Self-directed learning vs teacher-led instruction: Effects on oral proficiency and speaking structural accuracy

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Abstract

This study examined the effects and effectiveness of Self-Directed Learning (SDL) versus Teacher-Led Instruction (TLI) on the oral proficiency and structural accuracy of EFL learners' speech. Fifty-two participants were selected and categorized into intermediate and advanced levels. Each level was then randomly divided into SDL and TLI groups. Over the course of eight sessions, participants underwent training in English-speaking, with each group practicing according to the principles of either SDL or TLI. An IELTS speaking test was administered both before and after this training. Results showed that learners from both the intermediate and advanced levels benefited more from SDL than from TLI. To further investigate the merits of these two approaches, five intermediate and five advanced participants were asked to compose narratives. The narratives suggested that most participants viewed SDL as instrumental in helping them independently identify their speaking errors. Additionally, in the TLI group, teachers played crucial roles in guiding and overseeing the speaking process..

1 Introduction

The perspectives of teachers, language policymakers, authorities, and other related stakeholders on guiding learners in mastering English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are varied. Some of these groups prefer to equip English language learners with the necessary information, enabling them to navigate their learning journey autonomously. One relevant term for this is "autonomy," which, as defined by Richards and Schmidt (2013), involves taking responsibility for one's learning, decisions

about learning objectives, and meeting language needs.

Another related concept is "self-direction." Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) highlighted that self-direction encompasses both the external aspects of teaching and the internal attributes of learners, where they shoulder the responsibility for their learning. Conversely, there are instances where the teaching approach is teacher-centered. In such environments, as supported by Emaliana (2017), Peyton et al. (2010), and Serin (2018), teachers dominate, learners take a passive role, and instruction often stems directly from the board.

Given the pressing need for learners to attain communicative skills, the significance of speaking skills is undeniable. EFL and English as a Second Language (ESL) fields often prioritize oral proficiency. Luoma (2009), for example, has made considerable contributions in assessing speaking. To further enhance oral proficiency, it's imperative to consider the grammatical components of speech and their structural accuracy. As defined by Brown (2014), speaking structural accuracy refers to the ability to articulate clear, grammatically correct language.

Historically, there's been an inclination to view teachers as the primary facilitators of student growth and learning. However, with the growing emphasis on mastering communicative skills, it's essential to reevaluate this stance. By embracing Self-Directed Learning (SDL), learners can identify their strengths and areas for improvement more swiftly without relying heavily on teacher feedback.

Reviewing prior studies, Hiemstra (1994) noted that, 150 years ago in the U.S., numerous scholars explored self-education to understand SDL better. Similarly, Houle (1961) classified study participants based on specific characteristics, with one group resembling self-directed learners. While many have examined teacher-centered versus student-centered classrooms (e.g., Lak et al., 2017; Nagaraju et al., 2013; Serin, 2018), no research, to our knowledge, has directly compared the impacts of SDL and Teacher-Led Instruction (TLI) on EFL learners' oral proficiency and speaking structural accuracy.

Addressing this research gap, our study juxtaposed the effects of SDL and TLI on the oral proficiency and speaking structural accuracy of intermediate and advanced EFL learners.

2   Literature review

2.1   Self-directed learning

Knowles (1975), a leading proponent of self-directed learning (SDL), described the concept as a process where learners independently – with or without assistance – identify their needs, establish goals, source resources, implement effective strategies, and evaluate their learning outcomes. The precise origin of SDL is uncertain, but Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) noted its study began with Houle's (1961) observations on learning approaches. Knowles (1975) further enriched our understanding of SDL, notably by contrasting adult learning with that of children.

Recent studies have explored SDL's role in EFL or ESL contexts, especially concerning speaking abilities. Some research identified a correlation between SDL – occasionally paired with cooperative learning – and improvements in oral accuracy and fluency (Majedi & Pishkar, 2016; Suleiman & Maniam, 2019). Using films as a form of immersive self-study, Suleiman and Maniam (2019) observed enhancements in EFL learners' oral communication skills through SDL. A consensus in the field suggests that combining SDL with cooperative or collaborative learning can either enhance the learning process or foster the emergence of one approach from the other (Damian & Georgescu, 2014; Kelz, 2009; Moore et al., 2007). Barragán Torres (2013) also found that a combined approach of SDL and collaborative learning effectively boosted speaking fluency.

Gan (2004) explored students' attitudes toward SDL and determined that these attitudes didn't markedly affect their proficiency levels. Post the Covid-19 pandemic, many researchers shifted their focus to the efficacy of various English learning methods during these unprecedented times. For instance, Putra, Artini, and Padmadewi (2021) examined teachers' perceptions of SDL, identifying its presence in classroom activities. Their findings indicated that educators view SDL as a motivating

factor, empowering students to take charge of their learning. Other scholars found that SDL was pivotal in enhancing students' reading and writing capabilities (Aghayani & Janfeshan, 2020; Li et al., 2021).

