TRAINING TUTORS TO PROMOTE SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AMONG UNIVERSITY-BOUND ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS

La capacitación de tutores con el fin de que promuevan el aprendizaje auto-dirigido entre estudiantes de lengua inglesa que desean ingresar a la universidad

Melissa Williamson Hawkins[1], Josephine Prado[2], Julia S. Austin[3]

ABSTRACT

Instructors who teach in English as Second Language (ESL) programs must balance time allotted to teach academic English with the numerous study skills needed by university-bound English learners. However, for these language learners to close language-learning gaps independently and achieve higher levels of communicative competence, they must assume increasingly greater degrees of autonomy in their own language learning process. Although a high level of self-direction is needed, it is not a characteristic that is common to all students. Through explicit instruction, teachers can scaffold language learners as they implement feasible, concrete actions towards language-learning autonomy. In an ESL program at a southeastern U.S. university, the current qualitative study explored the effects of explicit instruction on self-directed learning (SDL) strategies. Study participants were ESL tutors. After being trained in SDL strategies, these tutors recommended SDL strategies to their tutees in individual tutoring sessions. Findings revealed 4 main categories of SDL assignments recommended by these tutors to their tutees across one semester. Implications from this study suggest that language programs should train teachers and tutors in SDL principles, in the role of SDL in language development, and in strategies for promoting SDL among language learners.

Key Words: self-directed learning, language learning autonomy, tutor training, English as a Second Language, English language programs, English language learning

RESUMEN

Los profesores que enseñan en programas de inglés como segunda lengua (ESL, por su sigla en inglés) necesitan equilibrar el tiempo dedicado a la enseñanza del inglés académico con las numerosas destrezas de estudio necesitadas por aquellos estudiantes que deseen ingresar a la universidad. No obstante, para que estos estudiantes cierren en forma independiente posibles lagunas en el aprendizaje de lengua y así lograr niveles más altos en la competencia comunicativa, ellos deben asumir niveles cada vez más altos de autonomía en su propio proceso de aprendizaje. Aunque se necesita un alto nivel de auto-dirección, éste no es una característica que es común entre todos estudiantes. A travéz de enseñanzas explícitas, los profesores pueden apoyar a los estudiantes de lengua mientras que estos implementan acciones factibles y concretas hacía autonomía de aprendizaje. Dentro de un programa de ESL situado en una universidad del sureste de los EE.UU., el actual estudio cualitativo exploró el efecto de enseñanzas explícitas sobre las estrategias de aprendizaje auto-dirigido (SDL, por su sigla en inglés). Los participantes en este estudio eran tutores de ESL. Después de ser capacitados en SDL, estos tutores recomendaron estrategias de SDL a sus tutelados en sesiones individuales de enseñanza. Resultados revelaron 4 categorías principales de estrategias de SDL recomendadas por estos tutores a sus tutelados en el transcurso de un semestre. Las implicaciones de este estudio sugieren que programas de lenguas deben capacitar a sus profesores y tutores en los principios de SDL, en el rol de SDL en el desarrollo de una lengua, y en estrategias para promover SDL entre estudiantes de lengua.

Palabras Claves: aprendizaje auto-dirigido, autonomía en aprender idiomas, capacitación de tutores, inglés como segunda lengua, programas de lengua inglesa, aprendizaje del inglés

[1] University of Alabama at Birmingham, melissaw@uab.edu

[2] University of Alabama at Birmingham, jprado@uab.edu

[3] University of Alabama at Birmingham, jaustin@uab.edu

INTRODUCTION

Determining appropriate English language levels for university academic readiness is both an art and a science. This balancing act requires teachers and administrators to consider an individual learner's academic background, previous English language studies, English language proficiency test scores, the demands of particular university environments, and support services in English as a Second Language (ESL) available on campus (Graham, 1987). Upon initiating university coursework, ESL students may discover that they do not have the multiple layers of linguistic aptitude widely regarded as necessary for reaching a high level of functioning in the academic English of university settings. These aptitudes include grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences (Canale & Swain, 1980). Without such tools, language-learning students may suffer "anxiety, frustration, de-motivation and an inability to engage with the learning process" (Murray, 2010, p. 56). To be successful in their university studies, these ESL students need a high level of self-motivation and autonomy to independently bridge possible language-learning gaps (Liu, 2015; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). However, self-directed learning (SDL) is not a characteristic common to all language learners; instead, it is frequently a skill that needs to be developed (Benson, 2013). This study explores how SDL can be promoted among university-bound ESL students by tutors who are trained in SDL as part of a language center's regular tutor training.

