SNAP TO READ

"NO ONE IS JUDGING": EXPLORING STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF SELF-DIRECTED DIALOGUE FOR EFL SPEAKING PRACTICE

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Abstract:
Speaking is an important skill in English language learning since it demonstrates students' capacity to communicate effectively. However, students frequently confront difficulties such as a lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, limited opportunity for practice, and a fear of being judged by others. Self-Directed Dialog (SDD) is a flexible, self-contained strategy that allows learners to regularly practice speaking skills. This more personalized and supportive practice environment can help students gain confidence, overcome their fear of peer judgment, and expand their opportunities to learn English. This research aims to explore students' experiences in using the SDD method in their English-speaking skills and to analyse the various challenges they face during its implementation. This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. Data were obtained through observations, document review, and interviews with ten students recruited through purposive sampling. All data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify thematic patterns from students' experiences and challenges while using the SDD method. The findings indicate that students consider SDD as a flexible and personal space for practicing speaking. They feel more comfortable when speaking, especially when they can rehearse independently without fear of immediate peer evaluation. Students also view SDD as a tool for increasing their awareness of errors, reviewing voice recordings, and using digital learning tools

to support their practice. This encounter instils a sense of learner autonomy and personal accountability. During autonomous practice, students face a number of hurdles, including difficulty structuring ideas, a limited vocabulary, and pronunciation issues. This study recommends the implementation of SDD as an effective alternative method to improve students' speaking skills in a sustainable and student-cantered English learning environment.

Keywords: *Phenomenology, self-directed dialogue, speaking ability, students' experiences, speaking challenges*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is an important part of English language learning since it allows students to develop and convey meaning, articulate ideas, provide appropriate responses, and engage in interaction (Agustina et al., 2024; Nathania, 2024; Shahini & Shahamirian, 2017). Unlike receptive skills, speaking needs learners to analyse and produce language in real time; thus, opportunities for regular oral practice are critical for building communicative competence. However, improving speaking abilities can be difficult for EFL learners since opportunities for meaningful verbal communication are frequently limited especially in classroom settings, when students have little opportunity to effectively use English.

These challenges also exist in the Indonesian EFL context. studies indicate that students can become hesitant to speak English due to a lack of confidence, a fear of making mistakes, and worry about being judged by others as having inadequate speaking skills (Fauzi & Asi, 2023; Mustamir, 2024). Limited opportunities for oral practice further limit student participation in speaking activities. Furthermore, classroom interaction is frequently teacher-cantered; teachers dominate the majority of the discourse, providing students with fewer opportunities to practice their speaking skills listeners (Asysyfa et al., 2019; Kurniati et al., 2015). Such settings can prevent students from having enough opportunities to practice speaking and gain confidence in speaking English. Consequently, the difficulties encountered are related not

only to students' linguistic limitations such as a limited vocabulary, but also to the availability of opportunities and the psychological factors surrounding speaking practice.

Limited possibilities for oral practice highlight the importance of learning environments that allow students to have more flexibility over their speaking practice outside of teacher-directed interactions. Self-Directed Learning (SDL) is a relevant educational approach that promotes learners' active participation in regulating their learning process through goal setting, learning strategy selection, progress monitoring, and learning outcome evaluation (Butarbutar, 2023; Rojabi & Femilia, 2025). In language acquisition, a self-directed approach allows students to practice at their own speed and needs without relying solely on teacher-directed activities (Kang & Sung, 2024; Rana et al., 2016).Learner-directed practice is important in speaking because it offers students more opportunities to use and practice English without the direct interpersonal constraints that can develop in classroom speaking activities.

Self-Directed Dialog (SDD) is an innovative approach to autonomous speaking practice within the context of self-directed learning. SDD can be defined as a learner-cantered speaking practice strategy in which students engage in structured or spontaneous conversation without requiring direct engagement with teachers or their peers (Imaliyah et al., 2024). Simulated conversations, self-dialogues, or audio recordings allow students to play the roles of both speaker and listener, providing opportunities for independent and repetitive English practice (Jannah et al., 2023; Supriyanto & Baso, 2024). These activities can also motivate students to check and reflect on their speaking abilities by listening to recordings, recognizing problems, and contemplating ways to improve. Importantly, the somewhat private aspect of SDD can provide a less stressful environment for students to practice speaking, particularly for those who are hesitant to speak for fear of making mistakes or being criticized by others. In this study, SDD is not positioned as a strategy that automatically enhances speaking skills, but rather as a

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learner-controlled speaking practice approach that can provide additional opportunities for speaking and reflection.