2.2   Teacher-led and student-centered instruction

The origins of the teacher-led instruction approach are somewhat nebulous, with no distinct starting point in history. It's plausible to believe that the genesis of teaching revolved around instructors standing at the helm, steering the course of the learning process. Such a concept might seem self-evident today, as students often seek a guiding hand to lead, advise, and foster their educational objectives (Nagaraju et al., 2013). This teacher-led or teacher-centered approach can trace its roots back to the era of behaviorism, where teachers, seen as the primary authority, would stimulate learners and await their responses, much akin to an input-output dynamic.

The Classical Method is considered the pioneering theoretical framework for language teaching. This method vested teachers with significant control over the classroom, yet curiously, it didn't mandate high-level expertise on their part (Brown & Lee, 2015). This suggests that while teachers served as the primary sources of information, they weren't necessarily expected to possess extensive knowledge or skills.

Recent research on teacher-led instruction has predominantly centered around contrasting teacher-centered and student-centered classrooms. Serin (2018) posits that in teacher-centered settings, educators exert absolute control, rendering students largely passive. The curriculum is predetermined, and tasks are devised by the instructor. In a similar vein, Al-Zu'be (2013) delineated the nuances differentiating these two pedagogical approaches. Emaliana (2017) weighed in on the advantages and drawbacks of both methods, emphasizing the suitability of teacher-centered learning for larger classes due to its time efficiency and the preparedness of learning materials.

2.3   Oral proficiency

Oral proficiency generally examines how language is produced authentically by the learners. Liskin-Gasparro (2003) stated that in November l982, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) issued the ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines, which is a set of descriptors on proficiency levels in four basic skills of speaking, listening, reading, writing, and foreign language culture. Currently, many scholars believe that learners should be able to establish relationships with L2 speakers and communicate successfully. As Xiao (2015) claimed, paying heed to the proficiency effect can partly derive from the assumption that general proficiency is the prerequisite for pragmatic competence. He further added that as pragmatic acquisition necessitates reaching a threshold level of proficiency, it can have a positive effect on L2 pragmatic competence.

There are several studies on the features which facilitate oral proficiency. For instance, Nakatani (2010) used a communicative approach with strategy training to reveal whether or not taking advantage of particular communication strategies could enhance the EFL learners' oral proficiency. It was revealed that using certain strategies for maintaining discourse and negotiating the meaning boosted the oral and communicative proficiency. Wu, Hsieh, and Yang (2017) also attempted to find some technological solutions to improve the learners' speaking proficiency by developing an online learning condition in a flipped course. Based on the results, the developed online learning community improved positive and meaningful cooperation and ameliorated the learners' speaking proficiency (Wu et al., 2017).

2.4   Speaking structural accuracy

Luoma (2009) posits that speech is a primary medium for individuals to present and articulate themselves. The intricacies of speech, such as pausing, speed variations, pitch modulation, volume

adjustments, and intonation, collectively weave a texture that enriches and amplifies verbal expression. For years, academia has been embroiled in a debate concerning the primacy of accuracy over fluency in speech production and vice versa, and this accuracy-versus-fluency quandary continues to preoccupy scholars.

Brown and Lee (2015) note a temporary shift away from an emphasis on grammar during the 1970s, during which educators began sidelining accuracy in favor of immersing students in more organic language activities. They highlight the dilemma educators often face: the balancing act of prioritizing both accurate (clear, articulate, grammatically and phonologically sound) and fluent (seamless and natural) language as dual objectives in teaching speech. Moreover, Brown and Lee (2015) underline the indispensable roles of both fluency and accuracy in effective communication.

3 Research questions

To address the uncertainties and challenges related to the efficacy and benefits of SDL vs. TLI, this study poses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do the effects of Self-Directed Learning (SDL) and Teacher-Led Instruction (TLI) vary on the oral proficiency and speaking structural accuracy of Intermediate and Advanced EFL learners?

RQ2: How effective are Self-Directed Learning (SDL) and Teacher-Led Instruction (TLI) in enhancing the fluency and accuracy of EFL learners' speaking skills?

4 Methods

4.1 Participants

A total of 60 Iranian EFL learners, aged between 16 to 33, were initially selected from intact classes. To determine their proficiency levels, these students undertook the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). Based on the test results, 52 qualified participants were selected. They were then randomly assigned to two distinct groups: Self-Directed Learning (SDL) and Teacher-Led Instruction (TLI). Among these participants, 38 were female (18 in the SDL group and 20 in the TLI group), and 14 were male (4 in SDL and 10 in TLI). An equal number from the selected participants, i.e., 26, were designated as either intermediate or advanced in proficiency.

The first experimental group consisted of 26 students (13 intermediate and 13 advanced) and were instructed through the self-directed learning approach. Conversely, the second group, also comprising 26 students (13 intermediate and 13 advanced), received teacher-led instruction. For the qualitative phase of the study, 10 participants (5 intermediate and 5 advanced) from both the SDL and TLI groups were chosen via convenience sampling. They were then tasked with writing narratives reflecting on the impact of SDL and TLI in enhancing their speaking fluency and accuracy.

