EFL Learners' Perception of Using Self-Study to Develop Speaking Skill

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to explore the students' preferences of self-study or teachers' involvement. It also aimed to explore what students perceive as necessary skills for self-study. This study was needed because some learners depend on teachers to develop their speaking, which may delay their learning process, reduces their sense of responsibility and demotivate them. Many learners lack motivation, awareness, and responsibility when it comes to developing their speaking skill. Therefore, this research attempted to explore if students employed their self-study to improve their speaking skills or they preferred teachers' involvement. The participants of this study were 33 female students from the preparatory year at Yanbu University Collage. This study was a quantitative method research where the researcher used a questionnaire to collect the data. The result showed that the students preferred both self-study and being guided by teachers, they were positive about self-study and they value the concept of it even when they did not have experience in it. Furthermore, the participants were asked about their techniques and skills they usually do to develop their speaking and the responses were mostly recommending talk to people in the target language and practice listening.

Keywords: reception, EFL learners, speaking, self-study, teacher's involvement

INTRODUCTION

Speaking skill is important, it is a challenging and crucial part of the English language learning and EFL learners have to develop it. Undoubtedly, human naturally speak and listen before they read and write. Language is learnt by speaking it first after a lot of listening to the sounds, words, phrases and sentences from the surroundings (Anuradh & Hemamalini, 2014, as cited in Hussain, 2018). It is commonly known how difficult it is to speak in English for EFL learners, and the fact that it depends on learners themselves makes it more challenging. However, many researches stated that the most common problems faced by learners is being shy, lack of confidence, and being afraid of making mistakes.

Self-study is considered an important skill that learners must have to develop and progress in their learning. Independent learners are those who learn in collaboration

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with their teachers and discover their own way of learning. They have some traits as they like to plan ahead, they enjoying questioning, testing, and analysing. They have open minds to learn new things, they are not afraid of being different, they work cooperatively with others, and they have developed skill in note taking and remembering (Moore, 1973, as cited in Wedemeyer, 1981). So, they differ from the non-independent learners who need help, control, suggestions, advice, and directions from their teachers.

Therefore, using self-study to develop speaking skill is vital since learners will learn how to help themselves and learn better. Lacking of opportunity to practice speaking skill is a major issue for learners. It is either they do not have time to take classes or they do not know English native speakers to communicate with them regularly. Luckily, there are plenty of opportunities where learners can make it by themselves and make their own plan lessons.

Statement of the Problem

EFL learners face difficulties when they speak, it is commonly because of a lack of practicing and lack of proficiency in English. Learners need to speak and speaking skill is needed to be public, it mostly depends on the learners' abilities and how they help themselves to speak and try any method without being shy. Therefore, self-study characteristics play a major role in learners' development.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' perception about their self-study to develop their speaking skill and their preferences to the teachers' involvement. It also sought to find what necessary skills students require to develop their speaking skill.

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

- Do students prefer self-study or teachers' involvement in developing their speaking skill?

- What do EFL students perceive as necessary skills required for self-study to develop speaking skill?

Literature Review

The main key concepts of this study are as follow:

Self-study

It is a method of education in which the learner acquires knowledge by his/her efforts and works to develop the ability for critical evaluation and thinking (Candy, 1991, as cited in Saleem, 2009). In the early seventies, it stated that self-study is the ability that learners have in order to decide on their learning. Up to this point, when learners have an awareness more than other learners, they will look for strategies to develop any skill. Towel and Cottrell (1996) stated that self-study is a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and materials resources for learning,

choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes. They need to learn how to learn, how to be critical thinkers, and to be motivated. Sometimes, without the need of teachers' instructions.

Speaking Skill

It is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information (Burns & Joyce, 1997). Speaking skill is important in English language acquisition and the foundation of communicating with other people. Therefore, learners need to explore how to develop this skill by themselves since it depends more on their abilities. According to Al-Hosni (2014), speaking skill has been considered as an essential skill to be able to communicate with other people around the world as one of the ultimate goals of foreign language learning.

