

Improving Speaking Communication Skills in English through Self-Directed Strategy

Cejay Lou Alaon¹, Jesly Delos Santos², Ariel E. San Jose^{3*}

^{1,2}Bachelor in Secondary Education in English, Southern Philippines Agribusiness and Marine and Aquatic School of Technology - Digos, Davao del Sur, Philippines

³Institute of Human Service, Southern Philippines Agribusiness and Marine and Aquatic School of Technology - Malita, Davao Occidental, Philippines

*Corresponding Author: arielsanjose74@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the importance of Self-Directed Learning technique in improving the communication skills in English of students. Sixteen sophomore BS Education majors in English were chosen on purpose. Focus groups were conducted to obtain the necessary information. The analysis of information yielded five themes: increasing language competency, encouraging independent learning, learning through the internet, and becoming more reading focused. Each theme were discussed. It was concluded that regardless of the good implications that Self-Directed Learning brings to learners, the truth remains that students who use Self-Directed Learning requires the guidance and monitoring of teachers in order for students to completely appreciate the significant effects and benefits of the technique. Giving students complete control over their learning can lead to inaccuracy and danger. The results implicate the current situation of COVID 19 where academic institutions are adapting the blended and flexible modalities.

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INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is well-equipped with highly qualified and competitive teachers in a variety of subjects. These teachers have the ability to shape each Filipino student's mind-set as well as realize their maximum potential. Students, on the other hand, take measures to develop their skills, such as fluency in speaking English, through self-instruction, knowing that those with fluency in English are in high demand. Despite students' efforts to improve their fluency, Catoto and San Jose (2016) noted that those students have trouble expressing themselves verbally because they lack the capacity to utilize English effectively in social interactions. Tuan and Mai (2015) blamed students' poor English speaking abilities on inhibitions, a lack of topic understanding, minimal involvement, and the use of mother tongue. Similarly, Leong and Ahmadi (2017) stated that incapacity to converse in English is caused by anxiousness.

Through autonomous language learning, students, on the other hand, are able to monitor their progress and tie learning to specific requirements (Harris, 1997). It is argued that individuals learn better when they have control over the flow of their experiences (Gureckis & Markant, 2012). According to Minott (2010), the objective of self-study is to compensate for the lack of attention provided by teachers. San Jose (2021) observed that academic institutions during the COVID 19 used the blended and flexible modalities. Teachers are bombarded with students' outputs, hence, they could no longer give feedback to the students.

The researchers observed that students taking BS Education major in English at the Southern Philippines Agribusiness and Marine and Aquatic School of Technology (SPAMAST) tend to have a serious difficulty with their speaking skills, which primarily affects their communication. With this discovery, the researchers assumed that there was a need to respond to the issue. These students majoring in English were expected to have adequate speaking skills. Also, the researchers did not discount the impact of learning anxiety on the students' speaking abilities. According to Na (2007), one of the most important affective elements that influence second language learning is learning anxiety. Likewise, Barabas (2013) found that majority of Filipino students experienced learning anxiety during speaking drills and exercises. Moreover, Lucena and San Jose (2016) mentioned that learning anxiety caused blockage and general discomfort in students, particularly while speaking.

Given the findings presented above, the researchers were convinced that students need to create Self-Directed Technique to deal with their anxiety over English language speaking skills. As a result, having high English speaking skills may be strengthened more effectively if students would use Self-Directed strategy.

Research Questions

This study explored the relevance of Self-Directed Learning in improving the speaking communication skills in English speaking among the English major students. Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. How self-directed learning enhanced the English speaking skills of the students?
2. What are self-directed learning strategies used by the students?
3. What essential experiences the students can share to other learners in self-directed learning?