SDD can be defined as a learner cantered speaking practice technique in which students engage in structured or spontaneous speaking activities without relying on direct interaction with others. This technique integrates cognitive and metacognitive processes of language learning, allowing learners to monitor and evaluate their own speaking performance in real time (Lai & Admiraal, 2022). The benefits of SDD are multidimensional: cognitively, it enhances language processing and memory retrieval affectively, it reduces anxiety and builds confidence by eliminating fear of judgment and linguistically, it improves pronunciation, grammar accuracy, and fluency through repetitive, reflective speaking practice. By encouraging learners to actively construct meaning and simulate authentic communication, SDD becomes an effective tool for developing communicative competence in a self-paced and stress-free environment.

In practice, SDD includes various activities designed to intensively and continuously train speaking skills. Students can simulate conversations in various situations, such as ordering food at a restaurant, speaking in a job interview, or expressing opinions in a discussion (Supriyanto & Baso, 2024). In addition, they can also use technology such as voice recording applications or artificial intelligence to receive feedback on their pronunciation and fluency. With consistent practice, students can enrich their vocabulary, improve their grammar, and enhance their clarity and fluency in speaking. SDD also encourages students to be more active and independent in improving their speaking skills, so they are better prepared to face communication challenges in both academic and professional environments (Nova et al., 2022). This approach encourages students to be more active and consistent in practicing their speaking skills, making it a practical solution to overcome the lack of speaking practice in school environments.

Previous study has investigated into SDD and other self-directed speaking activities, but the primary focus has been on instructional delivery

and speaking outcomes. For example, Nova et al. (2022) investigated SDD in 10th-grade students using a Classroom Action Research design, focusing on classroom observations and speaking tests to determine improvements during the intervention. Similarly, Fadillah and Syarifuddin (2022) and Jannah et al. (2023) conducted a pre-experimental study to investigate the utilization of dialogue-based speaking activities or self-directed learning with EFL students. These studies provide useful evidence for implementing SDD in the classroom and its potential educational usefulness. However, these research designs offer limited insight into how students perceive SDD as a form of self-directed speaking practice. Little emphasis has been placed on students' perceptions of practicing without direct interaction with teachers or peers, their experiences with confidence and fear of assessment, their self-monitoring and reflection processes, and the challenges they face when managing their self-directed speaking practice.

This experiential gap is crucial since the value of a self-directed speaking strategy cannot be measured just by speaking performance results. Students' experiences could reflect how they perceive the autonomy, responsibility, and challenges are associated with guiding their own learning practices. As a result, a phenomenological approach is appropriate for investigating the lived experiences that underpin students' engagement in SDD. Rather than assessing whether SDD leads to measurable speaking improvements, this approach enables researchers to investigate how students perceive SDD, how they interpret their self-directed speaking activities, and what challenges arise during the process. This understanding provides a more comprehensive picture of the circumstances under which SDD can serve as a supportive approach to speaking practice in Indonesian EFL contexts.

Therefore, this study uses a phenomenological qualitative design to investigate students' experiences with SDD for English speaking practice and the challenges they confront during implementation. By focusing on students' experiences, this study seeks to provide empirical insights into learner-controlled speaking practices and their potential role in addressing

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students' limited oral practice opportunities and concerns about speaking in front of others. Thus, this study attempted to answer the following research questions: How do students experience self-directed dialogue in developing their speaking abilities? and What challenges do students face while using the self-directed dialogue method in their speaking ability?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design (Creswell & Poth, 2016) to explore students' lived experiences with SDD for English speaking practice. Phenomenology was used because the study sought to understand how students experience, interpret, and reflect on their self-directed speaking practices, including their experiences with self-confidence, fear of judgment, and the numerous challenges they face when utilizing SDD. Semi-structured interviews were used to primarily explore participants' lived experiences, encouraging them to explain their experiences, feelings, reflections, and challenges while participating in SDD.