Previous Studies in the Literature

Taqi (2019) conducted a study in collage of Basic Education in Kuwait. His study aimed to investigate students' perceptions toward self-study as part of their curriculum and discussion. Therefore, he designed two tools to collect the data for the study; a questionnaire that contained 54 statements to see how far the participants would agree, and it was a quantitative method. Moreover, an interview that contained three questions of tasks related to topics the participants never been taught before to see if they can handle them on their own and it was a qualitative method. He targeted separated participants according to the tools. For the questionnaire they were 324 female students, their age were 17-30 years old. Their language background was Arabic, and their levels were first, second, third, and fourth year of the college. As well as for the interview, he initiated 12 groups, each group had 6 students. The participants were from 3 English courses; phonetics and phonology and they were third- and fourth-year students, writing and they were second year students, and conversation were first year students. The result of the questionnaire showed that most of the students can manage their time and use internet access to improve their language. They believed in their abilities to learn by themselves and find resources when needed and they can even evaluate their work. Meanwhile, the rest of them disagreed since they cannot find resources without teacher's help. However, the majority of them stated that they learn better in classes with teachers' presence. On the other hand, when he interviewed them, he asked them "Would they complete a task successfully without teachers' help?", "Could they confidently sit for a test?", "Would they like to have tasks in the class assignments?". The high GPA students were excited and totally agreed, but the lower GPA students were less confident but they said that they will try.

Rhoads and deHaan (2013) conducted a study at University of Shizuoka in Japan. Their study aimed to investigate positive instructor instructions and motivation of students to complete self-study activities and students' attitudes towards self-study. Therefore, they started to collect the data by classroom observation. So, six English instruction at their university created a one-semester self-access log to see how many students would complete it. One of the instructors applied motivational techniques in the classroom to create better self-study. Moreover, they designed a questionnaire given to 465 students,

it included two parts; the first one was to explore why the students who completed the self-access study log did so. The second part was to ask the students about their attitudes and activities towards self-study. The result showed that the activities and actions made by the instructors had a positive impact on students towards self-study outside the classroom, discovering a new way of learning by themselves, and they did not feel pressure from other students outside the classroom. While the second part of the questionnaire showed that students preferred to learn listening by watching You-Tube and listening to music, learn reading by reading comics and magazine, learn writing by keeping write dairies. Also, learn speaking skill by talking with their Japanese friends in English, and talking with the university native English-speaking instructors.

Tang and Yang (2000) conducted a study in The Chinese University of Hong Kong in China. Their study aimed to explore the children's reaction towards self-learning and how would they interact to the process of improving their English. Therefore, they made use of both qualitative and quantitative data involving questionnaire, interview, and naturalistic observation of the participants learning process. The participants of this study were 254 students from 18 different schools, 141 of them were male and 113 of them were female. 178 of them were between 6-12 and 76 of them were between 13-16. Cantonese was the first language for 218 of them and the rest were speaking Mandarin. They focused on learners' characteristics (Learning style, motivation, anxiety, and participation mode) to see how they would interact with the learners' developments awareness about learning. They stated that self-study needs self-awareness and willingness from the children since they were asked in the questionnaire about their preferences and dislikes about learning English. They found that the most likeable strategy to the children is language games, followed by reading books, listening to cassette tapes and singing English songs. On the contrary, the less popular ones were sentences composing and grammar. Moreover, the participants needed external motivation more than their internal motivation. On the other hand, they were worried the most of their English language performance in class otherwise they had a positive attitude towards English learning problems.

