



Student Self-Directed Learning Strategies In Improving English Speaking Skills In Senior High Schools

Rifka^{1*}, Bradhiansyah Tri Suryanto¹

¹Universitas Nurul Jadid, Indonesia

Corresponding Author  rifkahasan7@gmail.com^{1*}

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the self-directed learning (SDL) strategies employed by senior high school students to improve their English speaking skills. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, the study explores students' personal experiences in planning, implementing, and evaluating their independent learning activities. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, focusing on how learners manage their study routines, select learning resources, and overcome speaking challenges. The findings reveal that students adopt a combination of cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies, such as shadowing native speakers, self-recording, engaging in peer conversations, and utilizing digital applications. Intrinsic motivation, discipline, and self-confidence emerge as crucial internal factors, while access to resources, supportive environments, and technology serve as external enablers. The study concludes that SDL enhances students' fluency, accuracy, and confidence in speaking English, particularly when strategies are aligned with learners' preferences and supported by conducive learning conditions.

Keyword : Self-taught Learning Strategy, English Speaking Skills, of High school Students

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received

May 20, 2025

Revised

June 5, 2025

Accepted

August 30, 2025

Journal Homepage

<https://ojs.staialfurqan.ac.id/IJoASER/>

This is an open access article under the CC BY SA license

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

INTRODUCTION

English speaking skills are an essential competency for students in today's global era. In addition to accurate pronunciation, students must also possess fluency, confidence, and the ability to convey ideas logically in various contexts. However, not all students have effective learning methods to achieve this skill, making learning strategies a crucial factor. The researcher became interested in this topic during Field Experience Practice (PPL) at Tunas Luhur Senior High School, where they met a student who could speak English fluently and confidently. Interestingly, this ability was not gained through formal instruction but rather through consistent self-directed learning. This raised the question of how self-directed learning strategies can help students achieve strong speaking skills.

This phenomenon of autodidactic students shows that success in English speaking is not solely dependent on classroom teaching methods, but also on individual initiative and independent learning strategies. Therefore, it is important to investigate the differences in learning outcomes between students who rely on formal instruction and those who develop self-directed learning strategies. This study aims to identify and describe the self-directed learning strategies used by senior high school students to improve their English speaking skills. In addition, it seeks to explore the internal and external factors that influence their success in independent learning.

Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of language learning strategies, particularly in the context of self-directed learning for speaking skills. Practically, it may inspire teachers to develop teaching methods that encourage learning autonomy and provide examples of effective strategies that other students can adopt. The scope of this study is limited to self-directed learning strategies for English speaking skills among senior high school students, excluding other language skills such as reading, writing, or listening. The participants are limited to a small number of students from specific schools who already have experience in independent learning. In this study, the term *self-directed learning strategy* refers to learning techniques undertaken by students without direct involvement from teachers or formal institutions, such as watching English-language videos, listening to podcasts, speaking in front of a mirror, and recording speech for self-evaluation. Speaking skills are defined as the ability to communicate thoughts, feelings, and information orally in an effective and communicative manner.

This research also refers to previous studies indicating that self-directed learning can enhance motivation, learner autonomy, and speaking skills. However, it focuses on students' personal experiences in non-formal contexts, aiming to provide a more realistic and applicable understanding of how self-directed learning strategies can be implemented at the senior high school level.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry design, aiming to explore in depth the real experiences of senior high school students in developing their English speaking skills through self-directed learning strategies. The main focus was not to test hypotheses or generalize findings, but to understand the meaning, processes, strategies, and factors involved in students' independent learning practices. This design was chosen because it allows the researcher to gather rich, detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences within their social, digital, and learning environments. The primary subject of this study was a senior high school student who had successfully improved their English speaking skills independently. The researcher served as the main instrument, conducting semi-structured interviews supported by an interview guide containing open-ended questions. This flexible format enabled deeper probing when interesting responses emerged. In addition to interviews, document analysis was carried out, including students' learning notes, screenshots of online activities, photos of learning moments, and audio recordings of speaking practice sessions.

