Classroom Teaching Strategies of Improving the English Majors' Self-instruction in Newly–promoted University in China

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Abstract—This study investigated the effect of classroom teaching strategies in cultivating the EFL students' self-instructive ability of English majors in a newly-promoted university in China. 87 freshmen of English majors enrolled in Bijie University in the year of 2010 were the participants involved in this study. This study aimed to explore four research questions: 1.Is there any teacher-dependence in this study? If any, attempt to examine the research question 2, 3 and 4. Does teacher questioning strategy have the positive effect of improving students' self-instruction in English learning? Does students' cooperative learning help foster students' self-instruction in English learning? Does the 5-minute English talk show in class cultivate students' self-instruction ability? The research findings show that the teacher questioning strategy, the student's cooperating learning strategy and the five-minute talk show in class can help the teacher-dependent students improve their self-instruction in English learning.

Index Terms—classroom teaching strategies, self-instruction, teacher-dependence, English majors

I. INTRODUCTION

Autonomous language learning has held the attention of language learning and teaching researchers for many years. Holec (1981) claimed that the final aim of foreign language teaching is to arouse language learners' awareness of how to learn the language. It is commonly agreed that language learners are the central focus in learning. The teacher plays a role of a guider and facilitator to the language learners in learning process. The autonomous language learning involved the language learners in actively taking responsibility for their own learning.

A. Definitions of Autonomous Learning

The researchers had a heated debate on the definition of autonomous learning. Holec (1981) contributed "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" to the first definition of autonomy in 1981(p.3). Little (1990) stated that autonomous learning was "essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning" (p. 7). Boud (1988), Dam et al. (1990), Gardner and Miller (1996) and Nunan (1997) regarded that autonomous learning is related with the language learner's personal characteristics. Due to the different purpose and aim of encouraging language learners not to depend on teachers completely and to improve their autonomous language learning, there appear a great many terms such as self-directed learning, self-access, self-instruction, independent learning etc. Gardner and Miller (1999) stressed that though these terms are various, they are "approaches which assist learners to move from teacher dependence towards autonomy' and 'there are more similarities than differences" (p.8).

B. Research Contributions to the Autonomous Language Learning

The language teaching researchers made great contributions to the practical practice in language teaching and autonomous language learning. Richards and Lockhart (1994) reinforced the beliefs of autonomous language learning and encouraged the autonomous language learners to adopt their favorite language learning ways and strategies to create a preferred language learning environment. Dickinson (1997) and Gardner and Miller (1997) affirmed the benefits of using language learner profiles to stimulate the language learners to take their responsibility for study. Gardner and Miller (1999) provided many suggestions of self-access activities for language learners. Straka (2000) asserted that self-directed language learning needs individual language learner takes responsibility for the goals and decisions about their learning and work with others to achieve them.

At home, the Chinese language teaching researchers have discussed and analyzed the possibility and adaptability to the approaches of boosting English learner autonomy. Li Hong (1998) claimed that the traditional English teaching made students passive in English language learning and the autonomous learning way has involved students in English learning. She also pointed out that English teachers should be the guiders to help develop students' autonomous learning ability gradually in class. Xiao Fei (2002) advocated the student-center teaching approach and suggested some teaching strategies to foster students' autonomous learning in English. Peng Jinding (2002) thought that learner autonomy was an educational philosophy and the autonomous leaning approaches would be beneficial to Chinese college students. He

Xiaodong (2005) focused his research on the effects of autonomous English learning by adopting the self-access approach in extensive reading program and found some positive changes of students' attitude and behavior in autonomous English learning. Zhong Ming (2006) discussed the possible problems that college students may encounter in the self-access learning, analyzed the connections between self-access materials, teachers' and learners' beliefs, self-access centers and provided some countermeasures to promote students' autonomous learning ability. Zhao Yang (2007) emphasized that the formative assessment used in self-directed learning approach can assist Chinese college students to grow up into an effective self-directed English learners. Lv Haibing (2011) conducted a research on the efficacy of cultivating non-English majors' autonomous learning ability through explicit and implicit courses. His research found that explicit courses taught college students to make good use of campus intranet and the implicit courses instructed students' autonomous learning strategies, creating an active English learning atmosphere in class and after class.