LITERATURE REVIEW ABOUT SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

Importance of Self-directed Learning

For over three decades, SDL has influenced the field of adult education (Merriam, 2001). Educators generally agree that adults learn best when personally invested in identifying, planning, and managing their own learning. In its classic definition for adult education, SDL is evident when "…individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating those learning outcomes" (Knowles, 1975, p. 18).

A growing body of research in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts demonstrates a positive relationship between learning autonomy and SDL strategies as well as a positive impact on language proficiency (Gan, 2004; Karatas et al., 2015; Khiat, 2017; Yarahmadzehi & Bazleh, 2012). Students' perception of their competence in SDL strategies was found to correlate with their academic success (Khiat, 2017) and with language proficiency (Gan, 2004). An ability to engage in SDL was found to be a clear predictor of language learning success (Karatas et al., 2015). Finally, training in SDL had a positive, statistically significant impact on the students' language learning proficiency and their readiness to engage in SDL activities (Yarahmadzehi & Bazleh, 2012).

Teaching SDL to Language Learners

Building on SDL's role to improve language proficiency, several research studies have documented the significance of the teachers' role in promoting SDL (Cheng & Lee, 2018; Gan, 2004; Gan et al., 2004; Grover et al., 2014; Tse, 2012). Gan (2004) found that positive student attitudes about SDL significantly and positively related to SDL strategy use and explained that teachers' roles in the classroom are not minimized when students grow in self-direction. Instead, teachers provide the critical link and, often, sole impact on students' ability to use SDL for their own language learning. Gan (2004) concluded that, for students to be successful at SDL, teachers must promote the students' self-confidence.

Additional research supports the teacher's role in guiding students towards SDL mastery. Teachers must teach the value of autonomous language learning to students because, on their own,

language learners do not usually use SDL materials and strategies (Tse, 2012). Language learners can become motivated in SDL upon receiving teacher and peer support and also upon seeing evidence of their own progress (Cheng & Lee, 2018). However, when Grover et al. (2014) found that ESL students infrequently, if at all, use SDL techniques to further their English language study, they concluded, "It is incumbent on the instructor to help students make the connection between learning independently and how this ability can enrich their daily life" (p. 17).

Models of SDL Instruction

The following SDL models are applicable to the ESL classroom teacher as they look towards encouraging SDL. Grow's (1991) "Stages of Self-directed Learning" (SSDL) focuses on the process that learners experience as they grow in autonomy and also on the changing roles of educators as they walk alongside a student's ever-increasing SDL maturity. This model "proposes a way teachers can be vigorously influential while empowering students toward greater autonomy" (p. 128). As learners move from completely dependent to fully self-directed, teachers serve initially as coach, guide, and facilitator and later as mentor or consultant. As learners make progress at reducing dependence on the teacher, they simultaneously increase motivation for, and control of, the learning process (Grow, 1991).

Mirroring this change from dependence to independence, Nakata's (2010) "Three Stages of Self-regulated Language Learning" situates growth toward learner autonomy in the language-learning classroom. This model stresses the teacher's role in motivating students to learn and then teaching them to motivate themselves. While focusing successful SDL use on the interwoven concepts of self-regulation and intrinsic motivation (Gan, 2004; Gan et al., 2004), Nakata's (2010) model serves for training language teachers in SDL strategies through which the teacher transitions from being a learning instigator to being a learning facilitator.

Need for Teacher Training

The field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) has not fully embraced SDL despite research demonstrating positive correlations between SDL, student language learning, and teacher roles (Cheng & Lee, 2018; Gan, 2004; Gan et al., 2004; He & Valcke, 2012; Nakata, 2012). This gap between research and practice can be partially explained by the limited or nonexistent occurrences of SDL in TESOL teacher-training textbooks (Reinders & Balcikanli, 2011). Teachers-in-training receive little or no guidance on how to teach or nurture SDL among language learners of any age. Another explanation of the research-practice gap is the absence of any acknowledgement of SDL in most teacher education curricula (Lai et al., 2013), nor is training provided on how to integrate theoretical and practical SDL components. Hence, within this field of research, a gap exists regarding the influence of explicit SDL training on teachers' instructional practices. This study attempts to start filling this gap.

THE STUDY

Purpose and Research Questions

This study investigated whether ESL tutors, explicitly trained in SDL, would promote SDL among their tutees. The study was guided by the following research questions:
1. How often do SDL-trained tutors recommend SDL strategies for language-learning tutees?
2. What types of SDL activities do these tutors recommend to their tutees?
3. How do tutors describe the influence of SDL training on their tutoring practice?