4.2 Instrumentation

4.2.1 Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

To determine participants' general proficiency levels and to classify them into advanced and intermediate groups, version 2 of the quick Oxford Placement Test (OPT) (Cambridge ESOL, 2001) was administered. The test comprises 60 questions, each valued at one point. The scoring scale ranges up to 40 for the first section and up to 60 for the entire test.

4.2.2 IELTS Speaking Test

IELTS speaking tests were used in this study to assess the oral proficiency and speaking structural accuracy of the participants. All of the participants were presented with some samples of the IELTS

speaking test (Cambridge ESOL, 2009). The test entailed three sections.

In Section One, participants first shared brief personal information and then spoke on a given topic for 4-5 minutes. In Section Two, participants received a cue card and discussed a specific topic for 3-4 minutes, after a 1-minute preparation period. In Section Three, participants responded to more complex questions for 4-5 minutes, elaborating their answers with additional explanations and examples.

Concerning the scoring system, the IELTS well-known band scores ranging from 1 to 9 (non-user to the expert user) were used for assessing the participants' general level of oral proficiency. To score the participants' speaking structural accuracy, a holistic rating scale of grammatical accuracy designed by Purpura (2013) was employed (Appendix A). The presented scale ranged from 1-2 (none), 3-4 (limited), 5-6 (moderate), 7-8 (extensive), and 9-10 (complete). Besides using this holistic scoring rubric, the components of grammatical knowledge measured in the structure subtest of the Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT) were considered and modeled (Appendix B).

CELT has classified grammatical knowledge into two main parts of the grammatical form (accuracy) and grammatical meaning (meaningfulness). This rating scale (Harris & Palmer, 1986) has been specifically designed to measure the English language capability of nonnative speakers (Purpura, 2013).

As the participants were also non-native learners of English, these components seemed rational enough to pursue. Intercoder agreements were also considered for assessing the participants' speaking structural accuracy and oral proficiency, which means that the raters' categorizations and codes were compared and analyzed. To do so, two raters scored the participants' speaking performance and correlation coefficients were computed between their ratings.

All the coefficients for the outcomes of oral proficiency and speaking structural accuracy in the pretest and posttest phases were found above .8, showing high agreement between the raters.

4.2.3 Narrative inquiry

To assess the potential impact of SDL and TLI, both intermediate and advanced EFL learners were prompted to craft narratives detailing their experiences. These narratives focused on how each of the two approaches benefitted their speaking accuracy and fluency. The decision to use narratives stemmed from their capacity as introspective tools, providing deeper insights, often likened to adding 'more flesh to the bone.' Out of the entire group, ten students were selected for this narrative task. To ensure representation from both proficiency levels, five were from the intermediate level and five from the advanced level. Additionally, five students were chosen from the TLI group, and the other five from the SDL group.

4.3 Data collection procedure

After obtaining the consent of the participants, the initial phase of the study aimed to ensure participants' level of homogeneity by administering the Oxford Placement Test (OPT), version 2. The purpose of the OPT was to categorize learners into intermediate and advanced proficiency levels for both SDL and TLI groups. A one-way ANOVA was employed to verify differences between these groups based on their proficiency levels.

The results indicated significant differences in the mean OPT scores between groups ($p < .05$). Pairwise post hoc comparisons with a Bonferroni adjustment were used to determine specific group differences. Both advanced SDL and TLI groups, when compared with their intermediate counterparts, had no significant differences in scores ($p > .05$). However, there was a significant difference between the advanced groups and the intermediate groups ($p < .05$), with the advanced groups having notably higher OPT scores.

Out of the initial 60 participants, 52 were deemed eligible and were then divided into two groups: SDL and TLI, each comprising 26 participants. This included 13 learners at the intermediate level and 13 at the advanced level in each group. To discern potential differences between teacher-led and

self-directed groups, a pretest was conducted before treatment. The IELTS speaking test was administered to gauge their oral proficiency and speaking structural accuracy. Prior to the experiment, specific topics from the IELTS speaking test were selected, and participants were asked to discuss them. To ensure consistency, all groups were presented with the same topics and situations.

Instruction during this phase spanned eight sessions for all groups, with classes held thrice a week, each lasting about 90 minutes. The first group's instruction was grounded in self-directed learning principles, specifically Garrison's (1997) SDL model. This model emphasizes fostering learners' self-management skills, motivation, and self-monitoring abilities. Self-management focuses on achieving learning objectives and managing resources, characterized by goal management, diverse learning techniques, and continuous cooperative assessment. Self-monitoring, as explained by Garrison (1997), involves cognitive and metacognitive processes, allowing learners to strategize and reflect on their thinking process. Motivation, on the other hand, reflects the perceived value of learning objectives and adapts cognition and context as learning progresses. A detailed diagram of this model can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
Self-directed learning model (Garrison, 1997)
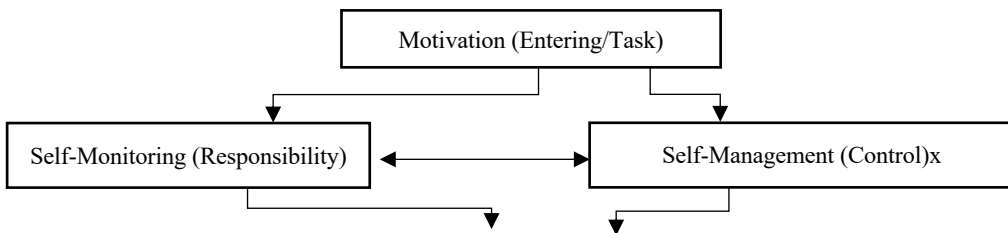
Participants in the TLI group were instructed based on the principles of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). The choice of GTM was influenced by its teacher-centric nature, where full authority is vested in language instructors. As noted by Brown and Lee (2015), this method is "teacher-centered, emphasizing grammatical rules, vocabulary, and the translation of texts" (p. 17), highlighting the pivotal role teachers play as primary sources of input.