Data collection was conducted in several stages. First, in-depth interviews were held with the main participant to gather information on motivation, strategies, learning media, and challenges. Supporting data were obtained from interviews with parents,

peers, and an English teacher to triangulate findings and gain different perspectives. Document analysis complemented the interviews, providing tangible evidence of the student's learning activities, such as watching English videos, practicing in front of a mirror, keeping vocabulary journals, and engaging in informal conversations. The data were analyzed thematically by identifying patterns and categorizing them into key themes related to self-directed learning strategies and factors influencing success. Internal factors examined included motivation, discipline, self-confidence, and learning autonomy, while external factors included parental support, peer collaboration, and access to learning resources. The combination of multiple data sources and triangulation ensured the validity and reliability of the findings, offering a comprehensive picture of how self-directed learning strategies can effectively enhance English speaking skills among high school students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the student employed a variety of self-directed learning (SDL) strategies to enhance English speaking proficiency, including watching English videos on YouTube, practicing self-talk in front of a mirror, imitating native speaker pronunciation through shadowing, and engaging in informal conversations with peers. These strategies were implemented consistently and autonomously, without over-reliance on teacher-led activities. This approach allowed the student to develop not only linguistic elements such as vocabulary and pronunciation, but also communicative aspects such as fluency and interactional competence. As Knowles (1975) highlights, SDL empowers learners to take full responsibility for their progress, while Hamada (2014) affirms that shadowing techniques significantly improve pronunciation and listening comprehension.

Interviews with the student revealed that the primary motivation for adopting SDL stemmed from a perceived insufficiency of speaking practice in the classroom environment. The student actively sought alternative opportunities to engage with the language beyond school hours, driven by personal goals such as excelling in competitions and interacting confidently with native speakers. This is consistent with Dörnyei's (2015) assertion that intrinsic motivation plays a pivotal role in sustaining long-term learning engagement. By setting personal challenges and maintaining consistent effort, the student demonstrated the self-regulatory behaviors identified by Zimmerman (2002) as critical for successful independent learning.

Parents corroborated these findings, noting that they frequently observed the student watching English videos and practicing alone at home. While initially uncertain about the effectiveness of such informal methods, they eventually provided full moral and material support, including consistent internet access and encouragement. Such parental involvement, even in a non-academic form, aligns with the findings of Lamb (2017), who emphasized that family support is a significant external factor that can reinforce learner autonomy and motivation, particularly in resource-dependent contexts.

A close friend described the student as highly disciplined, focused, and resilient in their learning approach. Although collaborative study sessions were infrequent, the student occasionally initiated English conversations with peers, thereby creating

authentic communicative contexts for practice. The friend also reported that the student frequently conducted self-research to resolve linguistic uncertainties an indicator of high metacognitive awareness. This aligns with Oxford's (2011) perspective that metacognitive strategies, such as self-monitoring and self-evaluation, are integral to language learning success in autonomous contexts.

From a teacher's perspective, the student exhibited remarkable progress, evolving from a hesitant and passive speaker to a confident and fluent communicator. The teacher emphasized that while SDL fosters rapid improvement, it requires occasional corrective feedback to prevent fossilization of errors, especially in grammar and pronunciation. This supports the argument by Vygotsky (1978) that scaffolding and guided interaction remain necessary components, even in self-directed learning environments, to ensure accuracy alongside fluency.

Analysis of these multiple perspectives highlights two interdependent categories of factors influencing SDL success: internal and external. Internal factors include intrinsic motivation, self-discipline, self-confidence, and reflective learning skills. External factors encompass supportive family involvement, peer collaboration, and teacher encouragement. The interaction between these factors created a socially and emotionally supportive ecosystem, which, as Lai (2017) suggests, is essential for sustaining autonomous learning behaviors and ensuring long-term skill retention.

