Parts 6 and 7 from 50% to 70% to ensure that I get two-thirds of the questions correct.

Excerpt 2 (HP1, Week 15)

I'm going to try not to make the same mistakes in the language tasks that I did once before.

These comments likely reflect the student's desire to improve her TOEIC scores, and the author presumes that she motivated herself to keep studying outside the classroom by setting these specific goals.

Regarding task analysis, HP1 was aware of her weak areas on the TOEIC test when she analyzed the types of tasks. For instance, this student decided to concentrate on practicing Part 3 of the TOEIC test, which was one of the most difficult parts for her. As for strategic planning, HP1 planned to use various strategies, such as *reviewing, dictation, balancing listening and reading practice, doing regular practice, and identifying learning problems* before engaging in the language tasks.

The other higher proficiency student (HP2) with similar goal orientations to HP1 made listening progress but decreased in her reading score. This student did not seem to be as active as HP1, but she was relatively aware of her planning processes. For example, HP2 planned not weekly but daily assignments in detail, mentioning the amounts of daily tasks to do (e.g., learning six new words a day and doing five grammar exercises a day). As for task analysis, HP2 specifically mentioned which tasks she would engage in, and she seemed to be aware of the purpose of the language task. The following excerpts (Excerpts 3 and 4) show that HP2 was likely to engage in vocabulary and grammatical tasks to review the items that she had learned previously:

Excerpt 3 (HP2, Weeks 10 and 11)

(I'm going to) review half of the words that I memorized in October and November [Week 10] ... (I'm going to) review the other half of the words that I memorized in October and November [Week 11].

Excerpt 4 (HP2, Week 10)

(I'm going to) review the grammar exercises that I answered incorrectly in October and November.

Concerning strategic planning, HP2 planned to use *reviewing, dictation, and focusing on the part of speech of the target word*, which were mostly related to vocabulary, grammar, and listening skills. Analyses of her journal entries revealed that HP2 did not plan to do any reading comprehension tasks. This lack of reading practice could be one of the factors accounting for her score decrease on the reading section of the TOEIC test (Table 2).

Self-reflection phase. The self-reflection phase occurs after finishing language tasks. The participants of this study reflected on their own self-study at the end of each week. The higher proficiency student (HP1), who had both instrumental and international orientations and made the greatest progress, appeared to self-reflect on her learning experiences in detail. For instance, it seems that this student assessed her achievement both positively and negatively. In particular, the negative evaluation seemingly led to problem identification, and then future study plans were likely to be set to overcome these problems. Excerpt 5 demonstrates HP1's problem identification and adaptive decision concerning her future study plans after practicing the listening section of the TOEIC test.

Excerpt 5 (HP1, Week 10)

Both sections [i.e., the reading and listening sections] are difficult for me, but especially, I still lack listening skills. I'm going to make the next week "Listening Week."

Subsequently, the adaptive decision in the self-reflection phase was reflected in the next forethought phase, in which HP1 clearly stated that she was going to master the TOEIC listening section. A closer look at her journal entries identified six cases of such cyclical processes of self-regulation, which might have contributed to her progress in English proficiency.

In addition to these metacognitive self-regulated processes, HP1 provided a kind of self-motivating commentary in the self-reflection sheet. The following excerpt from her self-reflection sheet (Excerpt 6) shows that she seemed to encourage herself not to give up studying even when she was unable to obtain satisfactory results.

Excerpt 6 (HP1, self-reflection sheet)

Even though I tried hard, I didn't get immediate results, and I often lost my motivation. When I prepared for the TOEIC test based on the previous test result, the score didn't improve on the second test. I felt very discouraged. But, I believe that my future score will greatly depend on whether I give up now or continue trying. So, I've decided to make diligent daily efforts. (I sometimes failed to do this when I was busy with other academic subjects though.)

These self-encouragements, which are defined as commitment control strategies by Dörnyei (2005) and Tseng et al. (2006), might have helped this student maintain her commitment to her goals in the face of difficulties such as unsatisfactory results.

