

[Article]

A Project to Enhance Motivation and Autonomy in Language Learning*

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1. Introduction

Having students take initiative and responsibility in their learning has proven to be effective in raising both students' motivation and autonomy. Many researchers have argued the importance of students' motivation and autonomy in second language learning, and they have tried to define these terms. As Ushioda (2011) states that autonomy and motivation have a mutual relationship, both notions should be considered interactively in second language acquisition. Little (1990) also argues that autonomy is not self-instruction and it is not a single, easily described behavior. Benson (2001) simply defines autonomy as "the capacity to take charge of, or responsibility for, one's own learning" (p.58). He proceeds to assert that it is neither necessary nor possible to define autonomy more precisely than this. Based on these researchers' interpretations of autonomy, it is clear that there is no limited explanation of the word "autonomy." In this paper, the author focuses on students' autonomy but believes students' motivation toward language learning plays an important role to enhance it. Autonomy and motivation cannot and should not be considered as a separate entity. This research aims to raise students' autonomy through creating a work-

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book with their instructor, analyze their source of autonomy, and investigate their motivation. Involving students in preparing printed work is expected to stimulate responsibility for their own learning, raise their awareness of autonomy, and also to encourage them to regularly use English outside classrooms. Since the concept of autonomy in language learning embraces a diverse range of learning styles and autonomous learning is mainly observed outside of the classroom, few formal studies have been done on students who are engaged in non-graded activities to investigate their motivation and autonomy. Therefore, the author was motivated to research the factors that influence students' motivation and their attitude toward autonomous learning in an environment where tests or grades were not their motives.

2. Concept of Autonomy in Japan

The idea of autonomy has been discussed among many researchers, starting from Holec's (1981) definition that it is "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3). Sharle and Szabo's (2000) definition that autonomy is "the freedom and ability to manage one's own affairs" (p. 5) is also used by many researchers. Most recent research quotes Benson's (2011) definition, as explained in the introduction. However, as Littlewood (1999) claims, based on Aoki and Smith's (1999) research, the style of autonomy in Asian countries is labeled as "reactive autonomy," which is different from that of western countries. Reactive autonomy is defined as "the kind of autonomy which does not create its own directions but, once a direction has been initiated, enables learners to organize their resources autonomously in order to reach that goal" (Littlewood, 1999, p. 75). Aoki and Smith's research was conducted in Japan and they observed Japanese students. They claim that Japanese students tend to rely on their teachers more and expect their teachers to take the lead. The author's pilot study (Imai, 2014) supports the tendency of Japanese university students' reactive autonomy, which will be explained in the next section.

3. The Pilot Study

This study observed how many students in the author's classes would show interest in working on a non-graded task for their self-study and how many could continue doing the task. The first point that was noted in this study is the tendency of the participants' reactive autonomy. All the author's students ($n = 37$, a beginner class composed of 18 students and an intermediate class of 19 students) expressed their interest in receiving extra non-graded tasks at the beginning of the semester to improve their English skills. It was not expected that all of them would show their interest despite the fact that the author emphasized that they would not be graded by completing the tasks. They were provided with extra reading materials at the end of each class and they could take the handouts freely. The students were then asked to discuss what they had learned from the handouts with their instructor when they finished reading. However, their motivation quickly decreased. By the second week, all the students in the beginner class failed to continue. The intermediate class also experienced a similar situation, although their motivation did not drop as rapidly. Every week, two or three students stopped reporting their results until eventually none continued. The students' self-study efforts were monitored but they were not offered any concrete study assistance. All the students had expressed their motivation to improve their English in the beginning of the semester and they were told that they could receive study assistance if they asked for it outside the classroom. They were aware that they had a privilege of obtaining support but because of their reactive characteristics to their own learning, they were unable to become autonomous learners in an environment where they were only being provided with learning materials.

Another point to be considered regarding Japanese university students' autonomy in language acquisition is their sense of group mentality as opposed to an individual one. Yashima (2014) claims that "following recent developments in applied linguistics and in particular of expanded theoretical frameworks including socio-cultural theory, the concept has become more complex" (p. 61). She explains that autonomy embraces the sense of interdependence as well as

independence. Therefore, focusing on the tendency of reactive autonomy and the interdependent feature of Japanese students may be crucial when analyzing their autonomy in language learning.