Al-Amri (2020) conducted a study in Saudi Arabia to investigate EFL students' teachers' perceptions of self-study. He used a focus group interviews to collect the data, five one-hour focus group interviews with six students in each group in Arabic as it's their native language. The interview was done by making the participant take control of the interview, have direct and intense contact with others, and create group interaction. Also, Al-Amri used techniques to strengthen his study. Namely; taking notes, making brief eye contact especially with silent students to make sure that their voices will be heard and provide more information from them, drawing on students' personal experience, and simplifying the wording of the questions. Moreover, he used another learning approach for self-study. It was implemented with 35 student teachers in one section and 32 students in another section. They were directed to read and answer a particular materials titles "English language curriculum" and then they had to find relevant reading material. The result showed that the students acknowledged freedom of choice in obtaining enquiry data online, but they were hesitant about sharing their enquiries with others because they feel

uncertain and vulnerable at the beginning of their journey as self-study learner. Other students preferred to receive guidance, and some believed grades were more important than learning enhancements.

Mayer, Fisher, and Pearl (2007) conducted a study on using self-study to examine students' perceptions of a self-study assignment, a requirement for a life-span human development course. The participants were 278 students aged 18-49 and 81.7% of them were female and 17.3% were male. The study was a mixed method research by designing a questionnaire contained nine questions ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questions covered students' perceptions on how helpful the self-study was for applying course material. Four of them were open-ended questions to give the participants the opportunity to write the benefits of writing and the challenges they experience by themselves. The result showed that the majority of the participants agreed that self-study helped them to apply course material. Also, the majority felt doing self-study was worthwhile in helping them understand the overall focus of life-span human development, they agreed that they gained better understanding by themselves and it made the course more meaningful. The result of the open-ended questions showed also positive attitude toward self-study when they were asked "What do you feel were the benefits of doing the self-study assignment?" The most common answer was "It was nice to be able to recall events in life, it makes me realize that all decision I make today will affect the rest of my life" The second question was "What did you learn about yourself to aid self-study?" The most common answer was "I learned and realized things I hadn't thought of before". The third question was "What are the difficulties you encountered in doing self-study?" The most common answer was "I felt like there was too much to write about and I didn't know what to include".

The previous studies showed that researchers tried to explore how students feel toward self-study and to find ways for learners to help them learn by themselves. They showed the positive impact of self-study on learning English language in general but each study showed it on their own domain. However, few studies have focused on speaking skill in particular. Therefore, this study focused on using self-study to develop speaking skill.

METHOD

This study was a quantitative method research where the researcher used a questionnaire to explore the students' perceptions toward self-study by using a Likert Scale.

Research Tool

Questionnaire

It contained 13 closed-ended questions and one open-ended question to measure the students' perceptions toward self-study to develop their speaking skill. A Likert Scale was employed ranging as (Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree) for the first 13 questions. The last question was an open-ended question to explore the students' perception. The questionnaire was translated into Arabic as well to help the participants in responding to the statements. (see the Appendix)

Participants of the Research

The participants of this study were 33 female students aged between 18-20 years old, they were studying preparatory year during the second semester of 2020-2021 at Yanbu University Collage, Saudi Arabia. Their native language is Arabic and their English proficiency level was pre-intermediate.

Data Collection Procedure

The data was collected after designing the questionnaire that were 14 statements. 13 of them were closed-ended questions and the answers were formed using a Likert Scale except for one question as it was an open-ended question. The questionnaire was published to the participants. Responses were collected from participants and data was presented and analysed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to investigate students' perspective about their self-study to develop their speaking skill and their preferences about the teachers' involvement. The results were collected from 33 female students studying at YUC, Saudi Arabia by using a questionnaire. The purpose of the first two questions were to ask the students directly about their preferences of either self-study or teachers' involvement (See appendix).

