# The Register of Progress in Self-Drected Language Learning

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**Annotation**. *The paper presents the problem of control in self-directed language learning. The necessity for the registers of learners' progress is expressed both by teachers and students and the conclusion to frame learning process is drawn. On the basis of some widely spread methods fostering the development of self-directed language learning, that is problem-based learning, project method, case-based learning, several registers for students progress could be introduced in second language learning environment The article analysis some types of progress registers: learning journals and logs, reflective diaries and language learning portfolio with the main focus on learning journals.*

## Introduction

Improving language learning in the European Union is a key factor in the Lisbon strategy, as an essential building block of almost all aspects involved, from economic efficiency to mobility, from the creation of more and better jobs to social inclusion and cohesion. While the authorities are arguing about the skills of learners that should be reported on the scales of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which are already widely accepted and are used by several Member States for determining their own benchmarks in this context, a new test delivery system is being developed by many institutions in Lithuania. Under the influence of a vast majority of ESP teaching methods students are introduced with different forms of learning and assessment. Much of this learning takes place at the learner's initiative, even if available through formal settings. A common label given to such activity is self-directed learning. In essence, self-directed learning is seen as any study form in which individuals have primary responsibility for planning, implementing, and even evaluating the effort. Most people, when asked, will proclaim a preference for assuming such responsibility whenever possible.

In Lithuania there has been a great interest expressed in the implementation of self-directed language learning. However, there has been much disappointment in this field as the lack of teacher's control and too much inde-

pendence lead students to dissatisfaction with their own studies and unstructured learning. That is why **the object of the research** was the register of progress in self-directed language learning. Having chosen this object, **the aim of the research** was to analyze the necessity for the register of progress in self-directed language learning. The **methods of the research** include the analysis of methodological references, a quantitative research, statistical data analysis (SPSS – statistical package for social sciences). The paper explores **the problem** of framing learners' control in self-directed language learning. Therefore, the main **hypotheses of this article** are: 1) despite being autonomous in self-directed language learning students need teacher's control in their studies; 2) students' progress should be registered to foster responsibility for their studies; 3) the usage of new methods of learning enhances the dialogue between a teacher and a student.

## 1. Forms of registers in self-direction in language learning

Before discussing some types of registers in self-directed language learning it is necessary to briefly describe what self-directed learning is. Self-direction is best viewed as a continuum or characteristic that exists to some degree in every person and learning situation. It does not necessarily mean that all learning will take place in isolation from others. Self-directed studies can involve various activities and resources, such as self-guided reading, participation in study groups, internships, electronic dialogues, reflective writing activities and etc. Meanwhile, learner's role is changing from a traditional to more autonomous and independent one. Individual learners can become empowered to take increasingly more responsibility for various decisions associated with the learning endeavor. Self-directed learners should be able to transfer learning, in terms of both knowledge and study skill, from one situation to another. At the same time, the teacher's role changes too. Effective roles for teachers in self-directed learning are possible, such as dialogue with learners, securing resources, evaluating outcomes, promoting critical thinking and fostering the development of responsibility.

Self-directed learning has been described as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others," to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, select and implement learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes (Knowles 1975). Mocker and Spear (1982) included self-directed learning in a descriptive model of lifelong learning based entirely on the locus of control for decision making about the objectives and means of learning. The model is a two-by-two matrix of learner and institution; the self-directed learning situation occurs when learners–not the institution–control both the learning objectives and the means of learning. The following situations occupy the other cells of the matrix (Mocker and Spear, 1982): (1) formal learning, in which institutions, not learners, control objectives and the means of learning; (2) non-formal learning, in which learners control the objectives and institutions control the means; and (3) informal learning, in which institutions control the objectives but learners control the means of learning. Thus, whether or not learning is self-directed depends not on the subject matter to be learned or on the instructional methods used. Instead,

self-directedness depends on who is in charge – who decides what should be learned, who should learn it, what methods and resources should be used, and how the success of the effort should be measured. To the extent the learner makes those decisions, the learning is generally considered to be self-directed. Perhaps only degrees of self-directedness are actually possible, given the frequent necessity of maintaining institutional standards and, as Mezirow (1985) points out, the impossibility of freely choosing among objectives unless all possible objectives are known. Some writers have pointed out that Mocker and Spear's model could be viewed as a continuum rather than as a matrix because some self-directed learning takes place in comparative isolation in secluded libraries. Other self-directed learners engage in more interpersonal communication (with experts and peers, for instance) than is typically available in conventional classroom education.

