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Autonomous Learning and Teacher Guidance: Towards the Improvement of EFL Students' Prepared Talk in Speaking Practice

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Abstract

This study was aimed to investigate the role of autonomous learning (hereafter, AL) with the teacher guidance approach in enhancing the performance and ability of students in practicing their English speaking skill. Pre-test and post-test were given to 22 first year university students to measure the improvement of their ability in the prepared talk before and after the learning strategy was implemented in the classroom. The questionnaires were also gathered to know their perception of this learning strategy. The questionnaires were in the form of closed-ended questions. Results of the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using Tableau software, meanwhile, the data from the questionnaire were calculated for frequency and percentage. From the results, the average score the students' post-test was higher than the average score they got in the pre-test, 83 and 62.2, respectively. The improvement was obvious; here, 16 students got the scores of 80-95 in their post-test, while others got a minimum of 75 and 60. The students' perception obtained from the questionnaires, in overall, received positive responses on the use of this learning strategy. It can be concluded that AL with the teacher guidance approach played a prominent role in improving the students' performance in English prepared-talk.

Keywords: Teacher guidance, autonomous learning, prepared-talk speaking, performance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Unenjoyable and ineffective English teaching-learning will lead to an unsatisfied result and also demotivates students to be fond of learning English (Marcellino, 2008). It is often caused by the applied method, teaching style and learning activities which fail to create enjoyable learning. Not well-prepared of the lesson plan often becomes an issue in this case. It demotivates the students to enjoy learning English, so they never put a target of their achievement to be reached at the end of the learning session. Hence, this contributes to the unsatisfied result in the final test for most of the students.

It also happens in Lhokseumawe State Polytechnic, Aceh, Indonesia, where only a few students have good motivation to learn English. It is hard for them to get a good score for the English subject because the syllabus in the institution is for advanced English skills, not for basic English skills. In fact, most students still lack knowledge about the basic skills of English. Therefore, the higher education syllabus that expects them to master the advanced skill cannot be fulfilled. Consequently, the lecturer should set a time allocation to review the basic language proficiency the students have achieved.

Among the skills, speaking plays a prominent role in the language learning aspect. If students are already confident to speak out the language being learned, they will be highly motivated to integratedly learn the other language skills, i.e. reading, listening and writing. This is caused by the confidence they have gained from the speaking practice. Once they have succeeded in coping with language anxiety, they will gain more self-confidence in further learning the language (Hanifa, 2018; Park & Lee, 2004).

In the digital era, it is easier to create a classroom to become more autonomous (Condrat, 2014). That is why the researcher applied autonomous learning (hereafter, AL) in this study to enhance the students' ability in their speaking in the institution under study. A number of resources of information are available for the students, whether it is from the internet, e-magazine, and others. The AL with the approach of teacher guidance is applied in this study.

This research is expected to bring a description about an effective teaching-learning activity for speaking skill, especially for the students who have not mastered the basic concepts of English, also are not able to talk in English. Moreover, this study also brings the idea to the students and educators of English about what efforts they can do to improve students' speaking ability. Hence, this study is to examine the effect of AL on language learning achievement. The difference of this study from the previous research is the AL in this study was applied with the approach of teacher guided questions in enhancing students' prepared-talk as a part of their speaking skill. Nguyen and Gu (2013) have done research to investigate the effect of strategy-based instruction (SBI) on the promotion of AL in an academic writing class and Qamar (2016) has compared the student-centered and learner-centered learning approach in teaching speaking skills. She promoted autonomous learning by setting an experimental group. The students were free to choose their own learning activities such as conducting a group discussion and choosing their own material without any guidance from the teacher. Meanwhile, this research mainly focuses on teacher guidance and AL towards the preparation of speaking practice. The research question is as follow:

- Does autonomous learning with the approach of teacher guidance improve the performance and ability of the students' prepared-talk in speaking practice?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking skill is a productive skill that enables students to produce a language in speaking. Talking in a foreign language is so hard for most people. This problem is not only caused by the lack of grammar knowledge but also the feeling of not confident to talk, and the feeling of anxiety to make mistakes (Hanifa, 2018). That is why they should find a strategy to cope with the language anxiety.