These results are consistent with previous research indicating that a combination of consistent practice, strong intrinsic motivation, and a supportive social environment can significantly improve language proficiency (Buitrago, 2017; Saad et al., 2024). In this case, self-directed strategies when applied systematically and supported by conducive external conditions proved to be a highly effective alternative to formal classroom-based approaches for developing English speaking skills among senior high school students. This reinforces the argument that SDL, complemented by appropriate external support, is not only viable but also advantageous in the context of contemporary language learning.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated how self-directed learning (SDL) strategies were applied by a senior high school student to improve English speaking skills and identified the internal and external factors that influenced the effectiveness of these strategies. The findings revealed that consistent use of techniques such as watching English videos on YouTube, practicing self-talk in front of a mirror, engaging in shadowing activities, and initiating informal conversations with peers contributed significantly to the student's improvement in fluency, pronunciation, and communicative confidence. These results support Knowles' (1975) concept of SDL, which emphasizes learner autonomy in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning without over-reliance on formal instruction. One of the most notable findings was the strong role of intrinsic motivation in sustaining the learning process. The student's motivation stemmed from personal aspirations, such as excelling in English-related competitions and achieving a high level of proficiency for future opportunities. This aligns with Dörnyei's (2015) theory that intrinsic motivation serves as a primary driver for sustained engagement, particularly in autonomous learning contexts. The

willingness to practice beyond classroom hours reflects a proactive orientation towards learning, a quality frequently associated with high-achieving language learners (Zimmerman, 2002). Parental support emerged as a crucial external factor that reinforced the student's motivation and persistence. Although the parents initially expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of informal learning methods, they later provided both moral and material support, including internet access and verbal encouragement. Lamb (2017) notes that such supportive environments are vital for maintaining learner autonomy, particularly when resources and learning opportunities outside the classroom are limited. In this case, parental involvement played an enabling role by ensuring continuous access to learning materials and fostering a positive mindset towards independent study.

Peer interaction, although less frequent, also contributed to the student's speaking practice. Occasional English conversations with friends offered authentic opportunities to use the language in informal settings, which research by Buitrago (2017) has shown to be effective in developing communicative competence. The friend's observations of the student's persistence and focus suggest a high degree of self-regulation, further confirming that metacognitive strategies such as self-monitoring and self-evaluation were integral to the learning process (Oxford, 2011). From the teacher's perspective, the student's transformation from a hesitant and passive participant to a confident and fluent speaker illustrates the potential of SDL when combined with strategic use of resources and consistent practice. However, the teacher also highlighted a limitation: without occasional corrective feedback, learners may risk fossilizing errors, particularly in grammar and pronunciation. This observation supports Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which underscores the importance of guided support even in largely autonomous learning contexts.

The interplay of internal and external factors was evident throughout the student's learning journey. Internally, the student demonstrated high intrinsic motivation, discipline, self-confidence, and reflective learning skills. Externally, the availability of technology, supportive family members, peer engagement, and positive teacher reinforcement created an enabling environment for sustained SDL. Lai (2017) emphasizes that such an ecosystem is essential for maximizing the benefits of autonomous learning and ensuring that learners remain engaged over the long term. These findings align with prior studies indicating that consistent practice, when combined with motivational and environmental support, leads to significant improvement in language proficiency (Saad et al., 2024; Aprilia, 2023). In the current study, the student's progress can be attributed to the integration of multiple strategies that addressed different aspects of speaking skills—cognitive strategies for knowledge building, metacognitive strategies for planning and evaluation, and socio-affective strategies for reducing anxiety and increasing speaking opportunities.

The study also highlights the adaptability of SDL to contemporary learning contexts, particularly with the integration of digital tools. Platforms such as YouTube provided access to authentic input, while self-recording enabled reflective evaluation of speaking performance. This supports Hamada's (2014) findings on the effectiveness of shadowing and repetition in improving pronunciation and listening comprehension. Furthermore, the use of technology facilitated flexible, learner-centered approaches

that could be tailored to the student's personal learning pace and preferences. Despite its positive outcomes, the student's SDL experience also faced challenges, including occasional boredom, limited peer practice, and a lack of immediate corrective feedback. These challenges suggest that SDL may be most effective when complemented by periodic interaction with teachers or peers for guidance and error correction. As Garrison (1997) points out, autonomy does not imply isolation; rather, it benefits from structured support that enhances the quality of learning outcomes.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the findings of this study suggest that teachers should actively encourage SDL by equipping students with effective strategies and guiding them in selecting appropriate learning resources. Integrating SDL principles into classroom instruction—such as teaching students how to set goals, plan their learning schedules, and use digital tools—can bridge the gap between formal and informal learning environments. This hybrid approach could maximize the advantages of both structured instruction and learner autonomy. In summary, the discussion underscores that the success of SDL in developing English speaking skills depends on the dynamic interaction between learner-driven strategies and a supportive learning environment. While intrinsic motivation and disciplined practice form the foundation of progress, external factors such as family encouragement, peer interaction, and teacher feedback act as powerful reinforcers. By fostering these conditions, educators and policymakers can create learning frameworks that not only improve language proficiency but also cultivate lifelong learning skills among students