Self-directedness starts with learners' needs analysis which could be considered the first source for a new curriculum design and the self-evaluation of their own skills. In the Briguglio (1998) study, when asked questions relating to their English language needs almost all students indicated they could use some support in all four macro skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, with writing and speaking given the highest priority. Having considered the learner's individual differences and their preferred learning styles, tutors tend to provide them with as many language learning and assessment techniques as possible. On the basis of some widely spread methods fostering the development of self-directed language learning, that is problem-based learning, project method, case-based learning, the following registers for students progress could be introduced in second language learning environment:

1. Learning journals and logs,
2. Reflective diaries,
3. Learning contracts,
4. Language learning portfolio.

As assessment is the formal outcome of learning process, the registers are taken here as a form of formative assessment not summative because they are described in the context of the improvement of learning. Learning journals, logs and reflective diaries are terms often used interchangeably. However, the purposes of them may differ slightly. When keeping a learning journal, the emphasis is on making explicit and recording the learning that occurs. Reflective diaries, as the name suggests, are more concerned with demonstrating reflection on an experience, while logs are a record of events that have happened. They usually, however, all have an aspect of reflection in them. Journals, logs, diaries, portfolios are containers for writing that is recorded over a period of time. The writing may accompany a programme of learning, work, fieldwork or placement experience or a research project. Learning journals/diaries and portfolios are increasingly used in higher education as means of facilitating or assessing learning. They have many different purposes and the structure that is introduced needs both to relate to their purpose and to the style of the learner. Generally speaking, they seem to be helpful in personalizing and deepening the quality of learning and in helping learners to integrate the material of learning – such as that from different modules or theoretical and practical learning. The advantages of using these registers will be summarized and the reasons for using this form of

delivering information on the progress made will be shown.

Learning journals could be of various shapes and size: tapes, video, electronic form, paper. Generally speaking what distinguishes a learning journal from other writing is that it focuses on ongoing issues over time and there will be some intention to learn from either the process of doing it or from the results of it. This suggests that it is not, simply, an events diary or a record or log. Very often a learning journal is described as a tool for reflection. We think that we reflect all the time but in language learning reflection on a specific topic or task leads to better understanding and memorization. There are some learners who reflect only when there is an incentive to do it or when guidance or conditions in their environment are conducive to reflecting. What are the main reasons for writing this kind of journal? There could be as many answers as tasks. In terms of purposes for journals, a perusal of the literature might suggest that every time a learner chooses to write or is asked to write a learning journal, a different purpose for the process is given. In a review of over a hundred papers on journal writing (Moon, 1999) found around eighteen purposes for journal writing. It is important to note that most journals will fulfill more than one purpose, and that the purposes set by a tutor are not necessarily the same as those that will be fulfilled or perceived by a student.

## 2. Learning from Learning Journals

While trying to classify the reasons for writing a journal, the stress could be put on four means of learning from them:

Firstly, students learn because journal writing is a process that accentuates favorable conditions for learning.

- It produces intellectual space in which they can think.
- It also encourages independent learning – learners have to write their own journal and they can monitor the process and do it at their own pace.
- Writing a journal also provides a focusing point, an opportunity to gather thoughts and to see the whole system of the gathered information
- Learning from a journal enhances learning skills because it forces the learner to cope with piles of information or material

Secondly, journal writing encourages reflection and reflection is associated with deep approaches to learning, or with deep learning. In deep learning, the intention of the learner is to develop a personal understanding of the material and to relate it to what is already known. The freedom of journal writing can support the learner's attempt to understand.

Thirdly, writing in a journal encourages metacognition, it develops metacognitive skills which are generally divided into two types: *self-assessment* (the ability to assess one's own cognition) and *self-management* (the ability to manage one's further cognitive development) (Rivers 2001). Successful learners employ a range of metacognitive skills and effective teachers of young adults attend to the development of these skills. (Hacker,1998) concludes that definitions of need include "knowledge of one's knowledge, processes and cognitive and affective states" and "ability to consciously monitor and regulate one's knowledge, processes, cognitive and affective states". It is likely that much free writing in journals will contain some metacognition and if journals are structured, then metacognition can be built in.

Lastly, the act of writing is associated with learning or the enhancement of learning. There is a considerable literature on the relationship of writing to learning, how it forces a learner to clarify his or her thoughts, how it becomes a powerful form of feedback to the learner, how it focuses attention and tells the learner if s/he does or does not understand.

### *2.1. Advantages of writing learning journals*

As every technique used in language learning, learning journals give students a possibility to practice critical skills. Recently, a lot of arguments have been made in the context of the ability to reflect, think critically and learn continuously. Daudelin (1996) stresses that reflection is increasingly becoming a part of organizational life. Salner (1999) points out that in order to prepare future specialists for their roles in organizations they must develop their ability to reflect upon, question and critically evaluate what they know.

Learning journals help students to develop their ability to reflect. Daudelin (1996, p. 70) defines reflection as "the process of stepping back from an experience to ponder, carefully and persistently, its meaning to the self through the development of inferences". Students have to connect learning to their experience and situations already familiar to new assignments.