Both groups used the 'New Headway' textbook, Fourth edition, authored by John and Liz Soars (2012) and published by Oxford University Press. The primary emphasis in both instructional methods was enhancing learners' speaking abilities. Hence, the speaking sections of 'New Headway' were predominantly utilized and practiced in class, but with distinct instructional methodologies.

Posttests were administered to both intermediate and advanced EFL participants roughly two to three days following the final instructional session. Specifically, to discern potential differences in oral proficiency and speaking structural accuracy between the self-directed and teacher-led groups, the IELTS speaking test sections were administered for a second time. While the topics and questions from the pretest phase were retained, new ones were introduced. The rationale behind supplementing with new topics was to evaluate students' preparedness to tackle unfamiliar subjects, having undergone numerous instructional sessions focused on enhancing their speaking capabilities, especially concerning structural accuracy and overall proficiency. Consequently, they were presented with both new and previously encountered IELTS speaking topics. At the course's conclusion, to gain insights into the impacts of SDL and TLI on students' speaking fluency and accuracy, participants were prompted to write narratives detailing their experiences.

5   Results

5.1   *Responding to research question 1*

The primary objective of the first research question was to determine any statistically significant differences between Intermediate and Advanced EFL learners concerning the impact of SDL versus TLI on their oral proficiency and speaking structural accuracy. This question encompassed two dependent variables: oral proficiency and speaking structural accuracy. It also dealt with two independent variables: proficiency level (Intermediate or Advanced) and treatment type (SDL or TLI). Consequently, to address this question, a factorial ANCOVA was conducted for each dependent variable.

The study aimed to discern potential disparities between the two levels of each independent variable: proficiency level and treatment type. Thus, factorial analysis was essential to simultaneously evaluate both independent variables. Since the initial equivalence of the groups regarding the dependent variables at the study's onset (i.e., pretest) remained uncertain, it was crucial to control for possible pretest differences by utilizing ANCOVA instead of ANOVA.

Before executing the factorial ANCOVA, the data's normality needed verification. Hence, skewness and kurtosis ratios were computed. As indicated in Table 1, all ratios fell within the range of -1.96 to +1.96, confirming the data's normality. Subsequent sections delve into the analysis for each dependent variable, discussed under distinct headings.

Table 1.

Descriptive statistics for SDL and TLI oral proficiency pretest and posttest scores across proficiency levels

SDL.TLI	Proficiency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std.Error	Kurtosis	Std.Error
SDL	Intermediate Oral.Proficiency.Pre	13	5.55	.51	.87	.61	-.06	1.19
	Oral.Proficiency.Post	13	6.13	.37	-.08	.61	-1.00	1.19
	Structural.Accuracy.Pre	13	5.65	.82	.46	.6	-1.02	1.19
	Structural.Accuracy.Post	13	6.92	.81	.56	.6	-.71	1.19
	Valid N (listwise)	13						
	Advanced Oral.Proficiency.Pre	13	6.69	.42	.54	.61	-.87	1.19
	Oral.Proficiency.Post	13	7.26	.41	-.53	.61	-.78	1.19
	Structural.Accuracy.Pre	13	6.57	1.05	-.55	.61	-.16	1.19
	Structural.Accuracy.Post	13	8.15	1.06	.01	.61	-.59	1.19
	Valid N (listwise)	13						
TLI	Intermediate Oral.Proficiency..Pre	13	5.80	.50	-.44	.61	-1.00	1.19
	Oral.Proficiency..Post	13	6.05	.55	-.29	.61	-.64	1.19
	Structural.Accuracy.Pre	13	6.34	.85	-.27	.61	-.97	1.19
	Structural.Accuracy.Post	13	6.57	.88	.04	.61	-.30	1.19
	Valid N (listwise)	13						
	Advanced Oral.Proficiency.Pre	13	6.80	.41	-.16	.61	-.16	1.19
	Oral.Proficiency.Post	13	7.01	.45	-.23	.61	-1.33	1.19
	Structural.Accuracy.Pre	13	8.15	1.23	-.38	.61	.64	1.19
	Structural.Accuracy.Post	13	8.42	1.11	-.57	.61	.48	1.19
	Valid N (listwise)	13						

5.1.1 Comparing SDL-TLI treatments across proficiency levels in terms of oral proficiency

Following the confirmation of data normality, the homogeneity of variances—another AN-COVA assumption—was assessed using Levene's test. The results in Table 2 indicate that this assumption is satisfied ($p > .05$).

