Journal of English Education and Teaching (JEET)
e-ISSN: 2622-5867
p-ISSN: 2685-743x
Volume 9 number 2, 2025
Page 346 - 355

Enhancing Students' Reading Skills Through Self-Directed Learning Strategy in Academic Reading Course

Anggun Citra Sari Dewi
University of Bengkulu
angguncsd@unib.ac.id
Gita Mutiara Hati
University of Bengkulu
gitamutiara@unib.ac.id
Tiara Azzahra Marpaung
University of Bengkulu
tamarpaung@unib.ac.id
Ruwaiza Sasmita
University of Bengkulu
rsasmita@unib.ac.id

Corresponding Email: angguncsd@unib.ac.id

Abstract

Reading is a fundamental skill in foreign language acquisition. This study aims to investigate how Self-Directed Learning (SDL) strategy can enhance students' reading skills in the Academic Reading course. The research was conducted through a classroom action research design involving two cycles. Results show a significant increase in students' reading comprehension scores, indicating that SDL effectively supports students in becoming independent learners capable of managing their own learning process.

Keywords: Self-Directed Learning, Academic Reading, Reading Comprehension, Language Learning, English Education

Introduction

Learning a foreign language is often perceived as very difficult and time-consuming (Wang, Grant, & Grist, 2021). In higher education, particularly in English Language Education study programs, students are required to master English, a foreign language in Indonesia. This is especially true for students in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, who are expected to become teachers who teach this foreign language to others. The problem is the limited time available for study and practice during on-campus lectures. Mastering a foreign language requires extensive practice, which cannot be achieved within the limited hours of lectures alone. Furthermore, the emergence of COVID-19 in 2019 has forced the sudden transition from face-to-face learning to online learning. Many students and teachers are still having to adapt to this online learning and teaching method.

One of the basic skills in a foreign language is reading. The purpose of reading is to understand, analyze, and explore the content of the reading material. By reading, we can more quickly master a foreign language. The academic reading course is offered in the English Language Education study program to equip students with the skills to understand academic texts. This will be invaluable in enriching their knowledge and assisting them in writing academic papers such as articles and theses.

The development of technology and communication has had a significant impact on various fields, particularly education. This allows students to access learning from anywhere, anytime, and wherever they are. Those who fail to keep up with these developments will be left behind (Taskin 2019). This is where the concept of Self-Directed Learning emerged.

Self-Directed Learning (SDL) is defined as the ability to achieve success and efficiency in each individual's learning goals and objectives to meet their personal targets (Morris, 2019). In the SDL process, learners take responsibility for planning, implementing, and reviewing every aspect of their learning process. The European Commission (2018) states that every individual must be able to identify and set goals, motivate themselves, and develop resilience and self-confidence to achieve success in their learning process.

Saputri (2021) defines SDL as a process for students to learn independently without the assistance of others, to evaluate their learning needs, formulate learning objectives, determine learning materials, and evaluate their learning outcomes. By applying this strategy, students can increase their knowledge of what they are learning, gain more learning experience, and sharpen their critical thinking in managing learning materials. Ultimately, students can achieve greater results in line with the effort they put into learning.

Learning with Self-Directed Learning (SDL) has four stages (Saputri, 2021): Planning, Implementing, Monitoring, and Evaluating. One of the most important features is that through SDL, students can benefit from the current online learning environment (Chou, 2012). Individuals who have acquired self-directed learning skills will demonstrate persistence in learning with increased motivation and engagement with learning in online classes (Sandars et al., 2020). In this context, FKIP students, as prospective teachers, need to acquire self-directed learning skills to be prepared for online learning now and in the future with more advanced technology.

Several studies have explored SDL, including Ballad et al. (2021), who examined the readiness to implement SDL and the learning styles of 236 nursing students in Oman. This study found that students with imaginative, perspective-based, competitive, and self-directed learning styles tended to achieve high SDL scores. This is because the SDL method emphasizes student independence in learning.

Furthermore, Lai, Y., Saab, N., and Admiraal, W. (2022) surveyed 676 language students from various universities in China regarding the use of mobile technology in SDL learning. The study revealed that 425 respondents used mobile technology in SDL learning and were highly motivated by this learning method and media.

Previous research on the use of SDL, specifically in reading classes, was conducted by Safa, B. S. S. & Wicaksono, D (2022). They conducted research in a narrative reading class in 9th grade at SMP Yandika 12 Depok. The study found that the effective SDL method used by the participants involved reading texts to practice their reading skills, and then continuing to study the text independently with guidance provided by the teacher.

