

INTEGRATING LANGUAGE LEARNER AUTONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT OF SPEAKING PROFICIENCY: AN ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH

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Developing a teaching approach in which the growth of target language proficiency is integrated with the development of learner autonomy is an important goal for a second or foreign language class. This paper exemplifies an action research based approach for fostering learner autonomy and improving speaking proficiency among ESL learners. Getting students to speak can be a challenge in many ESL contexts, especially in those difficult circumstances where English is a compulsory subject. This study was conducted for nine months in a high school in Bihar (India) where the syllabus and the textbook were pre-decided. The intervention consisted of direct instructions for developing metacognitive strategies for language learning, introducing personalized topics for speaking tasks, focus on emergent language, and constant critical reflection by both the teacher and the learners. During three iterative cycles, the data was collected through students' feedback, classroom recordings, and the teacher's regular journal notes. The findings indicate that by the end of the study, students became more engaged, appeared more fluent, and became considerably less dependent on the teacher. Fostering learner autonomy in ESL classes also encourages and leads to the development of teacher autonomy. Implications applicable to teachers working in difficult circumstances are also discussed.

Keywords: learner autonomy, speaking skills, action research, critical reflection, ESL.