The other higher proficiency student (HP2), who had similar orientations to HP1, was seemingly aware of her learning experiences but less careful of her learning problems than HP1. This student tended to evaluate her achievement positively, and she less frequently identified her learning problems than HP1. However, HP2 occasionally reflected on her weak points, especially in her listening skills. She reported that she could not catch a certain word and had difficulty keeping up with the listening speed. Such problem identification was reflected in the subsequent forethought processes. Moreover, this student, like HP1, provided a kind of self-motivating comments pertaining to listening skills in the self-reflection sheet, as shown in Excerpt 7.

Excerpt 7 (HP2, self-reflection sheet)

I am not originally good at listening, and that's why I did dictation practice when I reviewed the listening materials. As I reviewed the materials, I could identify the words that I had difficulty understanding and the words that I should pay more attention to, which was very good for me. I'd like to continue to review the materials without being lazy when I practice listening.

These findings lead the author to speculate that HP2 self-regulated her self-reflection processes, especially in listening skills, and that the problem-identification and self-motivating processes might potentially be contributing to her listening progress (Table 2). Concerning the score decrease on the reading section, the diary data revealed that this student hardly engaged in reading comprehension tasks, as noted in the forethought phase. In preparation for the reading section, this student appeared to focus on increasing her vocabulary and doing grammar exercises, as shown in Excerpts 3 and 4. To make better progress in reading, the author believes that this student might have needed more reading comprehension practice.

The lower proficiency learners

Forethought phase. Compared to the two higher proficiency students (HP1 and HP2), the forethought processes of the two lower proficiency peers (LP1 and LP2), who had only instrumental orientations, appeared to be less organized. Unlike HP2, LP1 and LP2 roughly planned not daily but weekly tasks, and their study plans seemed to be beyond their language capacities. For example, one lower proficiency student (LP1) planned to learn around 50 to 70 words a week for 7 weeks (Excerpt 8). The student with the lowest proficiency level (LP2) also set a goal of learning 50 to 100 words per week (Excerpt 9).

Excerpt 8 (LP1, Weeks 1 to 7)

(I'll learn) around 50 to 70 words a week [Week 1] ... the next 50 words or so [Week 2] ... around 50 words subsequently [Week 3] ... around 50 words [Weeks 4 and 5] ... around 60 words [Week 6] ... around 50 words [Week 7].

Excerpt 9 (LP2, Weeks 1 to 11)

(I'll learn) words from 1 to 100 [Week 1] ... words to 150 [Week 2] ... words to 200 [Week 3] ... words to 300 [Week 4] ... words to 900 [Week 10] ... words to 1000 [Week 11].

Regarding task analysis, although the two higher proficiency students seemed to be aware of their weaknesses or the purposes of the language task, the two lower proficiency students simply described task types briefly. As for strategic planning, these students rarely reported on which strategies they would use. Based on these findings, the author speculates that the two lower proficiency students, who had only instrumental orientations, tend to set rough plans on what to do without recognizing the significance of each task or planning how to approach the task before engaging in it.

Self-reflection phase. The two lower proficiency students (LP1 and LP2), who had only instrumental orientations, were not likely to reflect on their out-of-class learning experiences as conscientiously as their higher proficiency peers (HP1 and HP2). Analyses of their journal entries showed that LP1 and LP2 seemed to rarely reflect on their approach to learning English or identify their specific learning problems. These students were more likely to report on what kinds of tasks they did during the week and simply evaluate the amount of study they completed, as shown in Excerpts 10 and 11.

Excerpt 10 (LP1, Weeks 1, 2, 10, and 11)

I couldn't finish the listening tasks, but I completed the vocabulary [Week 1] ... I caught up on some of the listening tasks. Vocabulary learning was going well [Week 2] ... I learned vocabulary little by little. I did only one page of reading comprehension exercises. I practiced listening as I planned [Week 10] ... I learned around 30 words. I did only two pages of reading comprehension exercises. I practiced listening as I planned [Week 11].

Excerpt 11 (LP2, Weeks 1, 4, 5, and 8)

I couldn't learn all the vocabulary, but I practiced listening to English [Week 1] ... I tried to make a habit of reviewing vocabulary before going to bed [Week 4] ... I rented a DVD, a foreign film and watched it with subtitles. I could prepare for the listening section [Week 5] ... I sometimes didn't study English when I was tired after my part-time job. I want to eliminate these times [Week 8].