4. Conceptual Framework

As explained in the introduction, autonomy is one of the important keys to becoming a successful language learner. Therefore, it is beneficial and practical for language teachers to search for factors that can improve students' autonomy. The pilot study shows that no good outcomes are expected if students are given materials without any engagements of their teachers. To encourage reactive autonomy among Japanese university students, the author made a careful plan to adequately guide students. First, a strategy was formulated to ensure that the students would not start from deciding what to study and how. Second, an enabling environment to encourage students to keep studying when outside the classroom was created with a clear goal of making a workbook for the students. Mutlu and Eroz-Tuga (2013) state that there are four behavioral indicators of autonomy: 1) using language learning strategies, 2) a high motivation level to learn the English language, 3) taking responsibility for one's own learning, and 4) continued English language study outside the classroom. The purpose of this project was to investigate if providing a learning strategy and an environment to encourage English study outside the classroom can enhance students' motivation and reactive autonomy, and to investigate if these would enhance students' motivation and students' sense of responsibility for their own learning. As for the learning strategy, "pattern practice," which will be explained in Section 5.3, was used in this project. To facilitate the creation of an enabling environment to study outside the classroom, a project to create a workbook was planned based on the premise that students would feel responsible for their work because they had to work with other students interdependently and also their work would be printed in a booklet form.

Since autonomy and motivation are mutually related to each other, the author tried to analyze the factors for the autonomous traits of the students us-

ing Dornyei's (2014) tripartite construct of L2 motivational self-system. They are: 1) ideal L2 self—the image of oneself speaking English, 2) ought-to L2 self—avoid possible negative outcomes, and 3) L2 learning experience—the immediate learning environment and experience.

This study aims to observe Japanese university students' reactive autonomy in English language learning. To investigate factors that enhance students' reactive autonomy, this study was informed by the following three research questions:

1. Can providing a learning strategy and an environment for continued English language study outside the classroom enhance students' motivation and reactive autonomy?
2. Can interdependent work enhance reactive autonomy?
3. What are the possible factors that influence students' motivation and reactive autonomy?

5. Methodology

5.1. Design of the Study

There are two parts in this research: Part I) guiding students to create a workbook and Part II) monitoring students' self-study using the workbook. The purpose of this project was to observe students' autonomy. Part I was conducted during the spring vacation in 2016, while Part II was held during the spring semester in 2016. However, none of the participants were in the author's class, and their participation was completely voluntary. Both Part I and II were non-graded activities and students were informed that they were free to leave the project anytime. On completion of Part I, the author used a questionnaire to investigate students' motivation and autonomy. The questionnaire was anonymous to ensure that the students would feel more comfortable giving negative as well as positive feedback. On completion of the workbook, a five-scale Likert questionnaire written in Japanese was administered to all the participants to receive their feedback (Appendix B). The questionnaire had 10

questions in total, and each of the two questions focused on five components, namely: involvement, responsibility, motivation, improvement, and autonomy. Although the purpose of the questionnaire was to explore students' motivation and reactive autonomy, three related categories, involvement, responsibility, and improvement were added. If a student's response showed an increase in motivation and autonomy along with involvement, the factor for the result might have been the fact that he or she enjoyed the task. If it did along with responsibility, he or she might have felt responsible for the interdependent task, and as a result, his or her motivation and autonomy would have improved. In fact, to investigate the students' reactive autonomy outside the classroom, the author wanted to find out: 1) how much they were involved in the task (Questions 1 and 2), 2) how their sense of responsibility affected them (Questions 3 and 4), 3) if their motivation was enhanced during the task (Questions 5 and 6), 4) if they felt that they improved their English skills (Questions 7 and 8), and 5) if their reactive autonomy was enhanced (Questions 9 and 10). During Part II, the participants were asked to report on their self-study and interviewed on their motivation and autonomous learning. The interviews were recorded to facilitate further investigations on possible factors that could have enhanced the participants' autonomy. The factors were then analyzed using Dornyei's (2014) tripartite construct of L2 motivational self-system, as mentioned above. All the students, who were willing to participate, provided their written consent.