In accordance with a descriptive phenomenological perspective, the researchers used reflexive bracketing to identify and, to the extent possible, put aside initial assumptions concerning SDD during the data collecting and analysis processes. The analysis began with each participant's individual experience, followed by the identification of key statements and units of meaning related to their experiences via SDD. These meanings were then organized into themes that represented aspects of shared experiences among participants and synthesized to demonstrate the central meaning of the phenomena under investigation. Thus, phenomenological design not only serves as the foundation for investigating students' experiences, but it also guides the process of identifying shared meanings from their lived experiences when employing SDD.

Research Context and Settings

This study was carried out at a public high school in Jember, Indonesia, where English is taught as a compulsory subject. The school was chosen because it offers an appropriate Indonesian EFL background, with students of various levels of English language experience and proficiency. A tenth grade class of 35 learners took part in SDD activities.

Students' English proficiency was not assessed using a formal placement test. Instead, students' speaking ability was determined using their previous English language learning performance and their English teacher's evaluation of their speaking performance in class. These indications were utilized to gain an initial understanding of the students' speaking ability variations, rather than to establish formal proficiency levels. These proficiency variances were thought important for investigating how students perceive and respond to SDD as a kind of English speaking practice. Thus, this research context provided a suitable environment for investigating students' actual experiences and challenges when participating in SDD. The study focused on how students experienced and interpreted SDD as a form of English-speaking practice.

Research Participants

This study involved a class of 35 students. All 35 students took part in and were observed during SDD activities. Ten students were purposefully selected from this class to engage in individual semi-structured interviews. These interviews focused on a smaller group of students who were able to provide thorough descriptions of their actual experiences and the challenges they faced while engaging in SDD.

The ten participants in the interviews were purposefully selected based on several criteria: (1) variation in English speaking ability, as determined by previous English learning performance and English teacher assessments of students' speaking performance in class; (2) active participation in SDD activities; (3) willingness to participate in individual interviews; and (4) variation in students' experiences using English for speaking activities. This

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selection was made to include students with diverse levels of speaking ability and experience with SDD, allowing the study to represent the diversity of their lived experiences and challenges. Gender and attendance were not included as particular selection criteria because they were not relevant to the research questions. Thus, the sample is regarded appropriate for phenomenological study that focuses on how students perceive and interpret SDD as a form of English-speaking practice.

Ethical considerations were made throughout the research procedure. Students provided research consent prior to data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of the study's purpose and procedures. Confidentiality was preserved by using pseudonyms and eliminating any information that could identify the participants. Interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, and the data was used solely for research purposes.

Data Collection Technique

Classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document review were used in this study to explore students' lived experiences and challenges when using SDD as an English-speaking practice. Classroom observations provided background information on how students participated in SDD activities, whereas semi-structured interviews were the key source for investigating personal experiences, feelings, thoughts, and challenges. Documents were used as additional sources to help interpret the observation and interview data.

Non-participant observations were carried out during regular English classes for all 35 students in the class. SDD was administered in six sessions, each lasting about 60 minutes. Observations were made throughout the SDD to examine how students participated in speaking activities in a natural classroom setting. During the SDD sessions, students practiced SDD activities such as self-questioning and self-answering, picture-based speaking, simulated conversations, speaking practice, think-aloud speaking, self-reflection, and voice recording. An observation guide was used focused on

students' engagement in SDD, such as English use, participation in speaking activities, responses during dialog practice, self-monitoring or reflection, and challenges experienced during independent speaking. The observation guide was used to ensure consistency in observations across sessions while also allowing researchers to record unexpected or relevant classroom occurrences.

Observation data were recorded through field notes. Field notes documented observable student behavior, involvement, English use, participation in speaking activities, indicators of uncertainty or confidence, issues faced during SDD, and pertinent classroom circumstances. The observations were used to provide contextual information on students' experiences with SDD. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten purposively selected students after they participated in the SDD activity. The interview questions encouraged students to describe their experiences, how they experienced during the activity, what they found easy or difficult, how they dealt with different challenges, and how they perceived their time studying English using SDD. The interview approach was flexible, allowing researchers to ask follow-up questions if students' responses needed clarification or further investigation. Each interview lasted about 10-12 minutes and was conducted individually face-to-face to create an environment in which students could openly communicate their views. With participants' approval, interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed for analysis.