Teaching speaking skill is more challenging than other language skills in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context (Halimah, 2018; Usman et al., 2018), such as the case with Indonesian students. So teachers should prepare the best strategy which suits well to the context they are teaching in. Harmer (2007) states that a key success of learning activities and the tasks are given in improving a productive skill is on how educators set them, and how they give feedback and responses toward students' work. Harmer (2007) also suggests that educators or teachers should ensure the instruction of the tasks given to be understood well by the students, so the teachers must observe the progress that is being done and help students who find difficulties in doing the tasks.

2.1 Prepared Talk in Gaining Second Language Proficiency

Harmer (2007) claims that when students have a good language proficiency to talk, speaking practice is not a big issue, but the different thing with the students who are reluctant to talk, this can be caused by the feeling of not confident or the lack of proficiency about English. In this issue, a big contribution from the teachers who are teaching in the class is needed. Various research has focused on applying prepared-talk to fulfill the students' need in speaking practice. Among them is the research by Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004), where they found that students in Japan tend to choose preparation strategy among five strategies offered in coping with the language anxiety in English speaking. Mennim (2003) also found the success of speaking practice in his research. In his research, it was described that the students firstly recorded their practice presentation. Then it was transcribed and further corrected by the students on their own mistakes. This task was then given to the teacher so that that the teacher can provide feedback to the students before they present their speaking in the classroom presentation.

Teachers play a prominent role in setting teaching-learning activities which suit well to the context they are teaching in. Student-centered combined with teacher-centered is a good strategy, which enables to create a successful learning activity. Most of the students chose this teaching style to increase their motivation in learning a language (Sheikh & Mahmood, 2014). Inspirational learning and teachers give positive effects towards the teaching-learning activity because the learning activity becomes more enjoyable, motivates the students to learn more, and enables them to absorb more knowledge (Lamb & Wedell, 2013). The resource of inspiration could also be from technology and the approach from teachers to their students.

2.2 Autonomous Learning

Teaching-learning activities that enable students to be independent learners should be promoted in the classroom. Even though the teacher who teaches in the class may be the most competent one, it is still impossible to utterly help learners to get

enough exposure to practice the second language they are learning. Harmer (2007) claims that students need enough time to be exposed to the target language they are learning because a language is complex and varied, so the time for learning in the classroom is not enough. Jarvis (2012), who conducted a study about computer and learner autonomy, found that the majority of the students nearly every day get access to the language they are learning especially in doing the tasks and using the language in social need. However, the research was conducted toward the perspectives of immigrant students in the U.K. where the environment is native-speaker of English.

Still not much research conducted in discussing the importance of AL in the achievement of mastering the second language, although the study in this field has been done since the 90s. In the last decade, it has been redeveloped. For instance, the research done by Jarvis (2012) was about AL relation to the technology. In the international context, learner autonomy becomes a trending topic discussed, and so is in Indonesia. AL starts to be promoted in language learning because it is an important approach to be known by language teachers in achieving the goal of learning.

Nguyen and Gu (2013) point out that many studies about AL have important functions of generating insights into learner's autonomous behaviors, thus they have not provided sufficient empirical evidence for the effectiveness of any approach. Very few studies have examined the effect of AL on language learning result. Nguyen and Gu (2013) have done research about the effects of Strategy-based instruction (SBI) on the promotion of AL. An intervention was conducted with the participation of 37 students in the experimental group and 54 students in two control groups at a Vietnamese university. A metacognition training package was applied to the academic writing programme of the experimental group. The results showed positive effects, where students in the experimental group improved their ability to plan, monitor and evaluate a writing task more than the control groups.

In addition, Jiang (2016) found in her research that multimodality autonomous learning approach in teaching listening and speaking brought more benefit to the learning achievement. She has done research to four groups of the students in the non-English major class. Similarly, in her research, Cheng (2015) found the successful students in the vocational college English majors were more motivated and interested in conducting out-of-class English learning, and this is in contrast with their peers who learn merely in the class.

Furthermore, Wang (2011) investigated that using a new learning model in developing learner autonomous learning in China, has promoted students' English language much better than the traditional way of learning. Moreover, Qamar (2016) conducted a research about the impact of AL on teaching speaking skills to the students in Ardah college of Translational Studies, Jazan University, Saudi Arabia. She found that the experimental group with the learner autonomy approach has made a significant gain in accent, pronunciation, vocabulary, and accuracy in the target language. With the help of learner-centered classroom, they developed a more reflective approach towards their English language speaking skills. They become much more effective learners compared to the learners placed in the teacher-centered classroom.