5.2. Participants

Part I

There were 18 students enrolled in one of the author's classes in fall 2015, and nine out of those 18 students volunteered to join in the creation of a workbook project. Part I was conducted between February and March 2016, when the nine participants were no longer taking the author's class, which means the project was completely non-graded. The participants were majoring in English education and were interested in English in general.

Part II

In Part I, seven students out of nine expressed their interest to continue being monitored and supervised during their self-study after the new semester started. Although two students did not join in Part II because they were studying abroad during the 2016 spring semester, they sent their comments about the project through email when they received the completed workbook. One student stopped coming for the sessions after attending the first one in May because of his busy schedule. Two additional students, who did not get involved in the creation of the workbook (Part I), requested to join the sessions because they wanted to practice patterns using the book for their language development.

5.3. A Project to Enhance Reactive Autonomy

Part I

In this project, the learning strategy of “pattern practice” was selected mainly because of the two following reasons: First, pattern practice had already been introduced to all the students who were enrolled in the author’s class in 2015 and all the participants in this project were taking the class then. It was one of the most popular activities among the students, according to the end of semester questionnaire. Second, many researchers have affirmed the effectiveness of this strategy. Scheffler (2016) affirms the effectiveness of pattern practice as proposed by Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009). Pattern practice was designed based on “the generative principle, i.e. the human capacity to generate an infinite number of utterances from a finite grammatical competence.” (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009, p. 120). Scheffler (2016) reiterates that pattern practice is an activity that resembles real-life language use that provides massive repetition experiences. The importance of massive repetition experiences and consistent practice are suggested by Segalowitz (2003). Segalowitz (2003) states that pattern practice is usually boring and it reduces motivation but it is the crucial challenge to incorporate it into classroom activities in a positive way. Twenty-five patterns (Appendix A) were chosen and students repeatedly practiced each pattern aloud by looking at the Japanese sentences. For example, by looking at a sentence “*Fuji-san ni nobotta kotoga arimasuka,*” they could

say “Have you ever climbed Mt. Fuji?” aloud. Each pattern had 15 sentences, so students were able to practice the same pattern 15 times. To provide an enabling environment to study English autonomously, the participants were asked to create a workbook which compiled all the patterns they practiced in the previous semester to help them continue studying by themselves. The process of creating the workbook aimed at ensuring that the students were involved in studying English during the spring break. The 25 patterns were distributed to them, and each of the participants was in charge of two or three patterns. They made 15 sentences for each pattern, in both Japanese and English (Appendix A). All the sentences were checked by the author before printing.

Part II

After the completion of the workbook, students were asked if they were interested in joining “study and interview sessions.” The purpose of these sessions was to observe their motivation and self-study habits and guide them to become autonomous learners. Considering the fact that the author’s pilot study shows that Japanese students have reactive autonomy tendency, it is important for the instructor to get involved in their non-graded tasks. This “study and interview sessions” were conducted to maintain their motivation and make them realize that their instructor was watching their efforts. The workbook was completed at the end of April, and the study sessions were held once a month in May, June, and July 2016. The duration of each session was approximately 30 to 40 minutes and was video recorded. Some participants had the sessions in a group and some came individually, depending on their class schedules. The participants were first asked to report on their self-study using the workbook, and then checked their progress by demonstrating their pattern practice. After that, they had a free talk session in English for 10 minutes. The purpose of the free talk was to examine whether they would use any of the patterns they had been practicing during the talk, but it was not revealed to them.

6. Results & Findings

After the project, the author analyzed the questionnaire and interview results. The results of the survey after Part I show that three components— involvement, responsibility, and motivation—received high scores, while two components—autonomy and improvement—stayed neutral. As seen in Table 1, seven out of nine students strongly agreed or agreed that they enjoyed practicing patterns and nine strongly agreed or agreed that they were glad to have been involved in the project. All the students strongly agreed or agreed that they felt responsible for completing their parts even though they had a choice to quit. Six students gave positive feedback on their motivation, and only two students agreed that they studied continuously by using the workbook, five students chose neutral, and six students expressed their desire to spend more time to practice hereafter. Three students strongly agreed or agreed that their speaking skills improved and five remained neutral.