Document review was conducted as a supplementary data collection technique. The documents used included student speaking practice notes. Photographic documentation was also collected during classroom observations to document the context of the implementation and student engagement in SDD activities. These documents were used to provide contextual and supporting evidence in interpreting student-reported experiences and the results of classroom observations.

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Data Analysis

Data were analysed thematically within a descriptive phenomenological framework to understand the meaning of students' lived experiences with SDD for English-speaking practice. The analysis began with repeated reading of the interview transcripts and observation notes to identify significant statements and meaning units related to each participant's experiences. These meaning units were then coded and grouped into broader categories, from which themes representing common experiences and challenges were developed. Finally, the themes were compared across participants and synthesized to describe the shared meaning of their lived experiences with SDD. Therefore, the analysis was aimed at understanding how students experienced and interpreted the use of SDD.

Observation data were used to contextualize the experiences described in the interviews, notably during the 60-minute SDD sessions. During these sessions, students worked on self-questioning and self-answering, picture-based speaking, simulated conversations, speaking practice, think-aloud speaking, self-reflection, and voice recording. Observations focused on student engagement, speaking practice, responses, and challenges that emerged during the activities.

Trustworthiness was maintained through triangulation of interview and observation data, document review, theme checking against the original data, and member checking. Furthermore, a thorough description of the research setting and procedures was provided to facilitate transferability, while the analysis process was documented and interpretations were explicitly connected to participant data to ensure dependability and confirmability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Experiences of Self-Directed Dialogue for English-Speaking Practice

Transitioning from discomfort to adjustment

During observations, in the early stages of implementing the SDD method, most students exhibited stiffness and discomfort when asked to speak in English independently without a conversation partner. Although they felt strange practicing speaking alone, they showed that they were willing to practice speaking by asking for their friends' help, as shown in Figure 1. The observation implies that students first found SDD unfamiliar and uncomfortable, but they also demonstrated a willingness to adjust by seeking peer support. This suggests that the transition to autonomous speaking practice was gradual, rather than immediate.



Figure 1 A student practicing SDD with peer support due to initial discomfort.

This experience is also reinforced by interview data that show students' initial impressions when undergoing SDD practice.

> *"At first, I felt awkward because I wasn't used to talking by myself…" (S1),*
>
> *"At first, it felt strange because I had to speak alone, which made*

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me lack confidence…". (S3)

That awkwardness is part of the adjustment process to the new learning format, which demands courage, creativity, and self-reflection. The findings suggest that the feelings of awkwardness and insecurity were common among students, emphasizing the psychological challenge of transitioning from interactive to individual speaking tasks. Although this discomfort arose at the beginning of the implementation, in subsequent sessions, several students reported feeling more accustomed to the activity and more comfortable speaking independently. This indicates that the initial stage of discomfort is not a permanent barrier, but rather a part of the transition process towards more autonomous and reflective learning.

Thus, these findings reflect the natural dynamics of students in adapting to the SDD method. The awkwardness experienced at the beginning of learning is an important indication of the emotional challenges that need to be recognized by teachers, so they can provide appropriate support in the early stages of independent speaking practice. The experience suggests that initial discomfort was part of students' adjustment to a less familiar form of speaking practice.

Fostering learner autonomy through self-practice

During observation, a number of students appeared to be undergoing the speaking practice process with high initiative. They did not wait for instructions to start; instead, they immediately prepared recording equipment, organized their speaking ideas, and chose a comfortable practice location. This suggests that they have internalized the habit of independent learning. For example, in Figure 2, S2 appears to choose to practice quietly in the corner of the classroom while reading their notes, a habit they have built themselves week by week. These observations suggest an emerging sense of learner agency, as students independently initiated and organized aspects of their speaking practice without waiting for teacher instructions.



Figure 2. The student practices independently by reading notes in the corner of the classroom.

This statement is further strengthened by the confession in the interview, where S1 reported that over time he felt comfortable because he could practice anytime without having to wait for others:

> *"...eventually got used to it and actually felt comfortable because I could practice anytime and no one is judging." (S1)*

S2 also added that they are more active and have control over the learning methods they choose:

> *"...I have become more active and can control my learning methods." (S2)*

These findings suggest that students' sense of agency and ownership in the learning process, where flexibility and self-management play a key role in speaking skills. These accounts indicate that students experienced greater control over when, where, and how they practiced speaking. They learn to take responsibility for their time, tools, and methods of practicing speaking.