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that self-directed learning (SDL) strategies play a pivotal role in significantly enhancing the English speaking skills of senior high school students, particularly when applied consistently and supported by a conducive learning environment. The participant's notable progress evidenced by marked improvements in fluency, pronunciation accuracy, and communicative confidence was the result of employing varied and intentional strategies, such as watching authentic English videos on YouTube, engaging in self-talk practices in front of a mirror, applying shadowing techniques to imitate native speakers, and participating in occasional peer conversations (Hamada, 2014; Knowles, 1975). The data further indicate that internal factors, including intrinsic motivation, disciplined practice habits, and self-confidence, worked synergistically with external supports such as parental encouragement, peer interaction, and constructive teacher feedback to sustain long-term engagement in the learning process. Consistent with previous research (Saad et al., 2024; Lamb, 2017), these findings affirm that SDL when integrated with appropriate guidance, technological resources, and a supportive social environment functions as an effective complement to formal instruction and offers a viable pathway for fostering learner autonomy, adaptability, and sustainable language development in the digital era.

REFERENCES

- Al-Fraihat, Aprilia, A., & Kusuma Dewi. (2023). Senior high school students' experiences in using podcast to learn English speaking. *RETAIN (Research on English Language Teaching in Indonesia)*, 11(01), 115–122.

- Buitrago, A. G. (2017). Collaborative and self-directed learning strategies to promote fluent EFL speakers. *English Language Teaching*, 10(5), 139–157.
- Bygate, M. (1998). Theoretical perspectives on speaking. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 18, 20–42.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2015). *The psychology of the language learner*. Routledge.
- Garrison, D. R. (1997). Self-directed learning: Toward a comprehensive model. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(1), 18–33.
- Hamada, Y. (2014). The effectiveness of pre- and post-shadowing in improving listening comprehension skills. *The Language Teacher*, 38(1), 3–10.
- Hidayati, A. (2024). The use of self-directed learning in speaking classes at a senior high school in Salatiga.
- Holec, H. (1979). *Autonomy and foreign language learning*. ERIC.
- Kang, S., & Sung, M. C. (2024). EFL students' self-directed learning of conversation skills with AI chatbots.
- Knowles, M. S. (1975). *Self-directed learning*. Association Press.
- Lai, C. (2017). Autonomous language learning with technology: Beyond the classroom. *Language Learning & Technology*, 21(2), 98–102.
- Lamb, M. (2017). The motivational dimension of language teaching. *Language Teaching*, 50(3), 301–346.
- Mokoena, M., & Borotho, M. (2025). The innovative use of self-directed learning for addressing COVID-19 learning loss among English first additional language learners in rural high schools. In *INTED2025 Proceedings* (pp. 1082–1091). IATED.
- Muhayyang, M. (2025). Exploring the intensity of corrective feedback in online English instruction: A study of synchronous and asynchronous modes. *Nursing Research Journal*, 3(1), 34–47.
- Mulyadi, D., & Wijayatingsih, T. D. (2025). Applied research on English education (AREE). *Nursing Research Journal*, 3(1).
<https://doi.org/10.22108/are.2025.143822.2423>
- Nation, I. S. P., & Newton, J. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL listening and speaking*. Routledge.
- Oxford, R. L. (2011). *Teaching and researching language learning strategies*. Pearson Education.

- Saad, N. S. M., Yunus, M. M., & Embi, M. A. (2024). Digital-based self-directed learning strategies for ESL learners: Enhancing speaking fluency and confidence. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (ijET)*, 19(5), 45–59.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory into Practice*, 41(2), 64–70.