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was given to the participants to answer 14 questions. In the following, the answers of the first two questions were collected and presented in the figures below.
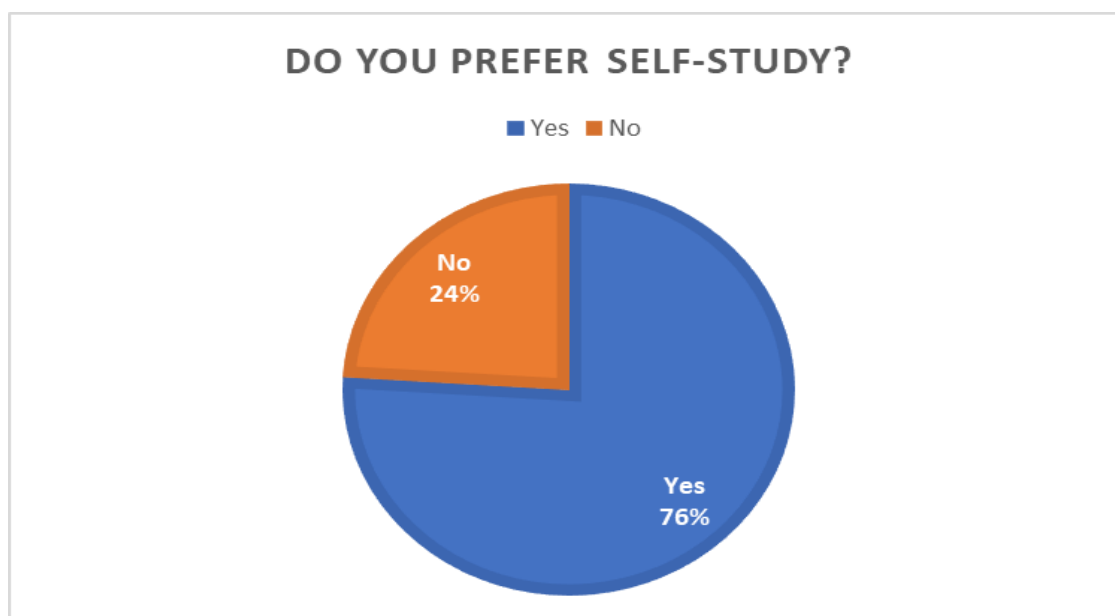

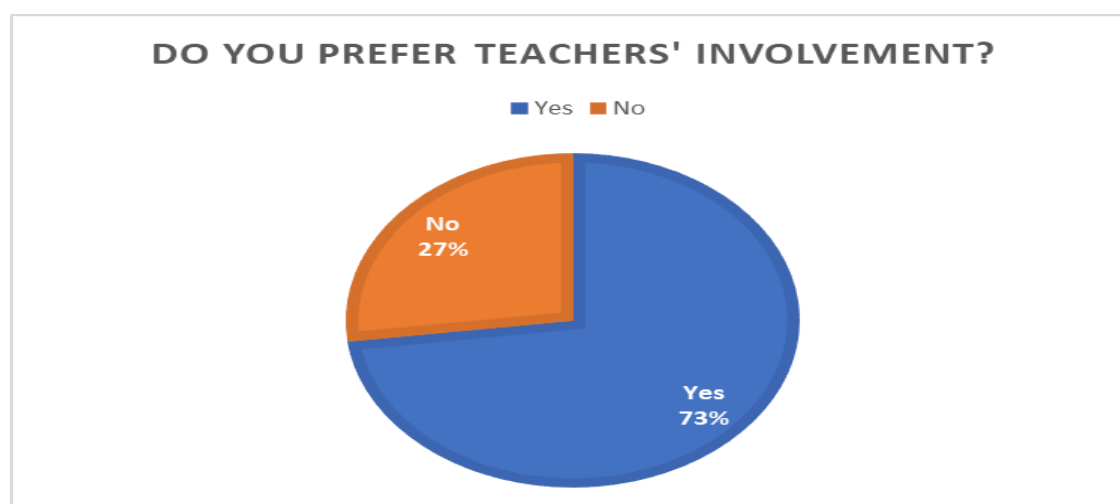**Figure 1.** Students' responses to question 1

Figure 2. Students' responses to question 2

From the figures above, the majority of the participants preferred both self-study and teachers' involvement which indicate to the importance of both of them. Learning environment certainly needs teachers' help and guidance. However, the figures showed that the participants picked both self-study and teachers' involvement almost at the same level, it is observed that there was slightly more percentage in self-study. As a result, students agreed with self-study, but they were accustomed on having teachers to help them.