Henceforth, the basic goal of language teaching is for students to take on what has been learned in the class and apply it outside of the class. So it could be understood that the basic purpose of learning a language in the class is to apply it in the environment that the learners need. This shows the importance of independent learning in learning a language.

3. METHODS

The sample of this study were 22 first-year students taking the English course at the Department of Civil Engineering, Politeknik Negeri Lhokseumawe. In the beginning, the students were tested by giving a speaking task. They were free to talk about the topic they like without any limitation from the teacher for three minutes. Then the test was marked by the teacher with the marking criteria and the total score for each of the criteria as follows:

1. Relevance to the topic (30)
2. Content (30)
3. Accuracy (the use of language systems such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary) (20)
4. Fluency (20)

One week later, the students were trained with the guided questions they have to answer in preparing for their speaking practice in class. The sample topics and the guided questions applied in the treatment and the post-test are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Topics and guided questions applied in the treatment and post-test.

<i>No</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Subtopic</i>
1	Entertainment	Describe your favorite music. - What kind of music do you like? - How often do you enjoy it? - Why do you like it? - Do many people like this genre of music?
2	Education	Describe the educative advertisement you like. What educative advertisement do you know? Do you like it? How is the shot played? What is its educative value/message?
3	Technology	The use of the computer. Do you have a computer? How often do you use it? What do you use it for? Does it influence your life? Which websites do you often visit?
4	Traveling	If money isn't a problem, what country do you want to visit? Where do you plan to spend a vacation? Whom will you go with? What do you like about it? What will you do there? Are there many tourist/visitor visiting your place of destination?

After the treatment of teaching-learning activities based on the design conducted, the students were given the post-test. The task for this test is similar to the one given during the treatment. The difference was only about the topic. The students were also given time for one week to prepare their talk. They could explore more information from many resources such as the internet, books, magazines, and other media to help them finish the task. The post-test also marked by the same criteria as used in the pre-test.

The primary data were the pre-test, the post-test and the questionnaires given after the post-test to the students. The pre-test and post-test data obtained were

tabulated and analyzed using Tableau software, while the questionnaires were tabulated in percentages.

The questionnaires data interpretation applied the method of two decimal. It was 0.00% = no; 0.01%-24.99% = fraction; 25%-49.9% = nearly half; 50% = half; 50.01%-74.99% = majority; 75%-99.9% = in general; dan 100% = wholly. The number of respondents who answered "Yes" was tabulated separately with the number of respondents who answered "No". The 16 closed-ended questions in the questionnaire were divided into three main topics. They were the role of teacher guidance, autonomous learning, and prepared talk.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results of the Tests

The results of the pre-test and the post-test are shown in Figure 1.

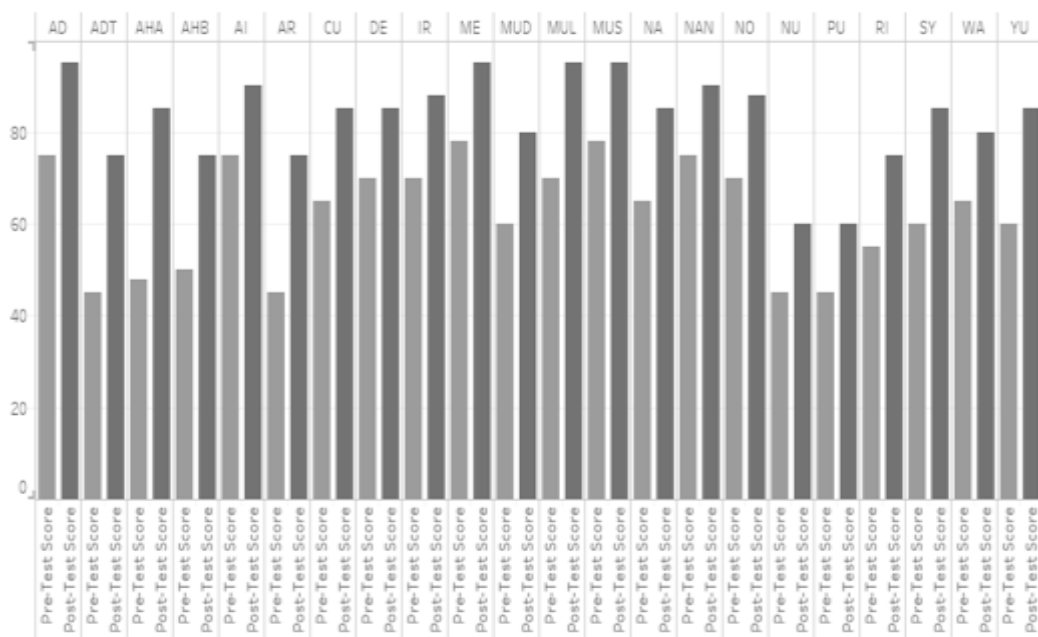


Figure 1. The results of the pre-test and the post-test (x-axis refers to students' codes, y-axis refers to the students' scores).