C. Learning Strategies

The language teaching researchers have discussed that the different learning strategies enhanced language learner autonomy. O'Malley(1987),Weinstein & Mayer(1986), Prokop (1989), Nunan, (1996) found that if the learning strategies were taught to language learners in class ,language learners could achieve better performance in language learning. They stated that a language teacher's task was not only teaching learners' knowledge but also teaching how to learn. The term of autonomous learning used in the present study as students' learning strategies is self-instruction. Dickinson (1987) described the self-instruction as "situations in which a learner, with others, or alone, is working without the direct control of a teacher"(p.5).

D. Teaching Strategies

1. Teachers' questioning strategy

The communicative language teaching theory shows that the communication and interaction in class facilitate the language learning. They are the purpose of the language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The teachers' talks and raising questions in class engage the language learners thinking about the learning materials. Teachers' questioning strategy aids language learners to make critical thinking in learning process and guide learners to achieve better understanding of the learning materials. Ornstein (1990) stressed that "through the appropriate strategies in formulating and ask questions, the teacher can help students understand and utilize content and formulate ideas, concepts, relationships and principles." (p.284) According to Ornstein (1990) the teachers' questioning strategies included the types of questions, wait-time and feedback. According to Bloom (1956), the types of the questions fall into five categories: knowledge, comprehension, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

2. Students' cooperative learning

Numerous studies have disclosed the positive effect of cooperative learning. Long, Adams, McLean, and Castanos (1976) found that group work made students produce better language production compared to learners working individually. This suggests that group work offers more opportunities for learners to produce language and to learn from each other. Wong-Fillmore (1982) demonstrated that interactions between a teacher and individual students, as well as between and among learners influence L2 learning.

3. Free talk show in class

Self-confidence is commonly agreed to be the important factors of one's success. A self-confident language learner has a positive attitude to learning. They will find every chance to learn the target language, participating in any language activities. Prepared free talk-show allows the students have a good preparation for the talk show in class. They rehearsed it with their group members to practice the talk that will be given in class next time can build students' self-confidence

E. Research Background

The previous studies abroad mainly focused on the definition clarification of autonomous language learning, the language teachers' and learners' beliefs and learning strategies of the autonomous learning, the different practices of autonomous learning approaches in the language learning context. The Chinese language researches have conducted many researches on autonomous learning based on the autonomous learning theories. However, most of the researches have just concentrated their attention on the autonomous language learning of non-English majors, and fewer studies have involved their studies classroom teaching strategy in English-major class. Particularly, more studies are needed on the investigation and the analysis of the autonomous English learning in the university or college newly promoted from a three-year college in the undeveloped area. Taking Bijie University as an example, it is a newly promoted university in which the most of enrolled students come from the schools where traditional English teaching still prevails. Teacher dependence is the common phenomenon among students who are always waiting for teachers to feed them everything in class. It is necessary to teach students how to learn in college study and use some beneficial classroom teaching strategies to guide the students to adopt the self-instruction learning strategy to make autonomous language learners out of them. This present study aims to investigate the effects of classroom teaching strategies in cultivating the self-instructive ability of English majors. The present study addresses the following research questions.

1. Is there any teacher-dependence in this study? If any, attempt to examine the research question 2, 3 and 4.

2. Does teacher questioning strategy have the positive effect of improving students' self-instruction in English learning?

3. Does students' cooperative learning help foster students' self-instruction in English learning?

4. Does the 5-minute English talk show in class cultivate students' self-instruction ability?

II. METHOD

A. Participants

The participants in this study were the 87 freshmen of English majors enrolled in Bijie University in the year of 2010. Of the 87 participants, 13 were male students. The other 74 students were female students. They were all four –year college students in Foreign Languages Department in Bijie University. Most of them entered the university directly from the middle school after passing the college entrance examination. Only three of them had the working experience and one of them studied in the other university before they were admitted to Bijie University. They have been exposed to English learning for 6 years to 10years.