Theoretical Lens

To provide a solid framework for this research, the researchers looked for hypotheses that supported the study's goal. Garrison (1997) proposed a complete theoretical model that combined self-management (contextual control), self-monitoring (cognitive responsibility), and motivational factors (entering task). It undoubtedly reflects a worthwhile and relevant approach to self-directed learning. Kanfer and Gaelick-Buys (1991) described self-management as a regulatory theoretical framework that includes functional analysis and the selection of target behaviors. According to Snyder (1979), self-management is the belief that individuals can and should exert control over their conduct. Likewise, Howe (1987) found that self-management has practical effects on the kind of cognitive operations that underpin human learning in order to achieve learning goals. Furthermore, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) developed the Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO) paradigm, which acknowledged both contrasts and similarities between self-directed learning as an instructional approach and learner self-direction as a set of personality traits. Individuals' ownership of their own thoughts and behaviors, as well as their desire to take charge in making any prospective choices regarding the directions they wished to pursue, constituted self-directed learning.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will help students who lack self-instruction and rely on their teachers to improve their English speaking skills. This research will teach them important principles regarding self-directed learning as a technique. Also, the findings will raise awareness among English teachers on the need of promoting self-directed strategies to improve students' English speaking abilities. It will also encourage English teachers to use student-centered techniques while teaching English speaking skills. Furthermore, the study's findings will serve as a reference for future research on English speaking skills, as well as basis for conducting quantitative investigations on the internal and external elements that influence learners' English speaking skills.

METHODS

Research Design

The qualitative-phenomenological method was employed by the researchers due to the nature of the investigation. Because this study dealt with the students' individual experiences on their self-directed learning to improve their English speaking skills, the qualitative method was most suited.

The phenomenological method was also applicable because the students had firsthand experience with the self-directed strategy. According to San Jose (2012), the qualitative method is typically employed when the goal of the research is to investigate and find personal insights. According to Rosenthal (2016) and Holtrop et al., (2018), qualitative methods are utilized to highlight the whys and hows of such events. Furthermore, Pereira (2012) asserted that phenomenology is employed to illuminate a person's basic experiences.

Research Participants

The participants in this study were 16 carefully selected sophomore students pursuing a Bachelor of Secondary Education with a major in English. These students were first recognized as engaging in self-directed learning and were found to be fluent in English. These students were chosen because they were a good fit for the study and were thought to be the best source of information. According to Creswell (2013) and Lichtman (2012), purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select the most effective informant accessible for the study and assess whether the participants are suitable.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researchers employed focus groups to get important information from the participants. The participants were divided into four groups of four people each. The researchers had developed trust among the participants prior to the formal conduct of the focus groups by discussing the study's objectives. The participants were given plenty of time to decide to participate. The researchers also followed research ethical norms, such as handing them the consent form, requesting them to use pseudonyms, stressing that the information acquired will only be used for research reasons, can withdraw anytime, and encouraging them to express their concerns.

After the gathering of information from the participants, the researchers transcribed the recorded interviews. Transcribed information were given back to the participants for self-verification. After which the information were given to the data analyst for thematic analysis.

Trustworthiness

The Lincoln and Guba (2003) trust and credit model was used to conduct this research. Credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability are all part of the model. The researchers' extensive involvement with the participants addressed credibility in this study. All of the participants in the study were familiar to the participants because they were classmates, thus there was no animosity. Furthermore, three experts validated the interview guide questions, which were based on the study's goal.

Confirmability was addressed through an audit trail, which was undertaken by an disinterested teacher to investigate the appropriateness of the method in obtaining material and thematic analysis. This was also done to verify that the outcomes of the information gathered were not biased.

The dependability requirement was addressed by giving only relevant information for this study. The researchers ensured that each portion of this study had adequate information; hence, this work passed through the panel defense in order to get this. The panel members evaluated the paper and made suggestions for improvement. Aniculaesei et al., (2018) noted that monitoring and correctness are required for dependability.