Table 2.
Levene's test of equality of error variances[a]

Dependent Variable: Oral.Proficiency.Post

F	df1	df2	Sig.
.78	3	48	.51

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.
a. Design: Intercept + Oral.Proficiency..Pre + SDL.TLI + Proficiency + SDL.TLI * Proficiency

Table 3 displays both the results for checking the homogeneity of regression slopes assumption (i.e., the interaction between the covariate and independent variable should not exist) and the primary factorial ANCOVA outcomes. Rows 3 and 4 confirm that the assumption regarding the homogeneity of regression slopes is satisfied ($p > .05$).

Row 5 reveals a significant difference in the groups' pretest performances ($p < .05$), but this initial disparity is controlled by the ANCOVA as the covariate. The data from row 6 shows a notable difference between the SDL and TLI groups in the posttest, with the Group $F(4,47) = 11.614$, $p < .05$, and a medium to large effect size indicated by Partial Eta Squared = .198.

Table 4, presenting the adjusted oral proficiency means for SDL and TLI groups, reveals that the SDL group has a significantly higher mean score for oral proficiency compared to the TLI group ($p < .05$). Thus, the null hypothesis related to the first research question is rejected concerning treatment groups. In simpler terms, the impact of SDL vs. TLI on oral proficiency is statistically significant, regardless of the students' proficiency level—whether advanced or intermediate.

Row 7 showcases the main results of the factorial ANCOVA, considering both independent variables. The outcomes indicate no significant differences across the levels of proficiency and treatment types ($p > .05$), signifying no interaction between the SDL-TLI treatment type's effect and proficiency levels, as detailed in Table 5..

Table 3.
Test of between-subjects effects

Dependent Variable: Oral.Proficiency.Post

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	20.14[a]	4	5.03	53.58	.00	.82
Intercept	1.19	1	1.19	12.67	.00	.21
Proficiency*Oral.Proficiency..Pre	.06	1	.06	.69	.40	
SDL.TLI*Oral.Proficiency.Pre	.17	1	.17	1.97	.16	
Oral.Proficiency.Pre	5.41	1	5.41	57.65	.00	.55
SDL.TLI	1.09	1	1.09	11.61	.00	.19
SDL.TLI*Proficiency	.01	1	.01	.19	.66	.00
Error	4.41	47	.09			
Total	2303.56	52				
Corrected Total	24.56	51				

a. R Squared = .820 (Adjusted R Squared = .805)

Table 4.
Adjusted oral proficiency means of SDL TLI groups

Dependent Variable: Oral.Proficiency.Post

SDL.TLI	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
SDL	6.76[a]	.06	6.64	6.89
TLI	6.47[a]	.06	6.35	6.59

Table 5.
Adjusted oral proficiency means of SDL TLI and proficiency groups

Dependent Variable: Oral.Proficiency.Post

SDL.TLI	Proficiency	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
SDL	Intermediate	6.61[a]	.10	6.39	6.82
	Advanced	6.92[a]	.09	6.73	7.11
TLI	Intermediate	6.35[a]	.09	6.16	6.54
	Advanced	6.59[a]	.10	6.38	6.79

a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Oral.Proficiency.Pre= 6.2163.

That is, SDL treatment is a more effective treatment than TLI to improve students' oral proficiency, no matter if the students are sitting in advanced or intermediate level classes. Simply speaking, intermediate and advanced students benefited equally from the effect of SDL treatment to improve their oral proficiency.

5.1.2 *Comparing SDL-TLI treatments across proficiency levels in terms of speaking structural accuracy*

After ensuring the normality of the data, homogeneity of variances, as another assumption of ANCOVA, was tested by running Levene's test. Related results in Table 6 delineate that this assumption is not met (p < .05), so a stricter p-value (i.e., .025) was considered in the main ANCOVA results to avoid committing Type I error.

Table 6.
Levene's test of equality of error variances[a]

Dependent Variable: Structural.Accuracy.Post

F	df1	df2	Sig.
6.14	3	48	.00

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.
a. Design: Intercept + Structural.Accuracy.Pre + SDL.TLI + Proficiency + SDL.TLI * Proficiency

Table 7 demonstrates the results of the check on the homogeneity of regression slopes assumption and the main factorial ANCOVA results. The 3rd and 4th rows indicate that the homogeneity of regression slopes assumption is met (p > .05).

The 5th row illustrates that the groups were definitely different on the pretest phase of the study (p < .05), but we knew that ANCOVA would control this initial pretest difference as the covariate. The 6th row demonstrates that the SDL and TLI groups are significantly different on the posttest; Group $F_{(4,47)} = 28.38$, p < .05, Partial Eta Squared = .37 large effect size. As per Table 8 presenting the

adjusted oral proficiency means of SDL TLI groups, the SDL group has a significantly higher Structural Accuracy mean score than the TLI group ($p < .05$). So far, it is therefore concluded that the null hypothesis to the first research question was rejected in terms of treatment groups. Hence, the effect of SDL vs. TLI on speaking structural accuracy was statistically different, disregarding the students' proficiency levels.