Besides the ability to reflect, learning journals develop critical thinking by requiring students to engage course material at higher cognitive levels as learning journals give the possibility for students to move through all levels of Bloom's taxonomy. As students have to be involved in a four-stage process-articulating a problem, analyzing and searching for possibilities, formulating and testing a theory to explain the problem and acting, they can practice reflection in two ways identified by Seibert (1999) cited in Varner Peck (2003). Coached reflection as is a structured approach that guides a person to think through their experienced and to identify what they learned from it. Reflection -in-action is unstructured, spontaneous reflection that occurs in the midst of engaging in a challenging experience which includes not only insight into the experience but also an action component.

Along with the help for students to achieve learning outcomes, learning journals could be used as assessment tools. There have been a lot of arguments whether to grade learning journals or not, if yes, then what to grade? If it is to be graded, certain evaluation criteria should be introduced to learners.

### *2.2. Evaluation criteria*

The most popular and often followed evaluation criteria are presented by Varner Peck (2003):

*Understanding:* Journal entries should demonstrate knowledge and comprehension of the material about which you are writing.

*Application:* Journal entries should make an explicit (that is, not implied) connection between subject of the entry and personal experience.

*Analysis, assessment, action plan*: Journal entries should include analysis of personal experience using the elements of the concept(s) being discussed, and a conclusion or evaluation based on the results of the analysis. Journal entries should offer recommendations or devise action plans based on the conclusions of the analysis.

*Professionalism:* Journals should be free of grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors and readability problems.

Specific measurements for these criteria are included in the final pages of this syllabus.

All journal entries must be typed (word processed). Entries are typically about three typed pages in length. The journal is confidential between you and the professor.

*Learning journals can be substitutes for exams*. The teacher is the person who decides on the criteria of evaluation, the content and the tasks.

What is a learning log? It is similar to learning journals. A learning log will help you structure your learning outside of class. Have you ever kept a journal or a diary about your personal life? The main idea was to feel free to write down an ideal or thought. Learning Logs operate in much the same way as diaries or journals except that they try to capture your ideas or insights on a particular aspect of business ethics. Each week students can be given some assignments and their responses to those tasks should be prepared before their next class in their learning log. For each class they write down their reflections on the course and class session material, anything related to their topic of interest that they experience dating the next week and personal reactions. The structure of the log can depend on the topic and grading system. If it is a constituent part of the log grade, then each part or presentation is to be assessed. Sometimes teachers check students learning log each week to give credit for completion of the week's work (30% of log grade). Learners have to turn in their Learning Logs twice during the semester, as noted on the syllabus and grading is based on keeping up with the log on a weekly basis and the extent to which they demonstrate understanding, insight and complete work.

## 3. Research results

### *3.1. Subjects and the instrument*

The research was carried out in two universities of Lithuania: Mykolas Romeris University and Vilnius Gediminas technical university. The majority of respondents (86%) were female first year students aged 17–24. The respondents were of different specialties: Law and Administration, Law, Public Administration, Business Management and Environmental Engineering.

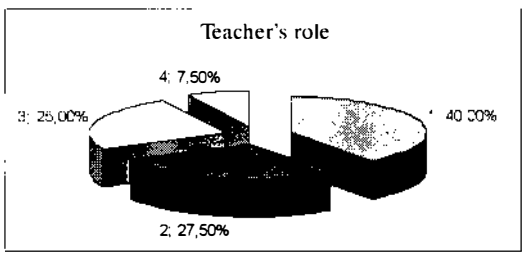
The questionnaire focused mostly on the necessity and importance of the usage of registers in self-directed language learning. Two main types: learning journals and logs were introduced to students and tried out. The first part of the questionnaire was designed to find out learners' attitude towards the teacher's role in self-directed language learning while using learning journals and the second part of the questionnaire was mostly focusing on the research whether new teaching methods help to develop students' autonomy and responsibility. The framework for the learning journal was designed having used some elements of learning logs and learning contracts for the sake of introducing more control in self-directed language learning.

### *3.2. Data analysis and discussion*

**Hypothesis 1:** despite being autonomous in self-directed language learning students need teacher's control in their studies.

Students' ability and wish to self-direct their studies was revealed by using the Bivariate correlation. Statistically significant correlation between learners' ability and wish to self-monitor and to self-control their learning process

((p = 0.000; r = ,553**). Statistical significance between self-monitoring and self-projecting in self-directed studies was established with the help of ANOVA (mean square between groups is ,534, within groups is ,120, f = 4.447; p = 0.042). However, there has not been any statistically significant result found between monitoring and self-assessment. Respondents expressed the need to have their learning process controlled and 40% of them think that a teacher should be a consultant, 27.5% of learners still need a teacher as a provider of information, 25% find a teacher as a partner and 7.5% would like to see their teacher in different roles.