Table 1. Results of the questionnaire ($n=9$)

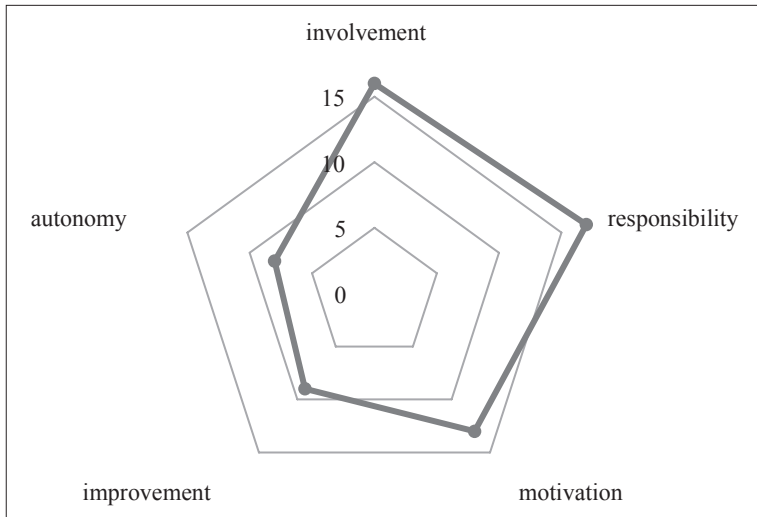
Question	Five components	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Involvement	1	6	1	1	0
2	Involvement	6	3	0	0	0
3	Responsibility	8	1	0	0	0
4	Responsibility	7	1	1	0	0
5	Motivation	3	3	2	1	0
6	Motivation	0	1	1	4	3
7	Improvement	1	2	5	1	0
8	Improvement	0	0	3	5	1
9	Autonomy	1	1	5	2	0
10	Autonomy	0	1	1	7	0

Note. Questions 6 and 8 are reversed items.

As seen in Figure 1 (total numbers of “strongly agreed” and “agreed” of two questions each), the participants gave positive feedback in terms of involvement, responsibility, and motivation. However, majority were hesitant to

express their improvement on their language skills and autonomy (Figure 1). To further investigate the factors that influenced their feedback, interview sessions were conducted.

Figure 1. Total numbers of positive feedback of five components



The result of the interview sessions during Part II show the possible factors for the participants' feedback analyzed by the questionnaire. There are three motives for the participants' positive feedback on their involvement, responsibility, and motivation. The first remarkable factor is that the project was interdependent and the workbook would not be completed without all the participants' contributions. Therefore, their sense of responsibility toward other participants motivated them to continue being involved in the project. Three students stated that they strongly felt that they should continue participating in the workbook project, while the remaining students indicated that they would not be able to continue. Also, one student expressed her desire to discontinue participation in the sessions because of her busy schedule. She, however, changed her mind after hearing two other participants who attended the sessions say that they would continue. The second factor is the simplicity

of the task. Despite the author’s concern of the monotonous nature of the task, participants found themselves enjoying practicing patterns. Four students stated that pattern practice is easy to practice and they could feel the effectiveness of the practice. The third factor is the guidance of the instructor. Even though participation in the project was completely voluntary, students still felt pressure before the sessions and tried to practice patterns more before meeting their instructor. Six students indicated that they opened their workbooks and tried to practice longer on the previous day of the session or on the very day just before coming into the session room.

To explore the negative factors that influenced participants’ feedback on improvement and autonomy, their self-study reports during the interview were analyzed. Their lack of confidence in the improvement and autonomy can be explained using Dornyei’s (2014) tripartite construct of L2 motivational self-system: 1) ideal L2 self, 2) ought-to L2 self, and 3) L2 learning experience. Based on the interview results, the author grouped all the participants into three categories: students who possess one of the tripartite construct of L2 motivational self-system, students with 2 of the three, and students with all of them (Table 2). The ones with all the three elements gave positive feedback on their language improvement and autonomy. The ones with two elements expressed strong motivation but gave neutral feedback on improvement and autonomy. Those who only possessed one element showed less motivation after the completion of their workbooks and gave negative feedback on their improvement and autonomy.