B. Questionnaire Sheet

Nunan (2002) claimed that the questionnaire is a relatively popular method and an easy way for researchers to extract research data that are more amenable to quantification. The material used in this study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed as a yes-or-no question for the quality of data collection. It consists of four parts (see Appendix). The first part of the questionnaire is designed for the purpose of examining students learning strategy. The second part is considered to investigate the effects of teachers' questioning strategy on improving students' autonomous English learning. The third and the fourth parts aim to explore whether the students' group work and the five-minute talk show in class can help students' self-instruction in English learning.

C. Research Design

This study was designed to find out whether the teaching strategies could help the participants grow into self-instructive English learners from the teacher independence English learners. The teaching strategies the teacher applied to in English class in this study were the teachers' questioning strategy, students' group work and the 5-minute talk show in class. The present study aims to investigate whether the participants adopted self-instruction as their learning strategies in the English learning and whether the teacher's classroom teaching strategies help the participants improve their self-instruction. The participants were presented with the same questionnaire twice. The first time was on the fifth academic week in the first term of their college study. It was the time the participant students had just finished their military training and began their college study. The purpose was to examine whether the participants were teacher-dependent or not. The data collected this time was named Data 1. The second time for conducting the questionnaire was on the first week of the second term. The collected data was Data 2. There was a comparison between Data 1 and Data 2, exploring the problems on self-instruction learning strategies of the participants involved in this study.

D. Data Analysis

Answers collected from the questionnaire were served as research data. Mean (see Table 1) was applied to investigate the roles of learners learning strategy. Mean in Table 2, 3 and 4 was used to disclose the effect of classroom teaching strategies in fostering English learners to move away from teacher-dependence.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1
RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS OF LEARNING STRATEGIES (LS)

Questions No.	Mean of answer "yes" for Data 1 N=87	Mean of answer "yes" for Data 2 N=87	Implication of students' learning strategy	Mean of answer "no" for Data 1 N=87" ;	Mean of answer "no" for Data 2 N=87"	Implication of students' learning strategy
1	59.77	97.77	Self-instruction	40.23	2.23	Teacher-dependence
2.	95.40	97.70	Self-instruction	4.60	2.30	Teacher-dependence
3.	32.18	73.56	Self-instruction	67.82	26.44	Teacher-dependence
4.	89.66	39.08	Teacher-dependence	10.34	60.92	Self-instruction
5.	52.87	86.21	Self-instruction	47.13	13.79	Teacher-dependence
6.	24.14	89.66	Self-instruction	75.86	10.34	Teacher-dependence
7.	47.13	83.91	Self-instruction	52.87	16.09	Teacher-dependence

Table 1 displays the mean of the students' learning strategies used in their English learning. In Table 1, Data 1 shows that most of the students have serious teacher dependence. Students' answers to Question 4 mean that 89.66 % of the students wait for the teacher to give them the answers instead of trying other ways by themselves to solve the problems. More than half (67.82%) of the students don't like to cooperate with the others. Most of the students (75.86) do not make use of the internet to help with their study. 52.87% of the students do not engage them to interact with the teacher in class. The mean (59.77) of the first question shows that over half of the students do not preview the text they are going to learn. This result is accorded with that of Question 4. This means that the students have the poor study strategy. However, the mean of Question 2 shows that 95% of the students utilize some reading skills to help them understand the learning text. This strategy may be developed from the middle school study because this strategy is commonly used to improve the scores in the tests. Compared with Data 1, Data 2 shows clearly that most of the students have changed their learning strategies of college study in a term's time. The number of the students who always wait for the teacher' answer is reduced to a great extent from 89.66 in Data to 39.08 in Data 2. 73.56 % (32.18% in Data 1) of the students begin to study with the other classmates. This may imply that the students find they have been benefited from the group work. The means of Question 1,3,4,5, 6, and 7 in Data 2 reveal that the students adopt the self-instruction learning strategy to make them move from teacher dependence toward self-instruction.