Self-Monitoring through Reflection

During observation, students often engaged in the process of re-recording aimed at assessing and improving their performance. Some students were seen noting down parts they considered unclear or inaccurate from their recordings, and then trying to correct them in the next practice. It can be seen in Figure 3, S3 always takes the time to listen to the recording

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again and marks the parts that sound weak or incorrect. This observation shows that students are no longer just completing a task, but are actively applying metacognitive strategies such as monitoring and evaluating their own performance an indicator of reflective learning behaviour.



Figure 3. The student reviews the practice recordings.

In the interview, S3 and S6 explained how he uses recordings as a means of evaluation:

> *"...recording, then listening back and noting the parts that need improvement." (S3)*
>
> *"...after recording, I listen to the recording and conduct a self-evaluation." (S6)*

These interview findings further reinforce the notion that students are integrating self – evaluation into their practice routines, treating SDD not only as a task but as an opportunity to improve iteratively based on their own observations. The observations and interview accounts suggest that some students used recording and replaying as forms of self-monitoring. However, the extent to which these practices resulted in effective correction varied across students.

Experiencing Greater Comfort and Confidence in Solo Speaking Practice

During observation, some students still appeared hesitant and nervous when speaking during practice. However, over time, most of them began to

show changes in expressions and body gestures that were calmer and more confident. Findings showed that the students no longer hesitated to repeat sentences when they made mistakes, and some even began using facial expressions and intonation during practice as if they were speaking in front of an audience. These observational findings suggest a positive shift in students' speaking behaviour, indicating the emergence of self-confidence and natural expressiveness during speaking practice.

The results of the observation were supported by interviews with the students. In the interview, S2 said that he feels confident because he doesn't feel judged when practicing alone:

> *"I feel more confident because I know this is just practice and no one is judging." (S2)*

Student 5 reported that they feel more prepared to perform after practicing independently:

> *"I am confident because I practiced on my own before performing." (S5)*

These interview responses provide deeper insight into the psychological comfort students feel during SDD, showing that the absence of external pressure facilitates emotional security and nurtures self-assurance. This change shows that the SDD method provides a pressure-free learning environment. The practice conducted without direct assessment from teachers or peers allows students to gradually build their confidence.

Challenges Experienced by Students in Using Self-Directed Dialogue for English-Speaking Practice

Facing grammar and vocabulary difficulties

Based on the observations, it was found that some students still face difficulties in continuing sentences when speaking in English. This difficulty is generally caused by a limited vocabulary needed to express ideas. In some moments, students are seen pausing for quite a long time in the middle of a sentence, repeating the same word over and over, or even choosing to replace difficult phrases with simpler and more memorable words. This phenomenon

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not only occurs during formal practice sessions but is also evident when students interact spontaneously outside the classroom. The researchers noted that Student 3 and Student 7 experienced difficulties in constructing sentences, especially when they attempted to engage in paired dialogue on their own initiative, without direct instruction. In those moments, both appeared hesitant and stopped mid-sentence because they were unsure of the correct grammar structure. Student 7, in particular, seemed to repeat the same phrase several times, indicating confusion in constructing the sentence structure correctly. This situation is clearly visible in the students' activities during independent practice outside the classroom.

These observation results indicate that limited vocabulary and grammatical uncertainty are significant obstacles that hinder students' ability to produce fluent and spontaneous speech during independent practice.

The findings are also supported by the results of interviews with students.

> *"My main difficulty is grammar, because I often forget the correct sentence structure." (S3)*
>
> *"The challenge is remembering the vocabulary related to the topic, especially if the theme is unfamiliar to me." (S7)*

These interview statements strengthen the pattern seen in observations, showing that grammar and vocabulary are recurring barriers faced by students in self-directed speaking activities. These findings showed that although SDD encouraged students to be independent in speaking practice, difficulties in mastering vocabulary and sentence structure still hinder their fluency. Without direct guidance, students often experience confusion in using grammar and in finding words that fit the context. Therefore, basic linguistic understanding remains an important foundation that must continue to be nurtured in the process of independent speaking.