Study Design

This research study followed an explanatory, sequential mixed methods design that was primarily qualitative. The quantitative elements were solely descriptive. The study transpired within the normal operations of the language program's tutoring center across an entire semester. Here, students may independently reserve one-on-one tutoring sessions without an instructor's referral, or they may be referred by their course instructor. The program welcomed the study because the possibilities that SDL offers for an English language tutoring center had already been explored (Hawkins, 2018). Approval for this study was received from the university's IRB office for incorporating SDL training into the tutoring center's regular activities and for studying the effects of this change in regular tutoring operations.

Setting

This study took place in an English language program's tutoring center at a large, public university in the southeastern United States. Free access to this tutoring center is available for English learners from all academic programs across campus as well as from the university's intensive English program and bridge-type English program. Students can schedule a single stand-alone tutoring session or multiple tutoring sessions with the same tutor on a weekly recurring basis. This center requires all tutors, both new and returning, to participate in a 90-minute training session at the beginning of each academic semester. Following best practices for adult education (Guskey, 2014), these training sessions are highly interactive, thus allowing tutors to apply this training to their own situations.

Participants

Study participants were selected from among tutors who attended a regular pre-semester training session where, for the first time, SDL was the main topic. When this session ended, attendees were informed about this study and invited to participate knowing that only the first-author researcher would be informed of their decision. After reading the consent document, seven tutors agreed to participate from the following subject areas: five ESL, one business, and one engineering. The five ESL tutors were selected as study participants because this study focused on SDL for English learning.

Of these five tutor participants, two were experienced ESL teachers and three were novice ESL teachers. Both of the experienced ESL teachers held an MA-TESOL degree, had over 10 years of teaching experience, and regularly taught as adjunct instructors in this university's English language program. The three novice teachers were all in their final semester of an MA-TESOL degree at this same university and had been teaching ESL in community English settings since starting this degree program. Four of these tutors were female, and one was male.

Procedure

Training session. The tutoring center coordinator and the first author led a 90-minute training session about SDL and its various stages. Attendees included all tutors hired for that semester. This training started with a short skit illustrating the SDL stages that often occur between a student and teacher. Tutors then worked in groups to describe the student's experience and the teacher's support. After this introductory exercise, these tutors received explicit instruction on SDL with a focus on Grow's (1991) "Stages of Self-directed Learning" (SSDL). Returning to small groups, tutors applied this SSDL model to case studies reflecting typical student profiles. They practiced identifying SDL stages being manifested by the student and then selecting assignments to help the student apply SDL beyond their tutoring session. This tutor training ended with a full group debriefing in which tutors were encouraged to promote SDL among tutees as a regular part of their tutoring sessions.

Tutoring reports. A standard procedure at this tutoring center is for all tutors to complete a Client Report Form upon finishing each tutoring session. Tutors are also encouraged to assign a follow-

up assignment upon the conclusion of each session. For the purpose of this study, an SDL item was included on this Client Report Form. This SDL item, entitled "Ways I promoted self-directed learning," consisted of a fillable box where tutors provided a short explanation of how they used SDL during that tutoring session. Participant responses to this SDL item were later analyzed by the first author.

Surveys. This study also included two surveys—an initial survey and a final survey. The initial survey was emailed to consenting tutor participants immediately after the SDL training. This survey served to determine the tutors' prior knowledge of SDL. It included two open-ended questions. The first question asked if tutors had heard of SDL before the training, and, if so, what they already knew. The second question elicited tutors' opinions about SDL and the corresponding training as well as ideas for incorporating SDL into their upcoming tutoring sessions.

The final survey took place immediately after the semester ended. This survey included seven Likert-scale questions, each with optional open-ended responses. The purpose was to learn how tutors had incorporated SDL training, if at all, into tutoring sessions. Questions asked about tutor perceptions of SDL's usefulness in helping their tutees learn course material, and about whether SDL seemed to make a difference in tutee attitudes about language learning. Other questions encouraged tutors to share anecdotes about particular assignments that seemed to make a difference among their tutees. The survey also asked whether tutors perceived the SDL training as helpful to them when tutoring and whether such training sufficiently influenced tutee success to merit inclusion in future tutor training.