The results of Table 1 provide the affirmative answer to the first research question that intends to investigate whether there is any teacher-dependence among the participant students. Data 1 shows that most of the students have teacher dependence. It is not surprising to find that the participants were teacher dependence because most of the students studied English in a middle school where they were taught for the purpose of passing college entrance examinations. Most of the students in their written answers to the questions "why" said that the teachers in the middle school English class used Chinese to teach English and the teacher would give students a detailed explanation about the language knowledge in every corner of the textbooks. The teachers were expected to provide all the answers to the English study problems. The students were all engaged in doing test papers in most of their time and they have no time working with other students. What they could do in English class was sitting down in the classroom silently, listening to the teachers carefully, taking down what the teacher said and finishing the homework assigned by the teachers. Only at college do they have the chances to receive the training of self-instruction learning.

TABLE 2
RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS OF THE TEACHER QUESTIONING STRATEGY

Questions No.	Characteristics of Questions:	Mean of answer "yes" for Data 1 N=87	Mean of answer "yes" for Data 2 N=87	Mean of answer "no" for Data 1 N=87	Mean of answer "no" for Data 2 N=87
8.	knowledge	97.70	98.85	2.3	1.15
9.	comprehension	74.71	96.55	25.29	3.45
10.	comprehension	26.44	64.37	73.56	35.63
11.	comprehension	6.90	49.43	93.1	50.55
12.	analysis	73.56	89.66	26.44	10.34
13.	synthesis	36.78	66.67	63.22	33.33
14.	evaluation	32.18	58.62	67.82	41.38
15.	wait-time	94.25	91.95	5.76	8.05
16.	Wait-time	89.66	98.85	10.34	1.15
17	feedback	80.46	87.36	19.54	12.65

Table 2 presents the students' responses to the questions raised by the teacher in class. In Data 1, it is found that only 6.90% of the students felt easier to do some paraphrasing. It is clear that most of the students did not know how to paraphrase a sentence in the learning text. The students need to lay a training on how to paraphrase a sentence because it is a new skill for understand the learning text better at college. The mean (26.44) of question 10 reveals that the students found it difficult to explain the meanings of the new words in English. This may be due to the limited vocabulary and poor oral English. The purpose of Question 13 is to examine the students' ability to assimilate the learning materials and Question 14 is to check the students' ability to develop their opinions. The means (36.78, 32.18) of the two questions imply that the students had weakness to deal with higher level questions. The means (97.70, 74.71) of Questions 8 and 9 reveal that the students had done better in the lower level questions. It is understood that factual knowledge can be easily found in the learning text and the simple analyzing ability is required for the tests in the middle school. As to the other questioning strategies such as wait-time and feedback, most (89.66%, 80.46%) of the students said "yes" to the question.

It is inspiring to find in Data 2 that most of the students made great progress in dealing with the higher level comprehension questions after a term's college study. Although less about half of the student still had the problem in sentence paraphrase, the number of the students who had improved their paraphrasing ability is obviously increased.

As to the second research question of whether the teacher questioning strategy has the positive effect on improving students' self-instruction in English learning. Data 2 in Table 2 provides the positive answers to this research question. The results in Data 2 disclose that the teaching strategies used in this study lead students to adopt the self-instruction learning strategy. The answers to the question "why" in the questionnaire given by most of the students were that

because they wished to have a better understanding of the learning texts, interact with the teacher successfully and behave well in English class, they spent most of their spare time in the classroom and the school library learning English alone or with the other classmates. This indicates that the teacher questioning strategy may help foster the students' self-instruction learning in English. Ornstein (1990:284) stressed that "through the appropriate strategies in formulating and ask questions, the teacher can help students understand and utilize content and formulate ideas, concepts, relationships and principles."

