

Applying NHK Programs for Learning Outside the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Learner autonomy is a leading key word in language teaching in Japan and one of its elements is learning outside the classroom. However, it is often time and energy consuming for teachers to find appropriate materials to recommend to students. In this short paper, the web-based service NHK Gogaku is suggested as a tool to foster learner autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

Learner autonomy is one of the buzzwords in language teaching in Japan. The focus on teaching methods has been shifting from traditional teacher-centered to learner-centered, and teachers are expected to enhance learner autonomy via the new method. Both learner autonomy and learner-centered orientation are relatively new or unfamiliar to current teachers as learners, and consequently many teachers, have been struggling with them. According to Little (1991), one of the major misunderstandings of learner autonomy is that teachers are not needed in autonomous learning. Moreover, he also claims that assistance from experts is necessary for adult learners to be autonomous.

One of the key elements of learner autonomy is that learners themselves decide what and how to learn outside the classroom (Chang, 2007). In this deciding process, teacher assistance is essential. Teachers need to be curators who suggest appropriate materials and instructions for learning outside the classroom. Considering the economic situations of students, it is practical to introduce free resources, and many Internet-based sites are applicable in this circumstance. However, a problem that arises here is that there are a number of free websites and apps for language learning, which makes it quite difficult for teachers to select appropriate services for learners since it takes time and energy to judge which websites are suitable for their learners' needs. In this article, NHK Gogaku, an Internet-based service, will be introduced as a solution to this problem offering a chance to enhance learner autonomy to some extent.

WHAT IS NHK GOGAKU?

NHK (Nippon Housou Kyoukai) is Japan's national public broadcasting organization and it has a long history of language learning programs for both TV and radio. In

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1925, “英語講座 (English Language Course)” started as the first radio language program. The basic format of most of NHK language programs consists of one conversational skit, a grammar explanation, words and phrases, and review quizzes. The contents are professionally designed by program instructors who are teachers or professors at educational institutions around Japan or first-rate professionals from non-academic fields.

In the fiscal year of 2017, 16 programs including TV and radio will be broadcast and the levels vary from A0 to C1 according to CEFR scale. All 12 radio programs are available on the Internet while they are on the air. In addition to this, NHK established the web-based service called NHK Gogaku where all the radio language programs are available from the next week of broadcasting for one week. It also provides word-jumbling quizzes, sentence-jumbling quizzes, dictation quizzes, and pronunciation practice tests.

APPLICATIONS

It is recommended to provide instructional guidance at the initial stage until students get accustomed to adopting NHK Gogaku into their learning outside the classroom. This paragraph will provide step-by-step instructions to guide students and instructions through the registration and application process.

First, registration is required to use NHK Gogaku. The links to the website and its app are below:

NHK ゴガク (Gogaku) Website <https://www2.nhk.or.jp/gogaku/>

NHK ゴガク (Gogaku) App <https://www2.nhk.or.jp/gogaku/app/>

It is highly recommended letting students register in the class to ensure that all the students are ready to use it. In the registration process, personal information is required. If some students are uncomfortable submitting personal information, radio or Internet radio is useful for them. In this case, they can listen to a program during broadcasting hours only.

Second, after introducing the available programs briefly, let your students choose which program to listen to as a part of the class assignment. Depending on the class level and condition, it may be preferred to recommend certain programs from the curator’s point of view. The assignment is to listen to one of the programs and stage a brief presentation or group talk to share reactions to the program. In this sharing activity, the following questions may be useful to encourage students’ understanding of the text and activate interest in the activity.

- Which program did you listen to?
- What did you learn from the program? Any new words or expressions?
- How did you find it? (e.g. ratings from 1 to 5).
- Why did you think so?

Third, give listening assignments regularly. This is the first step to let NHK Gogaku become a part of their autonomous learning. It is recommended to start this activity as an assignment until students become accustomed to applying it for themselves. In my class, students are required to choose and listen to a program once a week and fill in an online form (Google Form), which makes it easy for me to track students’ work. Learner autonomy is ensured to some extent as students are allowed to choose a program based on their preferences. After several weeks giving the regular assignments, it is helpful to have a sharing activity again to encourage them to listen and discuss knowledge retrieved from the listening.

If students are autonomous enough and come to like NHK Gogaku, they will keep

applying it right after it is introduced. However, certainly, it is not likely to happen in the most of the situations.

CONCLUSION

NHK Gogaku is recommended to enhance learning English outside the classroom and to foster learner autonomy. As stated in the first section, teachers are required to be cognizant curators who introduce correct materials to learners. NHK programs are reliable enough for educators to recommend without any hesitation. Future research on students' attitudes towards NHK Gogaku are indispensable to observe the change of their learning autonomy.

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