

Informal English Learning Experiences of Advanced L2 Students: A Case Study of Two Winners in the National “FLTRP CUP” English Writing Contest

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Abstract

First introduced and popularized by Knowles in 1950, informal language learning is seen as the most extensive and important part of all types of learning that we do every day of our lives, which is unstructured, unpurposeful, and thus different from formal language learning that is school-based, structured, and purposeful (Bahrani & Sim, 2012). Because it is not typically classroom-based or highly-structured, control of learning rests primarily in the hands of learners rather than instructors (Marsick & Watkin, 2001). As it is not guided by rigid curriculum, informal learning is often thought of as experiential and spontaneous (Eaton, 2010). It is learning at the individual level, where learners consciously or unconsciously acquire knowledge and skills. Based on the informal learning theory focusing on the setting and learner's control of learning, this study looks at two “FLTRP CUP” English Writing Contest winners' reflections on their informal learning experience, especially regarding the leading factors that improved their English writing skills and abilities, and their outstanding performances in this prestigious national contest. A theme-based analysis for the qualitative data reveals that both two winners made the best of a variety of sources in order to expand their authentic English language input. Above all, they had strong self-directed motivation, and had integrated interdisciplinary knowledge and skills into their writing practices. Besides, they both reported being devoted to improving their writing proficiency via mass media technologies in informal settings.

Key words: informal learning, self-directed EFL writing, reflection, motivation, exposure to technology