TABLE 3
RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS OF GROUP WORK

Questions No.	Mean of answer "yes" for Data 1 N=87	Mean of answer "yes" for Data 1 N=87	Mean of answer "no" for Data 2 N=87	Mean of answer "no" for Data 2 N=87
18.	24.14	73.56	75.86	26.44
19.	49.43	72.41	50.57	27.59
20.	14.94	78.16	85.06	21.84
21.	28.74	81.61	71.26	18.39
22.	43.68	71.26	56.32	28.74
23.	4.60	62.07	95.4	37.93

Table 3 demonstrates the comparison of students' responses to questions of group work in Data1 and Data 2. The results in Data 1 display that at the beginning of the college study most (75.86%) of the students did not enjoy the group work. The same implication is found in the mean of Question19 that less than half (49.43%) of the students had the group work more than once a week. Only 14.94% of the students engaged themselves in talking in English with the group members in group activities. 28.74% of the students thought they had learned something from the partners in the group activities. 43.68% of the students found group work help improve their English pronunciation and oral English. Terribly, fewer students (4.60%) worked with the classmates to solve the other study problems.

Data 2 presents the amazing results of the group work and provides a positive answer to the third research question of whether students' cooperative learning helps foster students' self-instruction in English learning. Most of the students appreciated the group work. They said that they were benefited a lot from the group work in the answers to the question "why" in the questionnaire. Particularly cooperative learning taught those students who were not familiar with this type of learning. Each group member is responsible not only for his own learning but also for helping group members, thus, every member can have a sense of achievement. The students found easier and interesting to talk with the partners in English because the group activities involved the students' interest and their favorite topic. They said that they were always eager to share the information with their group members. The group work helps students develop oral communicative and social skills. Long, Adams, McLean, and Castanos (1976) stated that group work made students produce better language production compared to learners working individually. According to Dickinson (1987: 5), the self-instruction is "situations in which a learner, with others, or alone, is working without the direct control of a teacher". Working with others is one of the elements of self-instruction. Thus, it is a good teaching strategy to help the students improve self-instruction.

TABLE 4
RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE FIVE-MINUTE TALK SHOW IN CLASS

Questions	Mean of answer "yes" for Data 1 N=87	Mean of answer "yes" for Data 2 N=87	Mean of answer "no" for Data 1 N=87	Mean of answer "no" for Data 2 N=87
24.	88.51	45.98	11.49	54.02
25.	52.87	93.10	47.13	6.90
26.	28.74	62.07	71.26	37.97
27.	45.98	64.36	54.02	35.64
28.	12.64	79.31	87.36	20.69
29.	33.33	83.91	66.67	16.09

Table 4 demonstrates the responses to the questions of the five-minute talk show in class. The mean of Question 24 in Data 1 shows that most (88.51%) of the students felt worried to do the talk show. There may be some reasons. The first reason may be that the speakers were not allowed to read the written material prepared before the talk show. This may be their first time to speak English before the whole class. Second, the students were not self-confident and afraid of making mistakes. Third, the students may not make good preparation for it. About half of the students spent little time preparing the talk show in their spare time according to the mean of Question 25. Fewer students (28.74%) in Data 1 can do the talk show freely and fluently without referring to the prepared written material. One of the reasons the students stated in their answers to the question "why" in the questionnaire is that they felt so nervous that they could not remember everything. Only 12.64% of the students announced they had some benefit from the talk show given by the other classmates. They reported the reason in their answers to the question "why" in the questionnaire that they could not understand what the others said in talk show. Based on the mean and discussion about the talk show done at the beginning of the term, it is not surprising to notice that only 33.33% of the students would like more chances to do the talk show in class.

