Investigating the Role of Autonomous Learning Strategies in Developing Learners' Oral Communicative Competences

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Abstract:

   This paper aims to investigate problems encounter secondary school students in using autonomous learning strategies in developing learners' oral communicative competences. The researcher has adopted the quantitative method as well as the questionnaire as a tool for collecting data relevant to the study. To bring to the light the importance of autonomous learning in process of learning a language. The sample of this study comprises of (50) teachers. The marks obtained from the questionnaire were compared. From one hand, the results have revealed that the students encountered difficulties in using autonomous learning. The result has shown that the questionnaire significance indicates that there is highly difference among students. Therefore, this indicates that high secondary school students face difficulties in autonomous learning strategies.

Key words: OC, CC, ICC and ALS.

Introduction

Autonomous learning strategies have great role in developing Oral Communication (OC). According to researcher point of

view, and his experience as a teacher of English noticed that, there are effective autonomous strategies learners can be used to develop their oral communication skills. This research tries to investigate the positive way of autonomous learning and suggest its appropriate strategies.

According to Joseph and Efron (2009: 5:6) "Oral Communicative Strategies (OCS) are important because it promote leadership and confidence. It is important for students to generate their own ideas using outside references in the communicating". English is the major language of news and information. It is language of the business and government even in some countries where it is a minor language. It is the official language of man time communication, the international aviation and air-traffic control. When we teach oral communication that is mean we teach the function of language not the nature of language. Graeme and Richard Dimbleby state that in their book Teaching Communication (1990: 1) "we believe that study communication is about personal development of attitudes and values about knowing oneself; about knowing other people and relating them; about critically understanding mass-media massage and about being confident in use of Oral Communication". Teaching communication is not about learning the requisite linguistic and social skills in isolation, like series of performing tricks, but about acquiring knowledge of how and why we communicate and a bout application of that knowledge. Communicative Competence (CC) in our life roles- personal, social, cultural and economic- is founded in our knowledge about social, cultural, and economic contexts. It depends on using and applying that knowledge. I believe that all pupils and students should be deliberately exposed to some experiences and activities of Oral Communication (OC). Communication skills and other language skills are very important and useful in and of

themselves when used together; they reinforce one another in producing a higher efficient level of communication.

Aims and Scope of the Study

This study aims to investigate the importance of Autonomous Learning Strategies (ALS) in developing Communicative Competence (CC). The scope of the study is limited to English language teachers in the Sudan. There are (50) English language teachers at different Sudanese universities.

Literature Review

Developing Autonomy through Self-Assessment Using Self-Study Resources

Significant development of software and hardware has greatly expanded the range of speech technologies available to students to improve their speaking abilities (Godwin-Jones, 2009). The technology can serve as a reporting medium for self-assessment through regular entries in self-evaluation of oral performance via recording tools (Healey, 2007). Learners' self-evaluation of their own linguistic competence can increase active involvement in learning and become self-critical because self-monitoring strategies allow learners to identify their own difficulties (Dam, 2000; Wenden, 1999). Thus, recording programs may build learners' linguistic competence through their self-assessment. Through self-monitoring the use of voice e-mail can enhance learners' pronunciation, grammar, and verbal expression for oral proficiency development as well as foster significant improvement in speaking relative to articulation and accuracy (Volle, 2005). VoiceThread can promote collaborative development of knowledge by giving learners the opportunity to share their voices (Brunvand & Byrd, 2011) with their peers and the instructor, making it so

learners are able to monitor and assess not only their own learning progress but also their peers' performance. Video recording tools can also provide a valuable source of information for learners to notice and analyze characteristics of their own speech (Lynch, 2007) to reflect on their learning progress because the learners can evaluate the full spectrum of their communicative performance (Oscarson, 1989).

Autonomy depends on learners' ability to self-direct for practice, critical reflection, and independent action (Andrade, 2012; Little, 1991). From this perspective, awareness through self-assessment of learners' speaking performance and understanding their learning progress with self-study resources can develop metacognitive skills to achieve their own learning goals, and ultimately this recursive process can enhance learners' autonomy. However, learners may need guidelines to find appropriate resources to achieve their learning goals (Murray, 2005). In this research, participants used self-study resources provided by the instructor, Vocaroo and vozMe, and then tried to pursue their own goals.

In light of the role of self-assessment, using recording programs can be positively affecting specific learning objectives for oral performance. However, researchers still need to define the optimal use of autonomous learning for language learners' speaking skills when using self-study resources.