Data Analysis

In keeping with qualitative methodology (Merriam, 2002), the first author analyzed the SDL data on the Client Report Forms using a constant comparative method of data analysis. Units of data that seemed meaningful were coded and compared to other units of data with the intention of producing tentative categories of SDL assignments for further investigation and consideration (Merriam, 2002). The first author also tabulated frequencies of tutors' SDL-reported assignments and compared these frequencies to the total number of tutoring sessions. While analyzing frequencies, the first author noted which SDL-reported assignments were appropriately labeled as SDL, based on definitions provided at the tutor training, and which were mislabeled. Ensuing calculations provided the number of assignments within each of four strategy categories and the percentage of appropriately labeled SDL assignments vis-à-vis the total number.

RESULTS

SDL Assignments on the Tutors' Client Report Forms

The Client Report Form was the primary source of data for determining the frequency and types of SDL assignments assigned by tutors to tutees during the tutoring sessions. According to the self-reported data on this form, all five tutors assigned SDL assignments to their tutees during their one-on-one tutoring sessions. However, these tutors assigned SDL assignments with differing frequencies. Differences also existed in how appropriately tutors labeled assignments as being SDL. Results are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. *Reported SDL Assignments, with Appropriately Labeled as SDL vis-à-vis Inappropriately Labeled*

Tutor Participants (N=5)	Tutoring Sessions (N)	Sessions reported as having SDL assignments	Frequency of sessions with SDL assignments	Assignments appropriately labeled as SDL	Assignments mislabeled as SDL	Appropriately labeled SDL assignments vs. total number reported
#1	58	58	100%	44	14	76%
#2	153	41	27%	35	6	85%
#3	15	13	87%	9	4	69%
#4	106	12	11%	4	8	33%

#5	86	31	36%	27	4	87%
	418	155	37%	119	36	77%

During the study semester, Tutor #2 and Tutor #4 provided numerous tutoring sessions, at 153 and 106, respectively. Tutors #1 and #5 provided about half as many sessions, at 58 and 86 respectively. Tutor #3 provided only 15 tutoring sessions. Together, these five tutors reported giving SDL assignments in 155 of their 418 tutoring sessions, which is 37% of all sessions. Two tutors gave SDL assignments in 71 of 73 tutoring sessions (97%), with Tutor #1 doing so in 58 of 58 sessions (100%) and Tutor #3 in 13 of 15 sessions (87%). Three tutors gave SDL assignments in 84 of 375 sessions (24%), with Tutor #2 doing so in 41 of 153 sessions (27%), Tutor #4 in 12 of 106 sessions (11%), and Tutor #5 in 31 of 86 sessions (36%).

Of the 155 sessions with SDL assignments, 119 assignments (77%) were appropriately labeled as SDL per definitions provided during the tutor training, and 36 (23%) were inappropriately labeled as SDL. Examples of inappropriately labeled SDL were finishing an exercise or writing a second draft for feedback. Tutor #2 and Tutor #5 demonstrated a strong understanding of SDL as evidenced by having appropriately labeled SDL for 85% and 87% of their respective SDL-reported assignments. Tutor #1 and Tutor #3 showed a moderate understanding of SDL as evidenced by having appropriately labeled SDL for 76% and 69% of their SDL-reported assignments. Tutor #4 demonstrated little understanding of SDL as evidenced by having appropriately labeled SDL for 33% of her SDL-reported assignments.

Coding SDL Assignments

After determining whether assignments were appropriately labeled as SDL assignments, the first author proceeded in coding these assignments. As the coding emerged, SDL assignments fell into four strategy categories: learning language skills, learning through sociocultural contact, practicing language creatively, and using technology.

In this study, the *learning language skills* category corresponds closely with Oxford's (2016) "cognitive apprenticeship" in which a person with more knowledge leads someone with less knowledge towards increased learning autonomy. The leader (tutor) shares specific language learning strategies with the novice (tutee), helps the novice set goals, and also scaffolds learning and provides guidance until the novice is ready for heightened levels of self-direction for learning language skills.

The *learning through sociocultural contact* category is associated with Vygotsky's (1978) "zone of proximal development" theory of social learning. Strategies in this category focus on improving language learning through intentional interaction with others. These SDL assignments are intended to help tutees traverse language-learning distances with assistance from others that they could not have done alone.

The *practicing language creatively* category is for open language practice. Language learning research has acknowledged the importance of play in language acquisition for both first and additional languages. Through competition, collaboration, and creative thinking, fun activities can lead to formal patterning and fictional worlds that are "essential to the development and deployment of communicative competence as the ability to conduct practical transactions and communicate facts" (Cook, 2000, p. 182). To that end, the creative use of language can be an excellent SDL strategy.