Maintaining Idea Consistency

Based on the observation, it was shown that some students had difficulty in conveying their ideas in a coherent manner. Students often lose

track of the conversation, repeat topics, or present ideas that jump around. This difficulty is evident when students repeat the opening sentence three times without completing the main idea they want to convey. As shown in Figure 5, S5 appears to repeat the opening sentence multiple times without being able to develop the subsequent ideas. As a result, the student had to ask for help from their friend and open Google Translate to find the necessary vocabulary to convey their ideas more clearly. This shows that besides the lack of a coherent thought structure, the limited vocabulary also affects the fluency and clarity in conveying ideas verbally. This observation illustrates students' struggle with coherence and vocabulary recall when speaking spontaneously, often leading to hesitation and dependence on external aids.



Figure 4. The student repeated the opening sentence several times and asked for help from a friend as well as used Google Translate.

The findings were also confirmed in the interview.

" The challenge is to keep the conversation flowing without jumping around" (S2)

"The difficulty lies in maintaining consistency while speaking and not repeating words" (S5)

These interview excerpts confirm that the students' difficulties with coherence are persistent across different speaking contexts, suggesting that spontaneous speech remains a cognitive challenge. These two quotes reinforce the finding that the ability to speak with a logical and structured flow has not yet been fully mastered by the students. Although they may understand the topic being discussed, difficulty in organizing and structuring

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ideas coherently causes the message they want to convey to be ineffective or confusing for the listener.

These findings indicate that organizing ideas coherently in the context of spontaneous speaking remains a real challenge in the application of SDD method. The irregularity of the flow of conversation, the repetition of initial sentences, and the reliance on friends or translation aids reflect the students' lack of readiness to develop arguments independently and structurally. Therefore, speaking exercises that focus on developing logical thinking, enriching vocabulary, and strategizing idea organization are important steps that need to be integrated into the implementation of SDD to further enhance students' oral communication skills.

Developing Awareness Through Self-Assessment Practice

During observations, several students appeared confused after completing the independent speaking exercises. They seemed unsure whether the dialogue they delivered was correct or still needed improvement. S9 appeared to replay their audio recording using a phone, then reopened their grammar notes, but did not immediately make any revisions. She only listened for a moment and then put his notes away again. Like in Figure 6a and 6b, these showed that although she had tried to evaluate hirself, she had not fully understood which parts need improvement. S1 also exhibited similar behaviour: after completing the exercise, he appeared to be lost in thought and wrote something down, but did not go back to record or repeat the incorrect parts. This observation highlights a common pattern among students: they attempt self-evaluation but often lack the strategies or confidence to carry out corrective actions effectively. As shown in Figure 11a and 11b, both show a gap between the awareness of the mistake and the corrective action.



Figure 6a

One of the students seemed to be replaying the recording while looking at their notes, but had not made any corrections after the self-evaluation.



Figure 6b

The student was seen taking notes after the speaking practice, but has not yet repeated the parts that were still incorrect.

The findings were supported interview sessions:

"Sometimes I get confused about assessing, but after getting used to it, I know my shortcomings." (S9)

"At first, I was confused, but over time I got used to it." (S1)

This quote shows that although evaluative difficulties are felt at the beginning, repeated practice allows students to form their own understanding patterns, even if they are not necessarily pedagogically accurate.

These interview responses reflect that although students begin with limited metacognitive strategies, repeated exposure to the practice helps build self-monitoring abilities. Based on these data sources, the absence of direct feedback poses a real challenge in the implementation of the SDD method. Not all students have the strong reflective or metacognitive capacity to objectively assess their performance. Students who are still in the early stages of developing speaking skills need guidance, correction, and validation from external parties. Therefore, although SDD emphasizes independence, the role of the teacher in providing regular feedback remains

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crucial to maintaining the accuracy, confidence, and direction of students' speaking skills development.

Students' first anxiousness implies that participating in SDD requires a shift from teacher- or peer-supported speaking activities to accepting increased responsibility for their own speaking practice. This transition, in line with Knowles' (1975) theory of Self-Directed Learning (SDL), is not immediately easy since students must initiate and manage speaking practice without relying on a discussion partner as they normally do. However, students' shared experiences suggest that this discomfort is gradually replaced by an increased familiarity with the activity. Rather than perceiving this discomfort as proof of SDD's ineffectiveness, it can be interpreted as part of the students' lived experience of coping with and adjusting to a new type of autonomous speaking practice.