The main results of the factorial ANCOVA, presented in the 7th row, account for both independent variables. These results underscore that there are no statistically significant differences across the proficiency levels and treatment type groups ($p > .05$), as detailed in Table 9. In essence, there's no interaction between the SDL-TLI treatment type's effects and proficiency levels. Put differently, the SDL treatment proved to be more efficacious than the TLI approach in enhancing students' structural accuracy in speaking, regardless of whether they were at the intermediate or advanced level. In simpler terms, both intermediate and advanced students experienced equal benefits from the SDL treatment in elevating their structural accuracy in speaking.

Table 7.
Tests of between-subjects effects

Dependent Variable: Structural.Accuracy.Post

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	63.47ᵃ	4	15.86	51.40	.00	.81
Intercept	4.86	1	4.86	15.74	.00	.25
SDL.TLI * Structural.Accuracy.Pre	.42	1	.42	1.40	.24	
Proficiency* Structural.Accuracy.Pre	.07	1	.07	.22	.63	
Structural.Accuracy.Pre	31.45	1	31.45	101.89	.00	.68
SDL.TLI	8.76	1	8.76	28.38	.00	.37
SDL.TLI * Proficiency	.02	1	.02	.09	.76	.00
Error	14.50	47	.30			
Total	3018.00	52				
Corrected Total	77.98	51				

a. R Squared = .814 (Adjusted R Squared = .798)

Table 8.
Adjusted speaking structural accuracy means of SDL TLI groups

Dependent Variable: Structural.Accuracy.Post

SDL.TLI	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
SDL	7.99ᵃ	.11	7.75	8.23
TLI	7.04ᵃ	.11	6.80	7.28

a.   Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Structural.Accuracy.Pre = 6.68

Table 9.
Adjusted speaking structural accuracy means of SDL TLI and proficiency groups

Dependent Variable: Structural.Accuracy.Post

SDL.TLI	Proficiency	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
SDL	Intermediate	7.75ᵃ	.17	7.40	8.10

	Advanced	8.23[a]	.15	7.92	8.54
TLI	Intermediate	6.84[a]	.15	6.53	7.16
	Advanced	7.23[a]	.19	6.84	7.62

a.   Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Structural.Accuracy.Pre = 6.68.

In conclusion, the null hypothesis related to the first research question was confirmed. Specifically, there was no statistically significant difference observed between the intermediate and advanced EFL learners concerning the impact of SDL vs. TLI on their oral proficiency and speaking structural accuracy. This indicates that learners at both proficiency levels derived equivalent benefits from the SDL approach over the TLI method in this study.

5.2   Responding to research question 2

The second research question aimed to determine the efficacy of SDL vs. TLI in enhancing EFL learners' oral fluency and accuracy. To address this, ten participants (comprising 5 intermediate and 5 advanced learners) were asked to create narratives detailing the effectiveness of the SDL and TLI methods in improving their speaking fluency and accuracy. Their responses were then subjected to content and thematic analysis to extract predominant themes. Frequency analyses were subsequently employed to identify the most commonly cited perspectives from the EFL learners.

Table 10 outlines the themes derived from the participants' narratives.

Table 10.
EFL learners' extracted themes regarding how SDL could be effective on promoting their fluency and accuracy in speaking

EFL learners' most frequent answers	Frequency for intermediate EFL learners	Frequency for advanced EFL learners	Percentage for intermediate EFL learners	Percentage for advanced EFL learners
1-SDL leads to a greater understanding of yourself and helps to discover your needs.	1	2	10	20
2-SDL makes learners successful in challenging situations of speaking.	2	1	20	10
3-SDL makes learners autonomous in understanding their problems in fluency and accuracy.	3	2	30	20
4-SDL enables learners to assess their progress.	1	3	10	30
5-SDL enables learners to establish successful relationships with others.	--	1	--	10
6-SDL helps learners to be responsible for their success and failure.	2	2	20	20
7-SDL informs learners of the strategies effective for them. .	2	2	20	20

Learners' narratives illustrated that SDL mainly helped intermediate learners to become autonomous in finding their problems for mastering their fluency and accuracy (30%), more than advanced ones. Moreover, it aided them in successfully dealing with challenging speaking situations, becoming responsible for their success and failure, and raising their awareness of effective strategies. Similarly, as reported, SDL helped them to feel autonomous in finding their problems concerning mastering fluency and accuracy in both intermediate and advanced levels (intermediate: 30%, advanced: 20%). Moreover, SDL mainly helped advanced learners to assess their progress (30%).

SDL generally contributed to the EFL learners' autonomy, helped them to take responsibility for their success and failure, and informed them of the effective strategies. The participants' related remarks are presented in the following extracts.