In the following, the 11 statements were divided into two tables, one was for statements that are related to the students themselves and the other one was for teachers' involvement. The first 7 statements were designed by the researcher to obtain the participants' perceptions toward self-study in developing their speaking skill. The responses to the statements were collected and presented in table 1 below.

Table 1. Response frequencies for questionnaire items

Question	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean response
I speak better when I'm alone	11	12	8	0	2	3.91
I'm aware of the contents of the study plan.	4	9	10	8	2	3.15
I can design my study plan by myself.	3	9	9	10	2	3.03
I can renew my plan every time I notice changes in my speaking skill.	6	17	4	6	0	3.70
I can set up goals for my speaking class.	3	12	6	8	4	3.07
I can rate my speaking skill level by myself.	4	14	7	5	3	3.33
I am able to decide which method is the appropriate method for me.	12	14	6	1	0	4.12

The mean response of the first statement (3.91) showed that the majority of the participants agreed that they speak better when they are alone, it may be because they are shy or afraid of making mistakes which contradicts self-study learners' characteristics. The point of speaking is to share and communicate with others. Self-study learners would find ways to speak with others and develop their speaking skill in every

opportunity they get. On the other hand, few students speak better when they communicate with people, these students could be those who made the difference in the first two questions and chose self-study over teachers' involvement.

The mean response of the second statements (3.15) showed that the majority of the participants were not aware of the content of a study plan or they were almost neutral. Self-study learners have the initiative to explore how to make a study plan by themselves. Also, they have the curiosity to know the items that relate to their learning. Therefore, some of the participants agreed on having knowledge about what a study plan is because they may utilize their initiative sense to explore the meaning and the content of a study plan.

The mean response of the third statement (3.03) showed a support for the second statement since most of them were not familiar with a study plan content. Therefore, they could not write a study plan for themselves. On the contrary, some of them were agreed on having the ability to design a study plan, and those who were aware of its content. Each student is more aware of his/her learning needs more than teachers themselves, so writing a study plan is vital to make them realize how self-study and depending on themselves help them know what to include on a study plan.

The mean response of the fourth statement (3.70) showed that the majority of the participants agreed that they can renew their study plan when they notice changes in their level, which contradicts the previous two statements. Most of them stated that they are not aware of a study plan contents and cannot design it, so they cannot renew their study plan if they do not know the content of it in the first place. With a study plan it is easy to notice a change and decide to move forward as what a few of them stated. However, taking a step and initiate that change is may be the problem that some students are afraid to make.

Formulating ones' goals by themselves is considered one of the self-study characteristics. The mean response of the fifth statement (3.07) showed a neutral result toward writing goals to develop speaking skill. Some learners are aware of where their weaknesses points are and based on that they set up objectives to strengthen them, but some of them are not. It seems that due to lacking experience in self-study, some learners may not consider writing goals as such an important way to mark where they need to focus on.

The mean response of the sixth statement (3.33) showed that some learners can rate their speaking by themselves and some of them cannot. Evaluating learning outcomes is one of the self-study characteristics. When learners know their speaking level, they can rate if they are advanced, intermediate, or beginner. On the contrary, most of learners depend on others to evaluate their speaking since that what they are familiar with and this is why some learners may depend on teacher to rate their speaking level.

The mean response of the seventh statement (4.12) showed that most of the participants agreed on deciding the appropriate method for themselves. It seemed that students may know some methods and they may believe that these methods are good to develop speaking but it also seemed that they have not tried it or incorporated them in self-study initiatives. For example, learners may listen more if they want to develop their listening

as well as speaking, so choosing a method is easier than take the initiative and design a plan for development.

Based on table 1, it is observed that the participants were neutral toward self-study, they were contradictory in some statements. For example, statement 4 contradicts statement 2 and 3. The participants seemed to approve on the idea of self-study and they considered it as positive, but they were familiar with teachers' role which made them respond more positively on teacher's involvement. It is known that learners need motivation in their learning process, but the characteristics of self-study learners show that they are capable of self-motivation. Moreover, students need to learn how to take the initiative and search for opportunity to take it as an experience for them.