With respect to the fourth research question about whether the 5-minute English talk in class cultivates students' ability of self-instruction, Data 2 in Table 4 offers a affirmative answer. The mean of Question 24 in Data 2 shows that the students who did not feel worried outnumber (54.02%) the students (88.51%) who felt worried to do the talk show. The reason may be that the students had the experience of talk show in class and they practiced it as long as they had the chances . So 93.10% of the the students spent more time preparing and practicing the talk show in their spare time according to the mean of Question 25 in Data 2. Compared with Data 1(28.74%), much more students (62.07%) in Data 2 can do the talk show freely and fluently without referring to the prepared written material. They claimed that the talk show experience improved their self-confidence. It is exciting to find that 87.36 %of the students reported they had some benefit from the talk show given by the other classmates. The mean (83.91) of Question 29 indicates that the students had improved their self-instruction through the talk show in class. Without the control of the teacher in their spare time, the students had learned to manage to solve the problems in English learning at college.

IV. Conclusion

This study examined the effects of classroom teaching strategies in cultivating the self-instructive ability of English majors. There are some findings in this study. First, most of the students involved in this study were the victims of the teacher dependent English teaching. Second, it is confirmed that the teaching strategies such as teacher questioning strategy, students' cooperating learning and the time-limited English talk show in class can help the teacher-dependent students grow into the self-instructive ones. Third, the teacher questioning strategy will encourage students to participate in the classroom discussion, give students the opportunity to think about the questions and work out of ways to solve them. Wait-time strategy allows students to utilize the different skills to produce appropriate answers. Positive feedback to the students' answers encourages and stimulates students to learn English. This can aid students learn to be self-instructive. Fourth, students' cooperative learning motivate the students to learn from each other without the control of the teacher. Group work can help students improve their oral communication; promote their self-esteem and help foster students' self-instruction in English learning. Fifth, talk show involves the students in doing more English learning on their own without the teacher. It may improve the students' self-confidence. The results in this study indicate that the students had improved their self-instruction through the talk show in class.

Acknowledgement

Appendix

Questionnaire Sheet

Age _____Gender_____Grade_____
The years that have been exposed to English_____
A. Questionnaire of students learning strategy
1. Do you often preview the texts before class?
2. Do you try some reading skills to understand the new words and the learning text?
3. Do you like to study with the other classmates?
4. Do you always wait for the teacher's answers or solutions to the study problems?
5. Do you manage to solve the study problems by yourself immediately?
6. Do you like to search for the solutions to the study problems on the internet?
7. Are you always active in answering the teacher's questions in English class?
B. Questionnaire of teachers' questioning strategy
8. Do you feel easier to answer when the teacher asks the questions of when and where the story happened in the textbook, and why?
9. Do you feel easier to answer when the teacher asks how the story happened, and why?
10. Do you feel easier to answer when the teacher asks you to explain the meanings of new words in English, and why?
11. Do you feel easier to answer when the teacher asks you to do some paraphrasing in English, and why?
12. Do you feel easier to answer when the teacher asks you to analyze the text structure, and why?
13. Do you feel easier to answer when the teacher asks you what you can infer from the story, and why?
14. Do you feel easier to answer when the teacher asks your opinions about the characteristics of the main protagonist and why?
15. Do you feel anxious when the teacher asks you to answer the questions at once?
16. Do you like the teacher to ask you to answer the questions after you discuss them with the partners or the group members?
17. Do you like the teacher to correct your mistakes in time?
C. Questionnaire of students' group work

18. Do you enjoy the group work?

19. Do you have your group activity more than once a week?

20. Do you often engage yourself in talking in English with the group members in group activities?

21. Do you think you have learned something from your partners in the group activities?

22. Do you find any progress you have made on English pronunciation and oral English through group work?

23. Do you often have the group activities to deal with other study problems except the required tasks?

D. Questionnaire of the five-minute talk show in class

24. Do you feel worried about the five-minute talk show in class?

25. Do you spend enough time preparing the five-minute talk show in class?

26. Can you or are you going to do the talk show in class without the prepared written materials?

27. Do you think the talk show in class improve your self-confidence?

28. Do you benefit from the talk show given by the other classmates?

29. Do you want more chances to do such talk show in class?

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