From Figure 1, the progress made by the students increased dramatically. A number of 16 students got the score of 80-95 in the post-test, while others got a minimum of 75 and 60. This means that the treatment of AL with the approach of teacher-guided questions really helped the students in the learning process and they could produce a good speaking. Moreover, the highest score in the pre-test was 75 and the lowest was 45. While in the post-test, it showed that the highest was 95 and the lowest was 60. It means that the score the students achieved have significantly increased.

Figure 2 shows the average score of the pre-test and the post-test.

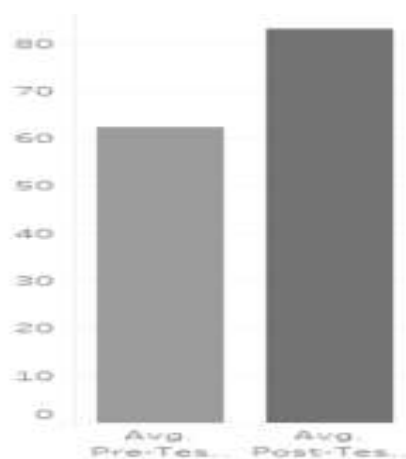


Figure 2. The average scores of the pre-test and the post-test.

Figure 2 shows that the average score of the pre-test was 62.2, and the post-test was 83. So the average score of the group also sharply increased. It also showed that the learning result of the group increased significantly after the treatment of AL with the approach of teacher guidance given to the students.

4.2 Results of the Questionnaire

Moreover, from the questionnaires data, it shows the role of teacher guidance in improving the prepared talk of the students. The data was tabulated into three parts based on the main topic of the questionnaire, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The role of teacher guidance.

Statements	N		Percentage	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1 Teacher guidance eases the preparation of speaking practice.	22	0	100	0
2 Teacher guidance ease to determine the main points that have to be involved in speaking.	15	7	68.19	31.81
3 Teacher guidance ease to not tell points that are not within the topic.	13	9	59.09	40.91
4 The topics chosen are interesting.	17	5	77.27	22.73
5 Teacher guidance ease to determine the kind of sentence to use in speaking.	20	2	90.91	9.09

Table 2 shows that in general, the students find the benefit of teacher guidance in improving the preparation of their speaking practice. It can be seen from the percentage of the responses which is shown in each of the statement provided. Almost all statement received positive responses from the students. Approximately 100% of the students found the teacher guidance to ease their preparation for speaking practice. Moreover, the responses “Yes” for statements numbers 4 and 5 received about 77.27 percent and 90.91 percent, respectively. Statements numbers 2 and 3 received “Yes” by a majority of the respondents, with 68.19 and 59.09 percent, respectively.

Meanwhile, Table 3 displays the responses from the students for the part of the role of autonomous learning. Similar trends are shown in Table 3. The number of respondents who responded “Yes” and “No” for almost every statement was the same, in which 77.27 percent responded “Yes” and 22.73 percent responded “No”. Only statement number 5 got a different number of responses, where 81.82 percent responded “Yes” and 18.18 percent responded “No”. Based on the responses, it is

interpreted that in general, the respondents found a great benefit of autonomous learning in improving the performance of prepared-talk for speaking practice.

Table 3. The role of autonomous learning.

	<i>Statements</i>	<i>N</i>		<i>Percentage</i>	
		<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
1	Autonomous learning increases the feeling of confident	17	5	77.27	22.73
2	Autonomous learning is easier to explore more information about the topic	17	5	77.27	22.73
3	Accessing the resources/media to get more information about the topic.	17	5	77.27	22.73
4	Not have enough information to be presented in speaking without a chance to find out the information from various resources.	17	5	77.27	22.73
5	Not just rewrite all the information found from all the resources/filtering the information which is related to the topic only.	18	4	81.82	18.18
6	Gaining more knowledge about English grammar from the text read from all resources.	17	5	77.27	22.73
7	Mastering more new vocabularies.	17	5	77.27	22.73

Meanwhile, Table 4 shows the role of prepared talk for speaking practice in class for the students. Responding to the role of prepared-talk in improving the performance of speaking, all respondents found the benefit of prepared-talk to be easier to talk in English. It is shown by the response of “Yes” toward statement number 3 that is 100 percent. While the responses towards other statements, in general, the respondents responded “Yes” to all the other three statements, with 90.90 percent and 95.45 percent, respectively.