Excerpt 1
Intermediate learner: *I can tell that the most main thing about the role of SDL is that it will make you a more independent student. It means that you will you will independently understand your problems in accuracy and fluency. You will take responsibility for your learning too. You will also be able to understand yourself and your needs.*

Excerpt 2
Advanced learner: *It shows you how to become autonomous and independent. As a result, you will not need a teacher around the clock, in all situations, for telling your mistakes in accuracy and fluency. It also helps you perform better in problematic and harder conditions of speaking English. If you can practice self-directed learning better, you can also understand which strategies are better for you when learning. Additionally, you will know which points are the problematic points of speaking.*

The participants in both groups were also asked to discuss the benefits of TLI in promoting their speaking accuracy and fluency (Table 11).

Table 11.
EFL learners' extracted themes regarding how TLI could be effective on promoting their fluency and accuracy in speaking

EFL learners' most frequent answers	Frequency for intermediate EFL learners	Frequency for advanced EFL learners	Percentage for intermediate EFL learners	Percentage for advanced EFL learners
1-Teacher is the key figure responsible for everything in your speaking process.	2	3	20	30
2-Teacher decides on every aspect of speaking.	1	2	10	20
3-Teacher guides and manages the process of speaking.	3	1	30	10
4-Teacher helps learners when they face difficulty in their speaking.	2	1	20	10
5-Teacher decides what is important and what the learner should learn to promote their accuracy and fluency.	1	--	10	--

6-Teacher decides which materials are appropriate for learners' proficiency level.	2	2	20	20
7-Teacher sets the learning goals and plans for future learning.	--	1	--	10
8-TLI is a type of instruction monitored by a professional and knowledgeable teacher.	--	2	--	20
9-Teacher decides what learning strategies are proper for learners.	1	2	10	20

As the responses to this interview question indicate, intermediate EFL learners mainly voted for the teachers' role as that of guiding and managing the process of learning how to speak (30%). Giving more examples, they also considered teachers to be responsible for everything, e.g., the way they could help them in the face of difficulties, in mastering their speaking skill, and deciding about appropriate materials based on the proficiency levels of the students.

Additionally, advanced learners primarily regarded the teacher as a key figure responsible for everything in speaking (30%), more than intermediate learners. They also believed that a teacher is a person who decides on every facet of instruction and decides what materials are appropriate for learners at any proficiency level. The discussed points are presented in the following extracts.

Excerpt 3
Intermediate learner: *Teachers help you in everything for your speaking. I mean, for example, how to speak, what to talk about, how to communicate better, how to act, and everything related. In these classes, the teacher will manage the class most of the time. I mean that in most of the class time, the teachers will help the students in almost everything. They will always answer the students' questions too.*

Excerpt 4
Advanced learner: *The teacher assists you detect what are some suitable materials for you at your level. She will let you understand your goals better. I mean that they help you in forming them. They bring some books, booklets, movies and everything that they think that are practical for you.*

All in all, the intermediate and advanced EFL learners found both approaches of SDL and TLI fruitful in improving their speaking accuracy and fluency.

6. Discussion

EFL learners, irrespective of their proficiency, derived significant benefits from Self-Directed Learning (SDL) in terms of enhanced oral proficiency and structural accuracy in speaking. Such outcomes align with previous research, suggesting that SDL effectively bolsters speaking accuracy (e.g., Majedi & Pishkar, 2016) and can be versatile enough to enhance language proficiency beyond traditional classroom environments (e.g., Suleiman & Maniam, 2019).

One of the salient outcomes of SDL, as noted by participants, is the development of learner autonomy, a finding consistent with earlier research (e.g., Yang, 2016; Ozer & Yukselir, 2021). While studies have pointed out synergies between SDL and collaborative learning (e.g., Damian & Georgescu, 2014; Barragán Torres, 2013), participants in the present study did not explicitly connect SDL to collaboration, revealing a potential area for further exploration.

As for the Teacher-Led Instruction (TLI) approach, participants perceived the teacher as a pivotal figure guiding their learning process. This perspective underscores the notion that while TLI may

be criticized for its teacher-centric nature, it still holds value in the educational paradigm. Contrary to popular misconceptions, teachers in TLI contexts aren't merely dictatorial figures but facilitators in the learning journey (e.g., Serin, 2018).While some scholars have critiqued TLI for its limitations compared to learner-centered methodologies (e.g., Lak et al., 2017; Kassem, 2019), a harmonized integration of both approaches seems to be the most endorsed stance in the pedagogical community (e.g., Al-Zu'be, 2013; Emaliana, 2017).

7. Conclusion and implications

This study has shed valuable light on the effectiveness of Self-Directed Learning (SDL) versus Teacher-Led Instruction (TLI) for intermediate and advanced EFL learners. The evident takeaway is the pronounced benefits of SDL in enhancing oral proficiency and speaking structural accuracy, especially when compared to TLI. Yet, the merit of TLI, with its more structured and guided approach, shouldn't be undervalued, particularly as it places the teacher in the role of a guide, curator of materials, and a decision-maker.