Students' experiences also revealed a developing sense of control over their speaking practice. Students reported being able to choose when, where, and how they practiced, while observations revealed that some students independently prepared materials, made recordings, and started practicing without waiting for teacher directions. These experiences are consistent with SDL concepts that promote personal initiative and self-management (Butarbutar, 2023; Rana et al., 2016). However, these findings should be understood as students' views of enhanced control over their learning process, rather than evidence that SDD objectively promotes autonomous learning or student motivation. Similarly, students' use of recordings, playback, and self-evaluation suggested the establishment of self-monitoring behaviors, while their ability to detect and respond to errors differed. Thus, while SDD appears to provide opportunity for students to develop agency and reflection, these opportunities can not necessarily result in accurate self-assessment or independent development.

Closely related to autonomy is the development of self- regulation, a sign of increased metacognitive awareness. Self-regulated learning, as observed through students' use of recording and self-evaluation strategies,

demonstrates metacognitive engagement. This finding support prior studies (Hamid, 2026; Nova et al., 2022) which emphasized that learners should evaluate their own progress and develop habits of reflection and correction, particularly in pronunciation and sentence structure. This finding lies in students' ability to independently identify and address their weaknesses through repetition and feedback. This has significant implications for instruction, as it shows that SDD fosters not only performance but also reflective competence. Teachers should encourage students to keep audio journals or speaking logs to enhance this reflective process. Long-term, this approach equips learners with tools to become independent language users capable of continuous improvement.

The most important finding is the tension between learner autonomy and the requirement for external language and evaluative support. Students appreciated the opportunity to practice without fear of being judged, but they still struggled with vocabulary, grammar, coherence, and self-assessment. These issues indicate that autonomous speaking practice does not eliminate the need for assistance, especially when students lack the language skills or strategies necessary to check their own performance. This finding is consistent with prior research that has highlighted the role of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge in promoting oral output (Buitrago, 2017; Fadillah & Syarifuddin, 2022). From a phenomenological perspective, the students' experiences therefore reveal SDD not simply as a means of becoming independent, but as an experience of negotiating independence and dependence: students valued having control over their practice while simultaneously recognizing the limits of practicing without external feedback.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to explore students' experiences in using the SDD method in their English-speaking skills and to analyse the various challenges they face during its implementation. The findings of this study suggest that students experienced SDD as a progressive transition from initial discomfort

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to more familiarity, agency, and comfort in practicing speaking English independently. Initially, students felt embarrassed and less secure speaking without a conversation partner, as they were used to. Some students described gradually becoming accustomed to the exercise and feeling more in control of when, when, and how they practiced. The use of recordings, playback, and self-evaluation suggested the establishment of self-monitoring behaviours. However, these outcomes are based on students' experiences and perceptions, rather than empirically verified gains in speaking ability.

This study also highlighted various issues with independent speaking practice, including difficulties with syntax, vocabulary, maintaining coherence, and assessing one's own speaking skills. Although some students attempted to evaluate and reflect on their speaking abilities through recordings and repeated practice, their ability to detect and respond to language errors differed. These findings point to a key tension in students' experiences with SDD: on the one hand, students valued their independence and freedom to practice without direct assessment; on the other hand, they recognized the limitations of independent practice without the linguistic and evaluative support of others.

Thus, pedagogically, SDD should be viewed as an additional space for independent speaking practice, which can be supplemented with focused feedback and self-evaluation advice. However, its use necessitates instructor support specifically, targeted linguistic feedback and self-evaluation guidance to guarantee that students can not only recognize challenges but also have suitable tools for addressing them. A limitation of this study lies in its specific context, involving students from a single high school in Indonesia; consequently, the findings cannot be broadly generalized to other learning contexts. Furthermore, the research focuses on students' experiences and perspectives. Future study could explore SDD experiences across different language proficiency levels and educational contexts, as well as examine how integrating SDD with teacher feedback and self-evaluation guidance can support students' independent speaking practices.

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