As shown in Excerpt 10, LP1 seemed to be able to practice his listening skills as he planned in Weeks 10 and 11, which might be one of the factors associated with his listening score increase in the TOEIC test (Table 2). On the other hand, LP1 slightly decreased his reading score (Table 2). As shown in Excerpt 10, LP1 was likely to be unsatisfied with the amount of his reading practice in Weeks 10 and 11, and he

seemed to rarely reflect on his reading strategy use and identify his reading problems throughout the project. Similarly, LP2 mostly commented on what language tasks he did or did not during each week. Although this student described how he had tried to study English, focusing on vocabulary learning in Week 4, he did not comment on whether he could keep learning vocabulary in the following week (Week 5).

Based on these results, it is presumed that students with lower proficiency may lack metacognitive awareness of their L2 learning processes. Notably, the least proficiency student (LP2) was unlikely to engage in metacognitive cyclical processes of self-regulation. The analysis of LP2's journal entries showed that 14 cases of his goals or plans mentioned in the forethought phase were not reflected on in the self-reflection phase. In other words, LP2's self-regulated learning processes were less likely to be cyclical, in contrast to those of HP1.

In addition to the metacognitive aspects, self-motivational processes were found to differ between the higher and lower proficiency students. In contrast to the two higher proficiency students, who had both instrumental and international orientations, the two lower proficiency students with only instrumental orientations seldom recorded a kind of self-encouraging comments to keep studying English outside the classroom. Even when they negatively evaluated their learning achievements, few solutions were described by these students.

Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study highlighted the differences in metacognitive and motivational self-regulated learning processes between two higher and two lower proficiency students, who also differed in their goal orientations, when they engaged in EFL learning outside the classroom. The following section discusses these results in terms of metacognitive and motivational self-regulated learning processes.

First, this study found that the two higher and the two lower proficiency students, who also differed in motivational beliefs, appeared to differ in metacognitive self-regulated learning processes in the out-of-class EFL learning setting. For instance, HP1 and HP2, who both had instrumental and international orientations, were more specific in goal setting, strategic planning, and task analysis in the forethought phase, and they more carefully self-evaluated their achievement levels and identified learning problems in the self-reflection phase than LP1 and LP2, who had only instrumental orientations. Moreover, as shown by the contrast between the most successful student (HP1) and the least successful student (LP2), cyclical self-regulated learning processes (i.e., setting goals and making plans in the forethought phase, reflecting on these goals and plans in the self-reflection phase, and setting further goals and making suitable plans for overcoming learning problems in the next forethought phase) were different. Zimmerman and Moylan (2009) claim that engaging in such self-regulatory cycles is one of the crucial factors influencing academic learning performance. The findings of the present study also highlighted the importance of cyclical self-regulation in EFL learning performance, which lends support to the theory of academic self-regulation. Similar tendency was also reported in Yabukoshi's (2018) L2 listening study, which revealed that the most successful listener was very careful about his listening problems and made adaptive decisions concerning his future study plans in the self-reflection phase. Later, these decisions affected the listener's subsequent goal-setting processes in the forethought phase. In brief, the present case study closely looked at self-regulated learning processes in terms of L2 proficiency levels as well as learning outcomes, revealing qualitative aspects of metacognitive self-regulated learning processes and providing further insights into prior quantitative evidence as to the positive relationships between L2 self-regulated learning processes, particularly L2 metacognitive strategy use, and L2 proficiency and achievement (i.e., Seker, 2016; Teng, 2019; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Wang & Bai, 2017).

Another issue worth discussing is learners' motivational beliefs (i.e., goal orientations) and motivational self-regulated learning processes. The present study found that the two higher proficiency students with both instrumental and international orientations seemed to engage in self-motivating