Table 2. Summary of all participants’ tripartite construct of L2 motivational self-system

1 of the tripartite constructs	2 of the tripartite constructs	3 of the tripartite constructs
Eri (OL2) Fumi (OL2) Hana (LE) Kei (OL2) Shiori (OL2) Taka (OL2)	Ken (IL2 & OL2) Ren (IL2 & OL2) Ryota (IL2 & OL2)	Mai (IL2, OL2, LE) Nami (IL2, OL2, LE)

*IL2 = Ideal L2 self, OL2 = Ought-to L2 self, LE = L2 Learning Experience

In every session, all participants confessed that they were not adequately studying autonomously. Still, each student showed a different level of motivation and autonomy during the interview. For example, Ken (alias) had a clear future self-image of being an English teacher. He also believed that if he did not use the workbook, all the participants' efforts would go to waste. He did not have L2 learning experience such as studying abroad, and he possessed two of the tripartite constructs—ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self. His comments showed that he had a strong interest in participating in the project so that he could be involved in an English environment. During the interview, he also commented on his improvement but he was not as confident compared to the two students who possess three elements.

- “I feel responsible to work on the workbook and continue practicing because if I don't, I feel bad for other students who contributed to this project.”
- “I feel that I am improving my speaking level, so I try to practice for short intervals even with a busy schedule.”
- (A comment from Ren) “Ken always uses one of the patterns, ‘I'm about to...' in class. He says it to his classmates and his teacher (not the author) whenever he has a chance to use this phrase. He likes the phrase and it comes out naturally.”

Another example is Mai (alias), who had a clear image of herself using English in the future. She did not have confidence in her English ability, and she knew she needed to study more. After she completed the workbook project, she left for a study abroad program. Although she was not able to participate in the study sessions, she emailed her comments after receiving the workbook.

- “Because I joined this project, I've practiced patterns again, so I became able to use the words in the book fluently.”
- “I just started the study abroad program and I can't speak well yet, but I was able to use the phrases I practiced in this book, so I am glad that I

joined the project.”

- “I want to continue practicing patterns here (outside of Japan).”

Nami (alias) also had a clearly defined goal to join a study abroad program for a year, and she was taking some English lessons outside of school. She believed practicing patterns would come in handy when living abroad. By the time the workbook was completed, she had left Japan but requested that the book be mailed to her so she can continue practicing.

- “My speaking skills improved by joining this project.”
- “It took a long time for me to make my own sentences using the patterns and it was difficult to come up with some good practice sentences, however, I could reach my current level of English by doing this, and also, I can keep using this book to improve, so I am glad to have joined the project.”
- “I hope there will be more workbooks with different levels so that I can continue using this strategy to improve.”

Hana (alias) was one of the three participants who had an L2 learning experience, yet she gradually lost her motivation on the project. She left for a study abroad program during the spring break in 2016. She said she used the patterns every day when she was there and expressed the importance of continuing the practice. She also continued participating in the sessions after she came back. She stated that she would use English in the future but had no clear future self-image yet.

- “I experienced how important the pattern practice is when I was in the short-stay program. However, since the spring semester has started, I have been extremely busy studying for other classes. Also, I am taking an English class now, so when I have time, I should study for the class first, rather than other non-graded materials.”
- “I always think I should practice or I would lose these expressions, but I’m just overwhelmed by my current schedule.”

- “I wanted to quit but if my friends continue, I want to come with them even though I don’t know how much time I can spend on practicing patterns.”

Taka (alias) showed and expressed the least motivation among the participants. He had no clear self-image of using English in the future. He had a feeling of inferiority in English because he felt that his classmates were better than him and they were improving. This feeling sparked his interest and involvement in the project.

- “I am not good at English compared to my friends. I know I should study more.”
- “I am busy playing baseball. I have no time to practice patterns. I need to do my homework first.”
- “I feel sorry that I haven’t practiced at all since I got this workbook.”

Ren (alias) was one of the two students who joined the project after the completion of the workbook. He did not volunteer to participate in creating the workbook because of his busy schedule during the spring break. However, after seeing his friend, Ken, continue practicing patterns using the workbook, he was motivated to join the study sessions and he decided to encourage himself to study autonomously.

- “I know that acquiring English skills is important for what I want to do in the future. I saw Ken’s workbook and I wanted to have one, too.”
- “Now my schedule is easier, I have time to study more than last year, so I want to continue practicing patterns.”