The other 4 statements were designed by the researcher to obtain the participants' perceptions toward teachers' involvement in developing their speaking skill. The responses to the statements were collected and presented in table 2 below

Table 2. Response frequencies for questionnaire items

Question	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean response
I achieve in classes more than at home.	6	10	8	8	1	3.36
I can find answers to my questions without teachers' help.	6	10	9	6	2	3.36
My speaking skill is developing because of my teacher.	6	8	6	7	6	3.03
I feel that self-study is important for developing my speaking skill.	10	14	4	4	1	3.82

The mean response of the first statement (3.36) showed that students divided into two ways since some of them achieve better in classes more than at home, while some of them stated the opposite. Developing a skill depends on the students themselves more than on teachers because learners know themselves better and can recognize their learning needs to develop this skill. As a rule, the more you practice, the more you achieve. Classroom can be intimidating for some learners due to many reasons, such as getting anxious around people and lacking self-confidence. On the contrary, some learners achieve in classes. They may like being guided by teachers or they feel safe.

The mean response of the second statement (3.36) showed that they can find answers for their questions without teachers' help. Self-study learners can find answers for their questions by using plenty of things, such as books or using technology. Otherwise, they can ask their teachers as what some of the participants claimed in this statement.

The mean response of the third statement (3.03) showed a neutral result. They were divided into two ways, some of them agreed on the idea that their speaking was developing because of their teachers and some of them disagreed. So, if students want to be independent and they believe they have the ability to help themselves, they will feel confident to choose the method they are comfortable with. On the other hand, students who used on having teachers to guide them in every step, they lack the experience to manage their own learning.

Last statement was the core of the questionnaire to obtain EFL learners' perceptions toward self-study. The mean response of the fourth statement (3.82) showed that the majority of them agreed that self-study is important to develop speaking skill regardless of teachers' involvement where learners are required to have that sense of responsibility so they can reach an advance level by themselves. The result showed that students seemed to be positive about the idea of self-study but they lack the characteristics of a self-study learner

In the following, the participants were asked about what they may do to develop their speaking skill. The results are presented in the table below.

b Response frequencies for questionnaire items

Statements	Number of students
Talk to people in the target language	14
Listen extensively to the target language.	11
Practice and learn from my mistakes.	7
Test myself.	1

The highest response (40%) was talking to people in the target language. Having people who have the same interests as they themselves will help them in developing ones' speaking when communicating. 30% of the participants stated that listening to the target language will develop speaking skill, so the more you listen to the language, the more you obtain skills to speak. 20% of them stated that practicing and learning from mistakes would develop speaking skill. Self-study learners are not afraid of making mistakes either alone or around people, they are not shy and they do not hesitate to share their thoughts. Only 10% of the participants stated that self-testing would develop speaking skill. It is a useful way since learners can recognize their mistakes by the test and work on them.

The findings of this study had similar finding in Taqi's study (2014), in terms of achieving in classes more than at home, and finding answer without teachers' help. Taqi's study support the results of this study since the participants of both studies were divided into two perceptions. Some of them claimed that they learn better in classes than at home and they can find answers/ resources without teachers' help, but some of them stated the opposite. However, Taqi's study did not support this study in term of evaluating one's self, the participants of Taqi's study showed that the majority of the participants had the ability to evaluate themselves unlike this study where the participants showed neutral result about this aspect. Al-amri study (2020), supported this study since both studies showed that the participants perceived self-study as a positive approach. They liked the idea to feel free and choose their own methods, but they were hesitating about sharing their opinion because they feel uncertain and vulnerable at the beginning of their journey as self-study learners. However, both were familiar with teachers' role which made them preferred to receive guide from them and perceive them more positively. Tang and Yang's study (2000), supported this study since it showed that their participants needed external motivation and teachers' help. As well as this study since the results showed how important teachers' role is. The difference was this study did not use techniques and activities to observe students' attitude toward self-study like Tang and Yangs' study. It observed that motivation plays a vital role in students' learning and it may inspire them

to be more aware of self-study. Rhoads and deHaan's study (2013), has differed from this study since the participants achieve outside of the classroom more than in classes. On the contrary, this study showed neutral results about achieving in classes.