Digital Storytelling for Oral Proficiency Development and Assessment

Learners' autonomy can be measured by their metacognitive awareness, ability to use resources appropriately, and assessing self-reflection of their development (Sinclair, 1999; Reinders & Lázaro, 2007). In order to measure participants' autonomy for oral proficiency development, this research used digital storytelling with four silent movie clips uploaded onto Voice

Thread to assess their independent study ability with self-assessment.

Digital storytelling has been widely used to help learners communicate their own stories effectively since it can be a learner-centered activity when the topic is related to their daily life and personal subject matter. It can also have an impact on improving learners' speaking in the narration process (Nelson, 2006), linguistic structure, vocabulary, sound patterns, and prosody of the foreign language (Verdugo & Belmonte, 2007). Learners can thus develop linguistic competence while describing context-rich visual situations after repeating self-directed learning. In addition, using a silent movie clip helps to build the metacognitive knowledge involved in communication. Kasper and Singer (2001) claimed that since silent films do not offer preauthorized dialogue, learners are not only allowed, but also authorized to create their own conversational texts, using English creatively to develop their own performance. Therefore, storytelling with a silent movie clip can be a good communicative competence task to measure English learners' oral proficiency in terms of functional and pragmatic knowledge from recorded files while the participants describe captured events and surrounding context (Kim & Choi, 2013; Kim, 2014).

Along with the many studies that have examined the usefulness of digital storytelling in oral production, this research focuses on investigating how a learner can step forward in developing a new technique for assessing autonomy in oral proficiency using storytelling.

Strategies of Autonomous Learning

Autonomy can be defined as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec 1981, p. 3) or "as the capacity to take control over one's own learning" (Benson 2001, p. 2). It is something that needs to be developed as it is not innate (Holec,

1990). Moreover in his definition of the term, little (2003) insists on the role of the teacher, which is to create a learning environment in which learners accept responsibility for their learning role in order to become more autonomous.

According to Riley, "autonomous learning strategies (ALS) in institutional settings inevitably requires both teachers and learners to modify their representations of these respective roles" (1986, p. 70). Furthermore, although different terms are sometimes used to name the person whose role it is to accompany learners in their autonomization – Riley speaks of "Helper", "Knower", "Facilitator" and "Counsellor" (1986, p. 19) – most researchers agree that autonomy necessarily implies a change in the pedagogical relationship between teachers and learners.

The teacher has a new role to play, as Byram and Morgan (1994) point out that "the teacher is important on two levels in the development of empathy: both as a model and as a source of information" (p. 27). As far as intercultural communicative competence is concerned, Jimenez Raya and Sercu (2007) assert that "a focus on learner autonomy holds the promise that values and norms are communicated, mediated, and developed rather than being transmitted" p. 22). Indeed they insist on the fact that the mere transmission of values and standards is not sufficient and could lead to undesired behaviours from students in many cases. Therefore the essential question for Jimenez Raya and Sercu (2007) is: how teachers can facilitate learners to make sense of the world they are very much part of. How can language education be organized in such a way that a learner is able and willing to mediate the often conflicting values, standards and norms by which s/he is surrounded? (p. 22) the answer to this essential question for Jimenez Raya and Sercu (2007) is in the development of learner autonomy and intercultural competence as "major pedagogical goals of foreign language education."

Integration of Autonomous Learning Strategies

As for Communicative Competence (CC), Van Ek (1986) suggested that foreign language teaching should not be concerned merely with training in communication skills but also involve the personal and social development of the learner as an individual. In other words, it should enhance the individual's self-reflection and self-awareness and his or her ability to interact in an intercultural context. Van Ek presented a framework for comprehensive foreign language objectives which included aspects such as social competence, the promotion of autonomy and the development of social responsibility which Byram included in his definition of intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) (Byram, 1997, p. 9).

When Byram (1997) considers the objectives of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), he recognizes the limitations of the classroom context of learning, which does not mean that the teachers do not have a role to play, as we have already seen. They can still structure and influence the learning opportunities involved. For Byram (1997), the aim may be, for example, to develop learner autonomy within a structured and framed experience of otherness outside the classroom during periods of independent vacation or periods of residence, exchange, etc. Indeed there are three broad categories of location for acquiring. Hélène Zumbihl Learner Autonomy in Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Proceedings 229 intercultural competence: the classroom, the pedagogically structured experience outside the classroom, and the independent experience (Byram, 1997). Our aim with the curriculum described in this article is to enhance learners' autonomy in the classroom to enable them to experience the period of independent learning while studying abroad with the lowest possible level of anxiety and the highest possible level of autonomy while facing different types of everyday situations.