Although Lyle (2018) stated that the study's transferability may not be immediate, this study addressed this condition by investigating who will benefit from the study's findings. Individuals who can use the findings were mentioned in the study's significance. As a result, the immediate beneficiaries of this study are English teachers, who can use the findings to promote independent and self-directed learning in order to increase verbal proficiency in English. According to Daniel (2018), the study's transferability looked into the applicability of the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presented in this section were findings of the study based on the gathered information from the Focus Group Discussions (FGD). In the presentation of information, the frequency of responses was considered General if a theme obtained 50% and above; Typical if a theme acquired 21% and above but not more than 49%; while Variant if a theme earned less than 20% and below.

Table 1. Themes and Core Ideas on Self-Directed Learning

Themes	Frequency of Response	Core Ideas
Reinforcing independent learning	General	innovating strategies in improving speaking skills settling initiative work
Fostering language proficiency	Variant General	providing advance learning learning different pronunciation exploring new vocabularies uttering words properly
Learning through the internet	Variant General	enhancing confidence to speak watching YouTube tutorial watching English movies with subtitles surfing in the internet or any social media platforms
Becoming reading oriented	General	reading books looking for dictionaries reading article newspapers and novels

Four essential themes were formulated for the self-directing learning to developing English speaking skills. These themes were reinforcing independent learning, fostering language proficiency, learning through the internet, and becoming reading oriented. Each of this theme was discussed below

Reinforcing independent learning

Generally, all participants agreed that self-directed learning innovate meaningful strategies that influenced their speaking ability. Most of them established initiative in the making of their own strategies particularly in enhancing their speaking skills. Variantly, few of the participants found self-directed learning strategy as a stepping-stone in establishing a well-founded ground of communication that served as an advance learning since they were enrolled in an English language major course.

Correspondingly, they recognized several factors which associated their speaking skills such as difficulty in pronunciation, criticism, lack of self-esteem, course-based factors, and peer-teacher pressure. The researchers found in this study that without genuinely depending on the talk and chalk method or conventional teaching, self-directed learning emerged as a constructive-based strategy in the development of English language proficiency of students, especially in speaking skills. They also used a variety of techniques to compensate for the obvious factors that hinder their ability to communicate. As a result, students are encouraged to use the SDL approach.

The integration of self-management, motivational, and self-monitoring are the key concepts presented by Garrison (1997) hereby for an effective autonomous learning wherein contextual control and cognitive responsibility were recognized on the participants wherein the willingness to take control on their learning needs which associates through independent learning. Boost with motivational factors that influenced the participants to undergo self-directed learning. Furthermore, Cotterall (2000) mentioned that reinforcing autonomous learning is an important and appropriate objective because it plays an integral part in educational goals. Thus, in tertiary education students facilitate their own learning with or without the help of their instructors (Giddings, 2015). Moreover, SDL focuses on the responsibility of the learners to meet their own learning needs (Knowles, 1975). These learning needs appertain to the English language proficiency of the participants especially their speaking skills. In addition, learner must identify first these learning needs in order to set learning goals, prepare learning plans, and evaluates the results and overall process (Guglielmino, 2013).

Fostering language proficiency

Generally, the participants were satisfied on undergoing self-directed learning because they can speak and communicate without hesitations and doubts. Through self-directed approach they learn pronunciation clinically and explore new vocabularies. SDL taught them to be eloquent. Variantly, few of the participants mentioned that SDL learning enhanced their confidence to speak in public. These findings showed that SDL advanced students' speaking skills.

Wang (2012) viewed that self-directed learning seems to have signposted an effective and economic way for English Second Language (ESL) learners to improve linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence beyond the language classroom. It also transcends literary barrier and it allows free flow of beneficial transmission of ideas which aimed at improving the language of the learners. According to Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) pronunciation has a positive effect on learning a second language and learners can gain the skills they need for effective communication using English. This means that if the learner gains proficiency in pronunciation of a certain language particularly English, the learners can be able to speak and communicate as they've mastered already the language. Moreover, Mishra (2012) suggested that students of different streams speaking English should pronounce the words correctly in a manner that can be understood by the listener so that there is least confusion in the listeners mind. SDL definitely enhances students' pronunciation.