CONCLUSION

This study attempted to investigate students' perception about their self-study to develop their speaking skill and their preferences to teachers' involvement. The result showed that the students preferred both self-study and being guided by teachers. The participants were positive about self-study and they value the concept of it even when they did not have experience in it. The findings showed that there are duties they cannot accomplish by themselves like designing a study plan. Furthermore, the participants were asked about their techniques and skills they usually do to develop their speaking and the responses were mostly recommending talk to people in the target language and practice listening.

Limitations

This study had two major limitation, time and participants. Due to COVID-19, it was not possible to apply the study in a school to explore more about participants' self-study through observing their body language and eye contact. Moreover, because of the shortage of time, the number of the participants was very small.

Recommendations

The researcher recommended that students must explore more methods to gain self-study characteristics to make their learning effective and faster. Especially for speaking skill as it depends more on learners themselves to always try to practice the language and create opportunities to develop speaking skill. Students can make use of technology to develop their speaking skills by learning from free resources online. They can decide on their educational needs and use these resources accordingly. They should also train themselves to write their own study plan by watching tutorials for it and ask their teachers for help.

The researcher also recommended that teachers may provide activities that encourage the students to depend on themselves and reinforce this skill. Moreover, teachers may get to know the students' concerns and anxiety to help them overcome such anxiety when participating in the classroom.

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APPENDIX

Appendix – Questionnaire

Put (✔) in front of your choice. ضعي علامة (✔) امام الإجابة المناسبة لك.		
Q1/ I prefer self-study study (Which means the process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, choosing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes). أفضّل الدراسة الذاتية (والتي تعني عملية يأخذ فيها الطلاب زمام أمورهم بمساعده الاخرين او بدونهم، تشخيص احتياجاتهم التعليمية، صياغة أهدافهم للتعلم، اختيار وتنفيذ استراتيجيات التعليم المناسبة لهم، تقييم نتائج تعلمهم)	*Yes* ☐	*No* ☐
Q2/ I prefer teachers' involvement. أفضّل مشاركة المعلمة.	☐	☐

Statements	*Strongly disagree* لا أوافق بشدة	*Disagree* لا أوافق	*Natural* محايد	*Agree* أوافق	*Strongly agree* أوافق بشدة
Q3/ I speak better when I'm alone. أتكلم بشكل أفضل عندما أكون بمفردي.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q4/ I'm aware of the contents of the study plan. انا مدركة لكل المحتويات التي تكون بالخطة الدراسية.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q5/ I can design my study plan by myself. أستطيع تصميم خطة دراسية من بداية الفصل بنفسي.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q6/ I can renew my plan every time I notice changes in my speaking skill. أستطيع تجديد خطتي في كل مرة الاحظ تغيير في مستوى تحدثي.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q7/ I can set up goals for my speaking class. أستطيع كتابة اهدافي من بداية الفصل لمادة التحدث بنفسي.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q8/ I can rate my speaking skill level by myself. أستطيع تقييم مستواي بمهارة التحدث بنفسي.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q9/ I am able to decide which method is the best for me. انا قادرة على اختيار الطريقة المناسبة لي.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q10/ I achieve in classes more than at home. أحقق انجاز عندما أكون بالصف أكثر مما أكون بالمنزل.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q11/ I can find answers to my questions without teachers' help. أستطيع إيجاد أجوبة لأسئلتي بدون مساعدة معلمتي.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q12/ My speaking skill is developing because of my teacher. مهارتي بالتحدث تتطور بفضل معلمتي.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q13/ I feel that self-study is important for developing my speaking skill. اعتقد انه من المهم ان نكتسب مهارة الدراسة الذاتية لتطوير مهارة التحدث.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q14/ What you may do to develop your speaking skill? ماذا يمكنك ان تفعلي لتطوير مهارتك بالتحدث؟					