*Graph 1.* ***Teacher's role in self-directed language learning***

The results discussed above show that the hypothesis was substantiated and statistically proved.

**Hypothesis 2:** students' progress should be registered to foster responsibility for their studies. The students who were given the possibility to have case-study method in their language learning reported that responsibility is closely connected with failures (p = 0.002; r = .484**). Respondents who are not willing to take responsibility for their studies blame others for the failure of the project or their unsuccessful performance. Though, at the same time there is a negative but statistically significant result found between responsibility and interesting tasks (p = 0.003; r = .-408**) which means that responsibility is not influenced by more or less interesting types of learning. The registered progress in learning journals and the analysis of the procedure of case-based studies increase responsibility (tablel) (p = 0.002; r = ,424**). The influence of case-base study method on responsibility was established with the help of General Linear Model (GLM) (F = 82.980; p = 0.000). Statistically significant result was found between students' self-correction in learning journals and responsibility for the project results (p = 0.049; r = , 313*). The analysis of the data shows that hypothesis 2 is statistically substantiated and we see that here is a close link between responsibility and the necessity to register students' progress in self-directed language learning.

**Hypothesis 3**: the usage of new methods of learning enhances the dialogue between a teacher and a student.

Having analyzed the data of the questionnaire 77,5% of the respondents reported that using learning journals in language learning and having project-based learning would encourage the cooperation between students and foreign language teachers. 82.5% of students even think that this method of learning would foster the communication with other subject teachers in order to have competent consultations in their specific field of interest. Besides, using new methods of learning such as case-study students find foreign language classes more interesting and challenging. It is necessary to note that the usage of case –study method correlates significantly (tablel) with students' interest in language studies (p = .028; r = ,348) and with the usage of individual tasks

*Table 1. **Bivariate correlations of variables***

| | Classroom activities | Responsibility | failures | Case study | Takes more time | More interesting | Individual tasks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Classroom activities | 1,000 | | | | | | |
| Responsibility | | 1,000 | | | | | |
| failures | | ,484** | 1,000 | | | | |
| Case study | | ,424** | | 1,000 | | | |
| Takes more time | ,364* | | | | 1,000 | | |
| More interesting | | –,408** | | ,348* | | 1,000 | |
| Individual tasks | | | ,327* | ,462** | ,320* | | 1,000 |

** – correlation is significant at the 0.01 level
* – correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

(p = .005; r = ,462) which means that new methods of learning foster students to account for their tasks individually and thus promotes the cooperation between a student and a teacher.

## Conclusions

Having analyzed the data and references in the field of using registers of progress in self-directed language learning the conclusion could be drawn that despite being autonomous in self-directed language learning students need teacher's control in their studies. In this research the main focus was on learning journals and logs which proved to be an efficient form of registers for first year students. The research findings indicate that students' progress should be registered to foster responsibility for their studies. Besides, using new methods of learning such as case-study students find foreign language classes more interesting and challenging. Statistically significant results were found between students' interest in language studies and the usage of individual tasks. It means that new methods of learning foster students to account for their tasks individually and thus promotes the cooperation between a student and a teacher.

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## SAVIDIREKTYVIOJO KALBOS MOKYMOSI PAŽANGOS REGISTRO FORMOS

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama Lisabonos strategijoje numatyta viena iš aktualiausių problemų – svetimųjų kalbų mokėjimo problema tobulinant ekonominius ir socialinius santykius. Autonominių studijų, vadinamų savidirektyviosiomis studijomis, uždavinys yra sudaryti besimokantiesiems sąlygas patiems tobulinti svetimosios kalbos studijas ir prisiimti atsakomybę už jas. Tyrimo rezultatai parodė, kad studentams reikia dėstytojo, kuris galėtų atlikti konsultanto, informacijos teikėjo ar partnerio vadmenį naudojant naujus mokymo metodus, kurie skatina autonomiškumą ir norą patiems vertinti bei kontroliuoti savo studijų eigą.

Atliktas tyrimas leidžia teigti, kad studentų mokymosi pažanga turėtų būti fiksuojama ir registruojama ir vienas iš efektyviausių būdų, skatinančių studentų atsakomybės jausmą, yra mokymosi žurnalai. Respondentų atsakymai rodo, kad naujų metodų, pavyzdžiui, projekto metodas, bylų / atvejų analizė, naudojimas svetimosios kalbos studijoms skatina dėstytojo ir studento dialogą ir suteikia studentams visavertes akademines studijas aukštojoje mokykloje.

Įteikta 2005 07 03
Priimta 2006 05 15