However, the shift from an over-reliance on the teacher to empowering students as autonomous learners is what stands out. Through SDL, learners become more proactive, taking charge of their own learning process, and deriving strategies that best suit their unique learning curve. This kind of ownership not only builds a robust learning foundation but also instills a level of confidence in students, preparing them for real-world challenges.

Teachers, in this light, play a pivotal role in this transformation. They can harness the strengths of both SDL and TLI to create a harmonious blend that maximizes the students' learning potential. This study emphasizes the need for teachers to take a more fluid role, sometimes stepping back to let students navigate, and at other times stepping in to offer guidance. Such an approach can ensure that learning is holistic, adaptive, and aligned with the needs of the modern learner.

Given the scope of the study, there are certain limitations and delimitations, including factors such as the number of treatment sessions, the potential bias in student narratives, the socio-cultural backgrounds of the participants, and concerns of generalizability. Such constraints hint at potential avenues for further exploration.

Subsequent research could delve deeper into optimizing the duration and frequency of treatment sessions or focus on understanding how socio-cultural factors influence preference and effectiveness of SDL versus TLI. Moreover, understanding these learning approaches in the context of other communicative abilities, like pragmatic and interactional competence, could give educators a holistic understanding of the EFL landscape. Expanding the geographical scope of the study could also offer insights into cross-cultural nuances in the learning process.

In conclusion, while this study underscores the strengths of SDL, it also posits the relevance of TLI. What's clear is the need for a balanced, flexible teaching approach that serves the evolving needs of the modern EFL learner. Future research can help further fine-tune this balance, paving the way for more effective and adaptive learning environments.

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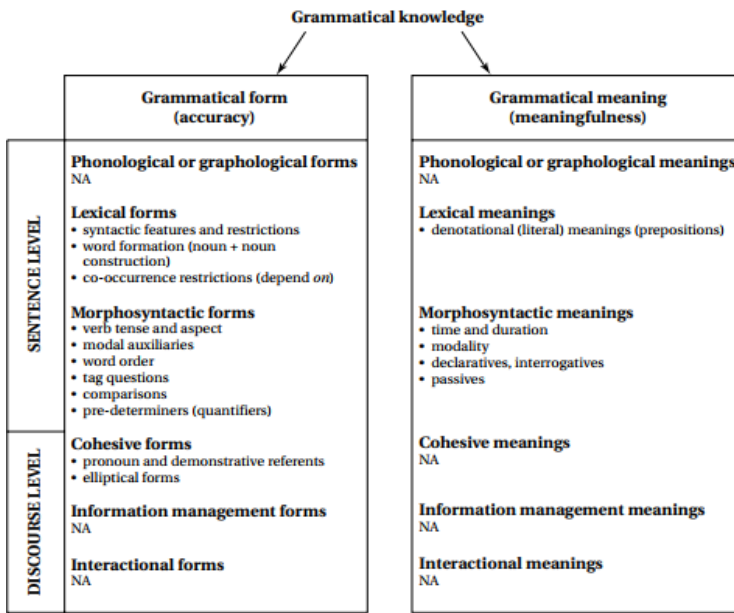
Appendix A.

A Holistic Rating Scale of Grammatical Accuracy (Purpura, 2013)

	Descriptors
9-10 Complete	Demonstrates **complete grammatical control** for the task; full range of grammatical forms; may have a few random minor errors; wide and sophisticated range of vocabulary
7-8 Extensive	Demonstrates **extensive grammatical control** for the task; large range of grammatical forms; may have some error types (e.g., articles) that do not impede communication; wide range of vocabulary
5-6 Moderate	Demonstrates **moderate to good grammatical control** for the task; limited range of grammatical forms; may have a few errors which impede communication; a moderate range of vocabulary
3-4 Limited	Demonstrates **limited grammatical control** for the task; small range of grammatical forms; may have several error types which impede communication; a limited range of vocabulary
1-2 None	Demonstrates **poor grammatical control** for the task; extremely limited range of grammatical forms; may have several error types which often impede communication; a limited range of vocabulary

Appendix B.

Components of Grammatical Knowledge Measured in the Structure Subtest of CELT (Purpura, 2013)

Grammatical knowledge

Grammatical form (accuracy)	Grammatical meaning (meaningfulness)
SENTENCE LEVEL	
Phonological or graphological forms NA	**Phonological or graphological meanings** NA
Lexical forms • syntactic features and restrictions • word formation (noun + noun construction) • co-occurrence restrictions (depend *on*)	**Lexical meanings** • denotational (literal) meanings (prepositions)
Morphosyntactic forms • verb tense and aspect • modal auxiliaries • word order • tag questions • comparisons • pre-determiners (quantifiers)	**Morphosyntactic meanings** • time and duration • modality • declaratives, interrogatives • passives
DISCOURSE LEVEL	
Cohesive forms • pronoun and demonstrative referents • elliptical forms	**Cohesive meanings** NA
Information management forms NA	**Information management meanings** NA
Interactional forms NA	**Interactional meanings** NA

NA = not applicable

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