processes, such as using commitment control strategies to maintain their commitment to their learning goals in the self-reflection phase, unlike their lower proficiency counterparts who had only instrumental orientations. These results lend support to Kormos and Csizér's (2014) empirical findings regarding the relationship between motivation and self-regulation. Their structural equation modelling revealed that students who have both instrumental and international orientations seemed to enhance their positive self-image as successful future language users as well as learning efforts, and that these efforts might influence their increased use of self-regulatory strategies. In particular, the importance of international orientations was highlighted by Chen and Lee (2018). They claimed that students with intrinsic and integrative motives (i.e., learning L2 for its own sake, interacting with native speakers, traveling, and making friends), which are broadly similar to the international orientations defined in the present study, made more of an effort than students with instrumental motives (i.e., improving test scores and obtaining tangible regards) in self-directed language learning settings. Chen and Lee (2018) argued that "instrumental motives may be effective in initiating learners' interest in language learning, but such motives were less effective in maintaining their interest over time" (p. 177). It thus could be argued that learner's goal orientations are likely to mediate self-regulated L2 learning, and the present case study sheds light on how the students with distinct L2 learning orientations as well as L2 proficiency levels differed in their self-regulated learning processes in the out-of-class EFL setting.

Based on the research findings, pedagogical implications are suggested. This case study described the self-regulated L2 learning processes outside the classroom by students with different L2 proficiency levels and motivational beliefs. The findings obtained in this study can serve to help language teachers increase their understanding of language learners' self-regulated processes in independent learning settings, which has at least two important implications for L2 learning and teaching. First, learning obstacles should not be overlooked but solved, as exhibited by the self-regulated learning processes of the two higher proficiency learners in this study. Therefore, it is inevitable for lower proficiency learners, who are relatively lacking in metacognitive awareness of their own learning processes, to be instructed to thoroughly self-reflect on their learning experiences and identify their learning problems. For example, teachers can reserve a few minutes at the beginning of class to ask each student to reflect on their out-of-class learning experiences and set relevant goals to overcome their learning difficulties as a warm-up exercise. Moreover, by having students keep a learning diary, such individual self-reflection can be shared in group practice, in which students discuss learning obstacles and solutions based on their journal entries. Second, the results of this study also cast light on the need for motivational support for students with only instrumental orientations. Teachers must become aware of the potential impacts of motivational beliefs on self-regulation and assist the learners to adopt not only instrumental motives but also international motives, which are likely to sustain interest in learning English over time and enhance self-regulation. To raise learners' interest in L2 use and intercultural partners, teachers could recommend a list of opportunities to use the target language outside the classroom and encourage learners to create authentic learning environments, for example, by participating in local international events or computer-mediated online communication platforms. Such support may raise students' awareness of the purpose of language learning and increase their interest in L2 communication, which in turn could facilitate self-regulated learning.

Lastly, limitations of the present study need to be mentioned. First, regarding methodological issues, diary data together with additional data (i.e., goal-setting and self-reflection sheets) were collected to delve into students' self-regulated learning processes outside the classroom. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that students may be using more self-regulatory strategies than they are aware of, and thus, they may not be able to reflect entire self-regulated learning processes on diaries and self-reports. Like other case studies (Zeng & Goh, 2018; Yabukoshi, 2018), interviews should be conducted in future research to support and supplement textual data and capture a fuller picture of students' self-regulated learning processes. Second, the study investigated the self-regulated learning processes, focusing on the forethought and self-reflection phases since these two phases are essential for cyclical processes of L2 self-regulation, as noted in the Purpose of the Study and discussed in this study. On the other hand, the

performance phase of self-regulation, which is included in the social cognitive model, is also worthy of investigation to fully understand effective self-regulatory cycles. Further studies should be conducted to explore the self-regulated L2 learning processes involved in the performance phase. Finally, this case study involved only four individual cases of Japanese university students learning EFL outside the classroom. As language learning and development are idiosyncratic in nature (Nakata, 2020), this study has provided only a glimpse into these students' out-of-class self-regulated L2 learning processes in the Japanese EFL context. Caution is thus urged in generalizing the findings from the present study to other populations in different learning contexts, and the findings presented in this article should be further explored. In particular, the interactions between motivation, L2 proficiency, and self-regulation have yet to be validated in this case study. Further studies employing quantitative approaches using reliable and valid instruments, should be undertaken to verify the interactions for better understanding of effective EFL learning outside the classroom.

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Appendix A

Prompts Used for the Diaries (English Translated Version)

- (A) (At the beginning of the week) Please write your learning goals and study plans for the week.
 (B) (At the end of the week) Please self-reflect on your learning experiences during the week and write your self-evaluation and comments.

