Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between learner autonomy and Chinese university students’ English proficiency. Participants consisted of 189 second-year non-English majors at Xiamen University, Xiamen, China. The Learner Autonomy Profile (LAP), which constitutes desire, resourcefulness, initiative, and persistence in learning, was used as the measure of learner autonomy. The score of the College English Test at level four (CET-4) taken in June 2005 was used as the measure of the students’ English proficiency. A mixed-method sequential explanatory design was utilized in this study. In the first phase, multiple regression and correlation analysis (MRC) was used to determine the degree of the association between the four factors of learner autonomy and the students’ English proficiency. Three dummy variables were created to understand the role of the moderating variables of the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency. The results revealed that a combination of two variables, resourcefulness and gender, accounted for 12.5% of the variability in the CET-4 score. In the second phase, a qualitative semistructured phone interview was conducted to further explore the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency. Nine students, with three representing advanced, intermediate, and lower English proficiency, respectively, were interviewed on the phone. The qualitative data further confirmed the role of resourcefulness in successful English learning and identified the importance of other two factors, persistence and initiative, in English learning at a college level. In addition, the qualitative data suggested a need for further studying Chinese students’ motivation in relation to learner autonomy and English proficiency. Based upon the quantitative and qualitative data results, a different MRC design with the LAP total score, motivation, and
gender as independent variables, and the CET as the dependent variable, was recommended.