In the intercultural communicative competence learning model described by Murphy-Lejeune (2003), she considers autonomy and self-confidence as strategic skills as "they derive from combined efforts to reach the goal of managing one's life in a new cultural environment. They are the means by which success abroad is attainable" (p. 104). It also means that preparation for study abroad experience should help students develop these strategic skills.

Similarly, among the dimensions of intercultural competence which are described by Byram (1997) in his model, savoir-apprendre and savoir-comprendre are particularly interesting for this specific issue of the learner's autonomization process in the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence. The language teachers' objectives should be to help students be able to learn and to understand by themselves, which, for teachers, consists of creating opportunities for learners to learn how to acquire competencies and skills in addition to knowledge. Sercu (2004) points out that "autonomous learning is already practiced by many foreign language teachers who consciously or not occasionally include problem-based or task-based learning approaches in their classroom" (p. 64). Intercultural communicative competence may also be autonomously acquired by students through problem-solving activities which will encourage critical thinking, collaborative learning, self-initiated knowledge acquisition, and cooperative evaluation of alternatives (Sercu, 2004).

This implies new roles for teachers which are widely described in the literature. They become guides, tutors, counselors, facilitators (Riley, 1986). Autonomous learning approaches involve more, not less, teacher direction or preparation. In a learner autonomy approach, the selection of the culture topics to be explored or the culture learning tasks to be completed remains the responsibility of the teacher or course

developer (Sercu, 2004). As for Jackson (2008), the course developer has to consider the students' needs to build a course for preparing for immersion abroad. The content should also incite learners to reflect on their own culture and on what they consider to be normal from their own point of view. For Kern and Liddicoat (2011), "the speaker is no longer someone who speaks, but someone who acts - that is, someone who acts through speaking and thus becomes a social actor" (p. 19). Therefore the speaker or learner will experience several modalities of learning, speaking and acting which may take place both inside and outside of school at different periods of his or her life. This interpersonal communication will take place in a context of social interaction. This means that we may consider languages as dynamic resources that individuals combine with other resources to act in a social world. This combination of the two terms 'speaker' and 'actor' highlights the individual's power to participate in the creation and the modification of contexts in which he or she is learning the language. The speaker is an actor, not only in class, but also in the social and cultural world which surrounds him or her. This could lead to a new way of considering learners in our classes of intercultural communicative competence. It also implies the need to enhance the learner's autonomization process.

Autonomous Learning

When Byram (1997) considers acquiring intercultural competence, he makes a difference between the work done in class, fieldwork, and independent learning. I will consider this last learning context in more detail. Independent learning is a factor in life-long learning and can be both subsequent to and simultaneous with classroom and fieldwork. "It will be effective only if the learners continue to reflect upon as well as develop their knowledge, skills and Hélène Zumbihl Learner Autonomy in Intercultural Competence 230 CERCLL ICC Proceedings

attitudes, as a consequence of previous training" (Byram, 1997, p. 69). If experience of otherness in one's own environment or in another country is not based on self-reflection, it remains mere experience and will not facilitate learning. Byram (1997) notes that: "for experience to become learning, learners must become autonomous in their capacity for refining and increasing their knowledge, skills and attitudes. This in turn suggests a classroom methodology which allows learners to acquire explicitly the underlying principles of the skills and knowledge they are taught, and the means of generalizing them to new experience. In that case one could properly speak of a learning biography and expect that far more cultural learning will take place outside the classroom than inside, whether consecutively or simultaneously." (p. 70-71).

For Murphy-Lejeune (2003, p. 101), "life abroad represents an extensive natural learning situation which stimulates many more aspects of learners' personalities than are usually catered for in educational institutions." She defines autonomy in the experience abroad as a twofold competence: the ability to manage without family assistance and without a mental clamp connecting travelers to the home environment. This means that you have to acquire "the ability to get through tough times by yourself particularly through language difficulties" and to "be prepared that's it's not going to be a rose garden because entering into a new cultural world is comparable to a rite of passage" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003, p. 106). A new socialization process and, therefore, an autonomization process must be engaged in, and this effort makes the arrival, in particular, a trying period. This means that preparation before the immersive experience abroad is fundamental (Zumbihl, 2004).

Methodology of the Study

The researcher has drawn the sample for this study exclusively from Sudanese teachers of English from various universities who responded to questionnaire. A sample of (50) teachers was randomly selected for the questionnaire.