Week	Period	(A) Learning Goals & Study Plans	(B) Self-Evaluation & Comments
1	Sept. 30~		

Appendix B

Goal-Setting Sheet (English Translated Version)

The Latest TOEIC Scores

Month: Year:	TOEIC listening score: TOEIC reading score: TOEIC total score:
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Learning Goals

Short-term (By the end of this semester)	Obtain a score of _____ on the TOEIC by the end of this semester
Medium-term (By the end of next year)	Obtain a score of _____ on the TOEIC by the end of next year
Long-term (By graduation)	Obtain a score of _____ on the TOEIC by graduation

Learning Purposes (Reasons why you study English with the aim of achieving your target scores)

--

Study Plans for 15 Weeks

	Your listening problems that need to be overcome & study materials to use
Listening	

	Your reading problems that need to be overcome & study materials to use
Reading	

Appendix C

Self-Reflection Sheet (English Translated Version)

Overall Evaluation

Please self-reflect on your entire learning experience and write your self-evaluation, comments, and future directions.

Appendix D

Journal Excerpts (Original in Japanese)

Excerpt 1 (HP1, Week 7)

Part 6・7正答率を50%から70%に上げる。2/3は確実にとるため。

Excerpt 2 (HP1, Week 15)

一度ミスした問題は二度と間違えない思いで解いていく。

Excerpt 3 (HP2, Weeks 10 and 11)

11月までに覚えた単語の復習（半分）[Week 10] ... 11月までに覚えた単語の復習（残り半分）[Week11]。

Excerpt 4 (HP2, Week 10)

11月までに解いた文法の復習（まちがった所）。

Excerpt 5 (HP1, Week 10)

どちらも [i.e., リーディングとリスニングセクション] 難しいが自分はリスニング力がまだまだ足りない。来週はリスニング週間にしようと思う。

Excerpt 6 (HP1, self-reflection sheet)

自分は努力してもあまりすぐ結果として出てこないの、そこでやる気をなくしてしまうことが多い。今回のTOEIC学習でも、1回目のテスト結果と対策を行った上でのぞんだ2回目で全く得点に変化せず、とても落ち込んだ。しかしここであきらめるのと、ここから頑張るのと、今後の点数が大きく変わると思い、日々コツコツとした（他の勉強で忙しいときは怠ってしまうこともあった）努力をしていこうと決心した。

Excerpt 7 (HP2, self-reflection sheet)

リスニングはもともと苦手なため、復習の際には書きとりを行いました。復習していく中で自分が聞きとりにくい単語もわかってきたので気をつけるべき単語がわかってよかった。今後も気を抜かずにリスニングの際はきちんと復習を行っていきたい。

Excerpt 8 (LP1, Weeks 1 to 7)

単語は一週間で50~70語ぐらい [Week 1] ... 単語は次の所から50単語前後 [Week 2] ... 単語は50前後引き続き [Week 3] ... 単語は50前後 [Weeks 4 and 5] ... 単語は60前後 [Week 6] ... 単語は50前後 [Week 7]。

Excerpt 9 (LP2, Weeks 1 to 11)

単語1~100 [Week 1] ... 単語150まで [Week 2] ... 単語200まで [Week 3] ... 単語300まで [Week 4] ... 単語900まで [Week 10] ... 単語1000まで [Week 11]。

Excerpt 10 (LP1, Weeks 1, 2, 10, and 11)

リスニングは達成できなかった。単語はできた[Week 1] ... リスニングは少し追いついた。単語は順調[Week 2] ... 単語は少しずつ進められた。長文は1Pだけしか進まず。リスニングはペース通り[Week 10] ... 単語は30前後進行。長文は2Pだけ進む。リスニングはペースドオリ[Week 11]。

Excerpt 11 (LP2, Weeks 1, 4, 5, and 8)

単語は覚えきれなかったがリスニングの練習はできた [Week 1] ... 寝る前に単語を見る習慣をつけれるように努力した [Week 4] ... 洋画のDVDを借りてきて字幕ありで見て、リスニング対策をすることができた [Week 5] ... バイトから帰ってきた後につかれて学習しなかった日があったのでなくしていきたい [Week 8]。