Table 4. The role of prepared talk.

	<i>Statements</i>	<i>N</i>		<i>Percentage</i>	
		<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
1	Prepared-talk improves confidence	20	2	90.90	9.10
2	Prepared-talk eliminate the feeling of losing face to talk in front of the public	21	1	95.45	4.55
3	Prepared-talk ease to talk in English	22	0	100	0
4	Prepared-talk allows us to be more ready to express ideas in English	21	1	95.45	4.55

From all three parts of the main points in the questionnaire, only one statement got the response “Yes” with 59.09 percent. That is, “Teacher guidance ease to not tell points that are not within the topic”. Furthermore, since there were still students who were not used to organize the story in a well-structured manner. So the students who answered “No” to this statement is almost half of them, which is 40.91 percent.

4.3 Discussion

The result of this research can be applied in the English teaching-learning because it is able to motivate students to learn a foreign language and to lead the students to be an autonomous learner with the teacher guidance approach. This research also aims to encourage students to realize that independent learning can be

done outside of the class, and this is an important aspect to improve the language they are learning (Hyland, 2004).

In addition, prepared-talk can also train the students to be autonomous learners or independent learners, but still under the teacher's guidance. Cao (2012, p. 11) claims that "under the guidance of teachers, autonomous learning of college students is the inevitable choice for students to become the masters of learning, personal development and self-improvement". In this study, because students were given the freedom to choose the topic they wanted to talk about, they could explore more about the specific topic they liked most. In this case, the crucial point to apply AL is the students could browse the information from all various resources such as the internet, books, magazines and other media. The more they explored the information, the more confident they were to talk about the topic they had chosen when it was time for them to present their talk in front of the class. Reinders (2010, p. 41) further says that "if learners can be made more proactive, then they might be expected to learn better". And so this sort of encouragement plays a prominent role in achieving the learning goals.

Furthermore, in applying AL with the teacher's guidance, the teacher needed to ensure that the students liked to talk about the topics for the prepared-talk task. This was to motivate students to talk if the topic they were talking about was familiar to them so they enjoyed the language teaching-learning process. The design of learning activities aimed to help the students in the preparation process, so the limitation from the guided-questions prepared by the teachers allow them to not talk out of the topic. The students could also add extra information in their prepared-talk but they have to cover all the crucial points that were provided in the guided-questions.

Besides, during treatment, the teacher also observed the performance of the students' engagement in the classroom, from the preparation to the performance in front of the class. It was seen that all of the students were reluctant to talk in English in the pre-test, but after the treatment, they were able to cope with the language anxiety in the post-test. Perhaps, this is because they already felt the task was well-prepared and guided by the teacher. Therefore, this made them more confident and certain of what they had to do for the task. The literature also notes that teachers who can give good feedback and guide students during learning can achieve the best of student progress along the teaching-learning journey (Coe et al., 2014).

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the quantitative data analysis, it can be concluded that autonomous learning with the approach of teacher guidance plays a prominent role in improving students' performance and ability in prepared-talk for speaking practice. This is shown in the significant increase of the post-test score compared to the pre-test score achieved by the students. Therefore, it is suggested that English teachers to apply autonomous learning in practicing English speaking and teacher guidance is one of the best ways to ease students in learning. Students became more confident to talk and they were also very enthusiastic in the preparation process by asking the teacher for the feedback of their works. Well-preparation made them feel more ready to present their speaking practice. Furthermore, prepared talk also brings more benefit to improve their confidence, especially for students at the beginner level. By exposing themselves to enough English inside and outside of class, they will get used to talking in English.

The more time they succeed in speaking English, the higher-motivated they are in learning English.

Nevertheless, this study was conducted with some restrictions. The time to conduct the research was limited to only a few months, and it focused only on implementing AL to one class of 22 students. The skill under study was also limited to one skill, which was speaking. Therefore, for future research, it is expected that researchers can apply AL with teacher guidance to a larger group of students and to other language skills.

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