Two students (Mai & Nami), who joined study abroad programs, reported a noticeable improvement in their speaking skills due to the efforts and time they spent in practicing using the workbook. Both students emphasized that they were able to use the phrases that they practiced from the book smoothly

in their daily lives. Their L2 learning experiences accelerated improvement in their motivation, thus enhancing their autonomous learning drastically. Contrary to the author's aim to provide students with an L2 learning experience through free English talk during the sessions, those students who stayed in Japan did not get an opportunity to have enough L2 experience, which explains their neutral or negative feedback toward their improvement and autonomy. Even without L2 experience, Ken, Ren, and Ryota showed strong motivation and higher awareness of their autonomous learning because of the two other constructs of the L2 self-system. Ren and Ryota joined the sessions after the completion of the workbook because they set their future goals and started seeing themselves using English in the future.

The possible factors that may have contributed to the weak areas of the questionnaire results can be explained by looking into each participant's L2 motivational self-system. However, considering the fact that their involvement was completely voluntary and they repeatedly expressed their desire to continue with the autonomous practice, the project in itself seems to enhance their motivation and their awareness toward autonomous learning.

The data show that providing learners with a specific methodology (pattern practice) and an enabling environment to practice English (the workbook creation project) can enhance Japanese university students' reactive autonomy. Pattern practice was popular among students because of its simplicity and effectiveness. Although repetition is an important part of language learning, it can also be monotonous for some students. However, once students feel the effectiveness of the tasks, easy and clear tasks can be used as an initial step to enhancing their reactive autonomy. Also, the interdependent nature of the project and the guidance of an instructor have a significant influence on students. In addition, collaborative work, in which students feel a responsibility toward each other, can be an effective tool to raise their awareness of autonomous learning. Furthermore, based on the analysis of the students' L2 motivational self-system, all three elements play significant roles in maintaining their motivation and helping them become autonomous learners. Language learners are encouraged to have ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience

so as to maintain their motivation and high level of awareness to autonomous learning.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, although longitudinal research is needed to confirm the effectiveness of providing an extra-curricular study environment to foster autonomous learning, the data show that providing a learning strategy and an environment for continued English language study outside the classroom can enhance students' motivation and reactive autonomy. Also, interdependent work might be effective to enhance Japanese university students' reactive autonomy. Regarding reactive autonomy, more quantitative data are necessary to confirm the correlation to the construct of L2 motivational system but all instructors should guide their students to be autonomous by facilitating the tripartite construct of L2 motivational self-system.

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Appendix B – Questionnaire

プロジェクト参加に関するアンケート

1. 楽しく学習できている。I enjoy practicing patterns.
大いにそう思う そう思う どちらでもない そう思わない 全くそう思わない
5 4 3 2 1
2. 英語に触れる機会が増えた。I became involved in English study more.
大いにそう思う そう思う どちらでもない そう思わない 全くそう思わない
5 4 3 2 1
3. 責任感を持って取り組んだ。I felt responsibility in this project.
大いにそう思う そう思う どちらでもない そう思わない 全くそう思わない
5 4 3 2 1
4. クラスメイトと協力していたので、続けた。
I continued participating because this was cooperative work.
大いにそう思う そう思う どちらでもない そう思わない 全くそう思わない
5 4 3 2 1
5. 英語学習に対するモチベーションが上がった。My motivation improved.
大いにそう思う そう思う どちらでもない そう思わない 全くそう思わない
5 4 3 2 1
6. 成績に直接つながるような授業内の勉強の方がモチベーションが上がる。
I feel more motivated to work on homework that will be graded.
大いにそう思う そう思う どちらでもない そう思わない 全くそう思わない
5 4 3 2 1
7. スピーキング力が上がったと思う。My speaking skills improved.
大いにそう思う そう思う どちらでもない そう思わない 全くそう思わない
5 4 3 2 1
8. あまりスピーキング力に繋がってないように思える。
I don't believe this had been contributing to my English speaking skills.
大いにそう思う そう思う どちらでもない そう思わない 全くそう思わない
5 4 3 2 1
9. 継続的に、自律学習を行っている。I study hard practicing patterns continuously.
大いにそう思う そう思う どちらでもない そう思わない 全くそう思わない
5 4 3 2 1
10. 今後も続けると思う。I think I will continue practicing using the workbook.
大いにそう思う そう思う どちらでもない そう思わない 全くそう思わない
5 4 3 2 1

Note. Questions 6 and 8 are reversed items.

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