Learning through the internet

Generally, the participants utilized the internet as one a tool to improve their speaking skills. They usually watched YouTube tutorials, English movies with subtitles, browsing the internet or search from any social media platforms which possessed information about correct English pronunciation. Internet sources served as the participants' reference in gathering relevant information where they can have the best and meaningful learning experience. The participants pointed out that the internet helped them enhance their speaking skills because not all learning were catered by their teachers. Integrating internet-based learning in self-directed learning, the participants found it conducive as they can learn anywhere on their own comfort.

Students do not rely solely in classroom instruction instead they make used of the internet accessibility to progressively achieve their educational goals especially in improving speaking skills in English. The research presented by Song and Hill (2007) signifies that online learning processes and frequently situates control of implementation with the learner. Moreover, Patterson (1999) explained that the internet provides an excellent framework for learning, communication, and information exchange. This means that students recoup information from the virtual world and used it to foster their learning in a direct manner as it is openly attainable that provides motivation for quality and creative work. Online learning context provides

learners with the benefits associated with flexibility. Shapely (1999) agreed to the idea that online learning is beneficial to self-regulated learners. Thus, learning is easily expanded that encourages self-directed learners to continue to foster their own learning as they can maximize their time practically.

Reading oriented

Generally, participants were happy to respond that reading materials such as English books, novels, dictionaries, articles, comics and newspapers had significantly improved their speaking skills. They also considered constant reading an important factor in improving their English pronunciation and strengthened their vocabulary. Furthermore, the participants also mentioned that reading out loud helped them monitor if they were articulating the words properly. This finding implies that reading is essential in the development of articulatory skills and vocabulary improvement.

Understanding the meaning of printed words and texts is the fundamental function of literacy, which enabling people to engage in communication effectively (Hamilton & Paris, 2014). This means that reading printed words involve comprehension. One must read not just for the sake of reading but also to understand what is being read (Martin, 1993). This acquired understanding will be utilized in different aspects of communication particularly in speaking skills. Irwin (2021) mentioned that an improved reading comprehension helps to expand vocabularies and able to gain greater control over complex syntactic structure. This was supported by Mart (2012) who opined that developing large reading vocabularies tend to improve large speaking vocabularies. In other words, encouraging the improvement of word knowledge through wide reading has the potential to enhance speech skills. Correspondingly, vocalizing words while reading helped the learner to monitor their attention, concentration, and effectiveness, however, frequent backtracking slows down the learner considerably (Martin, 1993).

Variety of Significant Experiences

The participants had diverse answers in terms of their experiences. Some of them shared that it was important to practice autonomous learning or independent learning for it promotes development in their target behaviors and learning needs. Few of the participants were happy to answer that their vocabularies and accuracy in pronunciation were strengthened through watching audio-visual preferences. Also, some of the participants stated that the learning they gained through SDL strategy were applied in competitions, as well as in speaking in front of the crowd. This pertains to the capacity of the participants to use English language confidently without inhibitions. They were also happy to share that SDL strategy was effective, fun, and convenient way of learning in a sense that it influenced their English language proficiency particularly their speaking skills.

CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study concludes that Self-Directed Learning (SDL) is useful and advantageous to any learner who want to improve their English speaking skills. It not only improves pupils' speaking skills, but also their confidence and independence. Furthermore, this method is particularly pertinent now, given that the English language has become a valuable commodity all around the world. Self-directed learning fills a vacuum in the classroom setting if teachers are unable to meet all of the students' demands. Self-directed learning can help students improve their speaking skills, particularly their pronunciation and vocabulary. Similarly, self-directed learning can be enhanced by using internet platforms and reading materials. Despite the good implications that self-directed learning brings to learners, the truth remains that students who use self-directed learning require the guidance and monitoring of teachers in order for them to completely appreciate the significant effects and benefits of the technique. Giving students complete control over their learning can lead to inaccuracy and danger.

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