

Learning Vocabulary with SkELL: Developing a Methodology with University Students in Japan Using Action Research

Authors : Henry R. Troy

Abstract : Corpora are becoming more prevalent in the language classroom, especially in the development of dictionaries and course materials. Nevertheless, corpora are still perceived by many educators as difficult to use directly in the classroom, a process which is also known as “data-driven learning” (DDL). Action research has been identified as a method by which DDL’s efficiency can be increased, but it is also an approach few studies on DDL have employed. Studies into the effectiveness of DDL in language education in Japan are also rare, and investigations focused more on student and teacher reactions rather than pre and post-test scores are rarer still. This study investigates the student and teacher reactions to the use of SkELL, a free online corpus designed to be user-friendly, for vocabulary learning at a university in Japan. Action research is utilized to refine the teaching methodology, with changes to the method based on student and teacher feedback received via surveys submitted after each of the four implementations of DDL. After some training, the students used tablets to study the target vocabulary autonomously in pairs and groups, with the teacher acting as facilitator. The results show that the students enjoyed using SkELL and felt it was effective for vocabulary learning, while the teaching methodology grew in efficiency throughout the course. These findings suggest that action research can be a successful method for increasing the efficacy of DDL in the language classroom, especially with teachers and students who are new to the practice.

Keywords : action research, corpus linguistics, data-driven learning, vocabulary learning

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