These challenges necessitate a strategy that students can implement to effectively utilize their current out-of-class learning. To be able to study online or outside of regular class hours, students must have control over their learning process and be responsible for what and how they learn the foreign language (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). This learning strategy is known as self-directed learning. Self-directed learning can improve students' knowledge, skills, and achievement in their chosen learning methods. This strategy is a mental process that is followed and supported by information identification and search (Suknaisith, 2014).

Based on this background, this study aims to improve the reading skills of English Language Education students by using self-directed learning strategies in academic reading courses. This research will be action research and is considered urgent because it is highly appropriate and necessary in the current online learning environment, enabling students to better understand how to control and explore themselves in online lectures and learning outside the classroom.

Research Methodology

This study aims to improve the skills of English language education students using self-directed learning strategies. Therefore, the research design used is Action Research. This study is a four-step cycle (Kemmis & Taggart, 1998): planning, acting,

observing, and reflecting. This cycle can be repeated if no improvement is found during the reflection stage, as evidenced by the achievement of success indicators. If this occurs, revisions to the planning stage are required, followed by a subsequent cycle. If the success indicators are met, no further cycles are necessary, meaning the study can be terminated. The success indicator for this study was that all students taking the Academic Reading course received a final semester grade of at least "*Very Good*" or *B+* based on academic guidelines on the Reading Comprehension proficiency test.

The subjects of this study were 29 undergraduate English education students taking the Academic Reading course. Qualitative data in this study was collected through observation, while quantitative data was drawn from reading comprehension scores and a questionnaire. The research instruments consisted of observation sheets, a reading comprehension test (50 questions), and a questionnaire on SDL (20 questions).

The study used a CAR design based on the model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1998), which consists of four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The research was conducted over two cycles, each spanning multiple class sessions within a two-month period.

During the planning phase, the researchers developed teaching materials, including an SDL tool adapted from Shen (2014) and a reading comprehension test comprising 50 TOEFL-based questions. The teaching plan was integrated into a course syllabus that incorporated SDL strategies.

In the acting phase, the SDL strategies were introduced and explained to students, who were guided on setting personal learning goals, choosing academic reading materials independently, and reflecting on their progress. They were also given SDL questionnaires and encouraged to create personalized reading plans.

The observing phase involved collecting both qualitative and quantitative data through observation notes, SDL questionnaires, and comprehension test results.

In the reflecting phase, the results of each cycle were analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of the SDL approach and make improvements for the next cycle if necessary. The success indicator was defined as achieving a minimum average score of 75 (grade B+) on the reading comprehension test by all students.

Findings and Discussions

Findings

The findings from this study are organized based on the results of two research cycles, each involving the application of the Self-Directed Learning (SDL) strategy in the Academic Reading course. These findings present both qualitative and quantitative outcomes that demonstrate the impact of SDL on students' reading comprehension and autonomy.

Cycle I

Planning

In this phase, the research team created the tools used in the study, including the Self-Directed Learning (SDL) questionnaire and the reading comprehension test.

They also set up the criteria for measuring the success of the research. The reading comprehension test included 50 questions drawn from TOEFL reading materials. This choice was based on the well-established validity and reliability of TOEFL questions as a standard measure of reading skills in English.

The SDL questionnaire used in the study was modified from a previously tested version by Shen (2014), who had used it in his earlier research.

Action

Throughout the learning process, the instructional materials followed the course syllabus (RPS) that was developed according to the SDL teaching approach.

Before classes started, students were given the SDL questionnaire to evaluate their current level of self-directed learning. Then, they engaged in the regular classroom learning activities.

At the end of each class, the main researcher, who also acted as the teacher, assigned students additional reading materials to study outside of class and asked them to create a list of the texts they had completed.

During this period, students were introduced to the SDL method and how to use it in a way that aligns with the principles of self-directed learning.

Once Cycle I was complete, the researcher conducted a reading comprehension test to assess the students' learning outcomes after the first phase of the SDL strategy. The study took place during classroom sessions, both offline and online. The researcher, along with team members who acted as co-observers, monitored students' behavior throughout the teaching and learning process.

The researchers conducted a reflection to evaluate students' performance across the cycle. This reflection aimed to determine if the predetermined success indicators were achieved and to identify areas for improvement in the next cycle. Based on the reading comprehension test results, the data is as follows.