Tools of the Study

The researcher has used questionnaire as a tool to collect the information of this paper. The questionnaire which was given to the Sudanese English teachers whom were selected randomly.

The researcher has used the descriptive analytical and quantitative methods as well as a questionnaire as a tool in the collection of relevant data and information in pursuing this paper. Population of this study is drawn exclusively from English language teachers in the Sudan. The population is English language teachers at Sudanese universities. A sample of (50) teachers was randomly selected for the questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

The researcher has used the questionnaire as a tool in the collection of data relevant to this study. The researcher has designed a questionnaire to answer the question" to what extent autonomous learning strategies do not use in developing oral communicative competences among the students who study English as Second Language? To provide answers to the problems encountered teachers who do not know why these took place. The tables below are going to illustrate what has been stated earlier.

Teachers' Questionnaire

This item tries to elicit information from the teachers concerning their views about the autonomous learning in developing communicative competences.

Table (1)

1. Teachers should encourage students to interact freely outside the classroom.

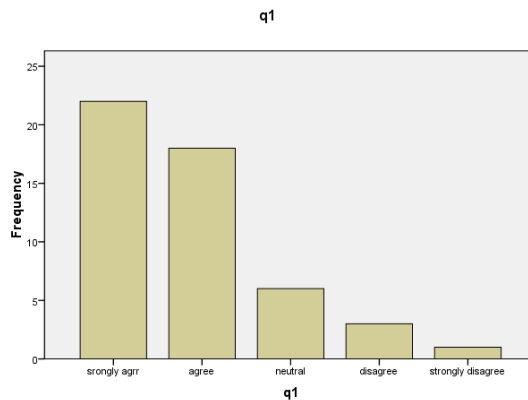|		Frequency	Percent
Valid	strongly agree	22	40.0
	Agree	18	36.0
	Neutral	6	12.0
	disagree	3	10.0
	strongly disagree	1	2.0
	Total	50	100.0

Figure (1)

Table and figure (1) above shows that a vast majority of the respondents (76%) strongly agree together with agree that students should use autonomous learning in promoting English language oral communicative competences. Only 12% do not

agree to that. This indicates that students need to be trained and developed in how they can make use of autonomous learning in promoting English language oral communicative competences.

Table (2)

2. Teachers should be aware of the importance of using modern technology when teaching communication.

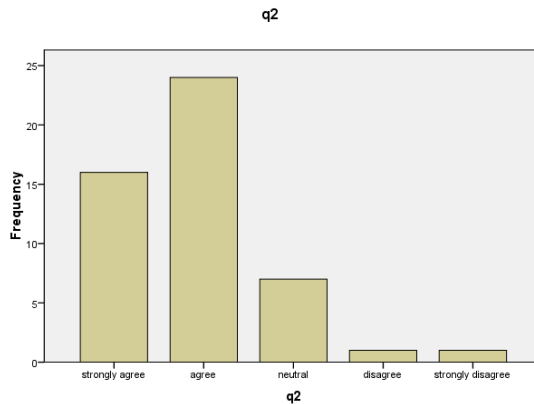|		Frequency	Percent
Valid	strongly agree	16	30.0
	Agree	24	48.0
	neutral	7	14.0
	disagree	1	2.0
	strongly disagree	1	4.0
	Total	49	98.0
Missing	System	1	2.0
Total		50	100.0

Figure (2)

Table and figure (2) above shows that a vast majority of the respondents (78%) strongly agree together with agree that students should be taught how to use the library in enhancing

autonomous learning competences. Only 6% do not agree to that. This indicates that students need to be trained and developed in how they can use the library in enhancing autonomous learning competences.

Table (3)

3. Language labs are one aid of oral communication development.

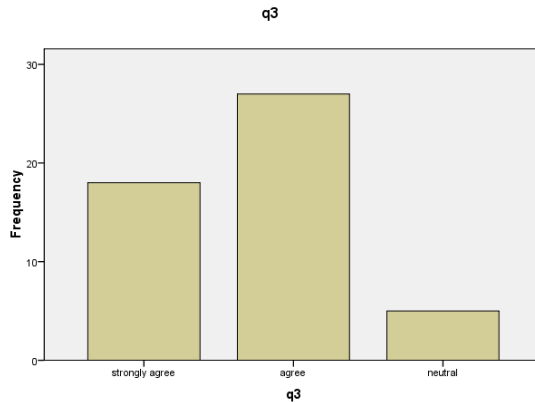|		Frequency	Percent
Valid	strongly agree	18	36.0
	Agree	27	50.0
	Neutral	5	14.0
	Total	50	100.0

Figure (3)

Table and figure (3) above shows that a vast majority of the respondents (86%) strongly agree together with agree that students should adopt the autonomous learning to improve their oral communicative competences. Only 00% do not agree to that. This indicates that students need to be trained and developed in adopt the autonomous learning to improve their oral communicative competences.

Table (4)

4. Monolingual   dictionaries   (English-English)   are necessary to success in autonomous learning.

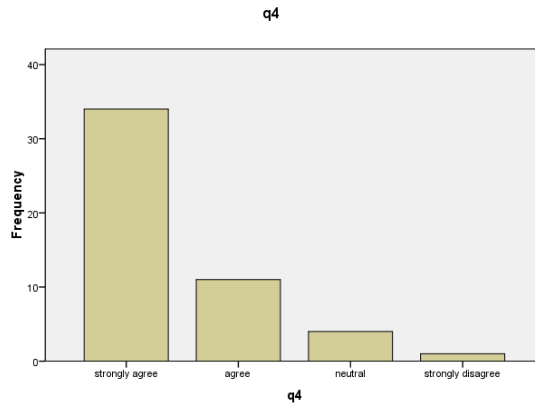|		Frequency	Percent
Valid	strongly agree	34	60.0
	Agree	11	22.0
	Neutral	4	8.0
	strongly disagree	1	10.0
	Total	50	100.0

Figure (4)

Table and figure (4) above shows that a vast majority of the respondents (82%) strongly agree together with agree that students should develop their own style to make use of autonomous learning in developing oral communicative competences. Only 10% do not agree to that. This indicates that students need to be trained and developed in how they can develop their own style to develop their oral communicative competences.

Table (5)

5. Self-directed learning vocabulary is a good opportunity to develop oral communication.

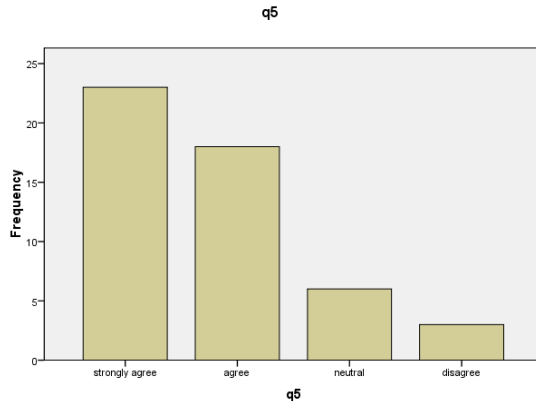|		Frequency	Percent
Valid	strongly agree	23	46.0
	Agree	18	32.0
	neutral	6	10.0
	disagree	3	12.0
	Total	50	100.0

Figure (5)

Table and figure (5) above shows that a vast majority of the respondents (78%) strongly agree together with agree that students should change their own autonomous learning environment to develop their oral communicative competences. Only 12% do not agree to that. This indicates that students need to be trained and developed in how they can change their learning environment to develop their oral communicative competences.

The data collected was analyzed in relation to the study hypothesis. The data was collected by questionnaire which had given to teachers who do not know why these took place.

Also analyzing the data collected from the   questionnaire which had been given to teachers exclusively drawn from English language teachers in the Sudan. The population is English language teachers at Sudanese universities. A sample of (50) teachers was randomly selected for the questionnaire.

The researcher has used   the questionnaire as a tool in the collection of data relevant to this study. The researcher has designed questionnaire to identify the problems encountered teachers who do not know why the autonomous learning strategies do not use   in developing   oral communicative competences.

The marks obtained from the questionnaire   for all participants were analyzed and compared statistically by using frequencies and percentages. The analysis showed that the highest percentage which is represented strongly agree and agree is estimated by (80%) in contrast to the percentage of strongly disagree and disagree which is estimated by lesser than this one. Accordingly, this justifies that   there is statistical difference   in terms of teachers' point of views that autonomous learning strategies do not use   in developing   oral communicative competences.

Report Discussion:

After the comparing and calculation of the sub-hypotheses; we have found that the average of the total number of the five sub-hypotheses percentage (76%+78%+86%+82%+78%) equal (80%) which represents negative respond   justifies that Teachers do not know why autonomous learning strategies do not use   in developing   oral communicative competences.

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