Tabel 1. Student's Reading Comprehension Score in Cycle I

Student	Score
1	76
2	78
3	82
4	72
5	70
6	72
7	80
8	74
9	70
10	72
11	74
12	70
13	82
14	70
15	74
16	80
17	70
18	74
19	82
20	74
21	70
22	70
23	84
24	70
25	86
26	70
27	78
28	74
29	78
Average	**75,03448**

The results from Cycle I showed that the average score of the students was 75.03. Although this met the minimum requirement of 75, the researchers decided to do Cycle II to strengthen the students' SDL skills. In principle, the research could have been concluded at this stage. However, to prevent potential bias—since the scores

were only marginally above the minimum success criteria—the research team decided to proceed with Cycle II to get more reliable and convincing results.

Cycle II

In Cycle II, the researchers followed the same steps as in Cycle I. However, during the action phase, extra help was given to students who had trouble finding the right sources for independent learning when using the SDL strategy.

Throughout this cycle, the researchers kept observing all the students' learning activities. At the end of Cycle II, the researcher gave another reading comprehension test and asked the participants to finish the SDL questionnaire. The test results from Cycle II are shown in Table 2.

Tabel 2. Student's Reading Comprehension Score in Cycle II

Student	Score
1	88
2	92
3	94
4	84
5	86
6	88
7	94
8	90
9	86
10	88
11	86
12	82
13	94
14	82
15	88
16	90
17	84
18	84
19	92
20	90
21	86
22	80
23	94
24	86
25	92
26	86
27	88
28	84

29	90
Average	**87,86207**

The reading comprehension scores in Table 4 show that the students' average score went up a lot to 87.86

The average score went up to 87.86, and every student scored above the minimum required. This showed that using SDL, along with guided practice and reflection, made a big difference in how well students performed in academic reading.

Discussions

The study shows that Self-Directed Learning (SDL) helps students improve their reading skills. The increase in test scores from the first cycle to the second cycle shows that students became more involved and responsible in their learning when they were given the tools and freedom to manage their own learning.

This agrees with earlier work by Morris (2019), who talked about how SDL helps students take control of their learning and stay motivated.

With SDL, students can set their own goals, check how much they've learned, and think about how well they're doing—all important skills for college and lifelong learning.

The better reading results also mean that SDL is a good fit for online or mixed learning settings, where students need to manage their time and resources on their own. This matches what Chou (2012) and Sandars et al. (2020) found, as they said SDL is key to doing well in online learning.

Most students did well with SDL, but a few had trouble planning their learning. These students got help from teachers who provided support, which helped them develop better SDL skills. This shows that a mix of learner freedom and some structure is important.

Overall, using SDL in the Academic Reading class not only helped students understand texts better but also made them more ready for independent study, like writing research papers and theses.

Conclusions and Suggestions

This study shows that using the SDL approach in the Academic Reading course greatly improves students' reading skills. The results from two cycles show a clear improvement in their test scores and how much they can take charge of their learning.

Students who used SDL well showed better reading habits, more interest in academic texts, and better skills at managing their own learning. These improvements are important for future English teachers, who need to not only know the material but also learn how to study effectively.

However, some students had a hard time at first with SDL. This shows the need for teacher support and a step-by-step approach to help learners become more independent. Teachers should start with some guidance and slowly let students take more control.

The findings of this research also suggest some points to be explored, such as English language programs could incorporate SDL strategies into other reading or language courses, students are trained in time management and resource selection, which are essential elements of SDL and lastly for further research should be conducted on the application of SDL in various language skills and disciplines.

References

Chou, P. N. (2012). Students' perceptions of self-directed learning and collaborative learning with and without technology. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society, 15*(1), 31–42.

European Commission. (2018). *Council recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning*. Official Journal of the European Union, C, 189, 1–10.

Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1998). *The Action Research Planner*. Victoria: Deakin University.

Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. L. (2013). *Adult learning: Linking theory and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Morris, T. H. (2019). An analysis of Rolf Arnold's systemic-constructivist perspective on self-directed learning. In *Educational Perspectives on Transformations and Change Processes* (pp. 301–313). WBV Verlag.

Sandars, J., et al. (2020). Twelve tips for rapidly migrating to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. *MedEdPublish, 9*.

Saputri, R. P. (2021). *The Implementation of Self-Directed Learning Strategy Using Moodle* [Undergraduate thesis].

Shen, W. Q., Chen, H. L., & Hu, Y. (2014). The validity and reliability of the self-directed learning instrument (SDLI) in mainland Chinese nursing students. *BMC Medical Education, 14*(1), 1–6.

Suknaisith, A. (2014). The results of self-directed learning for project evaluation skills of undergraduate students. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 116*, 1676–1682.

Wang, Y., Grant, S., & Grist, M. (2021). Enhancing the learning of multi-level undergraduate Chinese language with a 3D immersive experience - an exploratory study. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 34*(1–2), 114–132.