The *using technology* category includes the use of technology for promoting self-study. Such strategies are frequently employed in language centers. However, Tse (2012) demonstrated that, without explicit training on the usefulness of technology, language learners will not engage in self-study on their own. When trained in using technology for SDL, these students can use the powerful technological tools at their disposal and capitalize on these opportunities to individualize their own learning.

Types of SDL Assignments

After appropriately labeled SDL assignments were coded and four strategy categories had emerged, the first author selected several assignments representative of each strategy category. These examples are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. *Types of Assignments Appropriately Labeled as SDL*

SDL Strategy Categories and their Frequency of Use	Examples of SDL Assignments Assigned by Tutors
Learning language skills 39% of SDL assignments	Listening: follow steps for listening to TED Talks, Voice of America, National Public Radio Reading: read online while listening to NPR broadcasts, reading a fun book Pronunciation: view English Central online and imitate intonation, especially stressed words Vocabulary: create and maintain vocabulary list for easy access and review Writing: write short paragraphs every day about different aspects of life
Learning through sociocultural contact 16% of SDL assignments	Seek opportunities to work with others to practice English Negotiate meaning through contact with other English speakers Create a study group with American classmates and other English learners Practice giving and receiving feedback with American roommate Invite students from other language groups to personal gatherings to require using English
Practicing language creatively 20% of SDL assignments	"Try different protein shakes for post workout and report to me how you feel after each one" "Try five new recipes from around the world. How did they taste? Were they easy to make?" "Choose a painting and write at least seven statements describing this artwork" "Make sentences in your head as you walk and say them out loud under your breath" "Sing a song in English every day" "Listen to stand-up comedians on Pandora and find main themes. Why is this funny?"
Using technology 25% of SDL assignments	Go to websites provided by the tutor for further self-study Access free technology resources available through tutoring center Use TOEFL materials on center's bookshelf and MP3 audio files on the center's computers Access reading passages on internet and identify main idea and supporting ideas

Of the appropriately labeled SDL assignments assigned by tutors to tutees, 39% were for learning language skills, 16% for learning through sociocultural contact, 20% for practicing language creatively, and 25% for using technology. When assignments were coded as belonging to two or more categories, the most prevalent category was selected for this analysis.

Results show that all tutors helped tutees by encouraging SDL strategies in the *learning language skills* category. Tutors scaffolded learning as needed and recommended activities to promote tutees' language learning development beyond the support provided in a given tutoring session. Tutors used SDL to support speaking, listening, reading, writing, and pronunciation skills with similar frequency, although speaking and pronunciation received more focus than listening, reading, and writing. Grammar, however, received little attention in the SDL assignments assigned by tutors.

With respect to the other strategy categories, tutors seemed to prefer certain SDL categories when giving assignments to their tutees. The *learning through sociocultural contact* category was used primarily by Tutors #1 and #2. Tutor #2 also frequently assigned assignments in the *using technology* category. The *practicing language creatively* category was used mainly by Tutors #4 and #5.

Among appropriately assigned SDL activities, one tutor would interweave study skills with the above-mentioned SDL strategies. In addition to tutoring ESL, this tutor was also tutoring students for undergraduate degree courses. This tutor's dual role could have influenced also promoting SDL for the organization and management of degree courses in bridge-type programs.

Survey Results

Of the five tutor participants, four responded to the initial survey, and the same four responded to the final survey. It is unknown why the fifth tutor did not complete either survey. Each tutor is identified by the same number (e.g., Tutor #1) in the SDL assignments data and in the survey data. Results from the survey data are provided here.

Initial survey. In response to the initial survey's first question, all four of the tutors who completed the survey indicated that they had heard of SDL before the training. Tutor #1 mentioned that the concept had briefly been introduced in one of her graduate courses. Tutor #2 remembered having read about Grow's staged model, probably in this same graduate course. Tutor #3 explained having understood the model to mean that a learner takes control of learning to go beyond what happens in the classroom. Tutor #4 felt fully aware of the model and reported already using it. In their responses to the second question, these four tutors commented on SDL, the SDL training, and initial thoughts on incorporating SDL into their upcoming tutoring sessions. Tutor #1 indicated having "enjoyed the way this training introduced applications of the concept." This tutor "appreciated the way this training explained different stages of development in self-directed learning" and asked for additional ideas for SDL activities. Tutor #2 explained that the training session "helped me to tutor a student as a whole-student, not just what they came in for that day." This tutor planned to give assignments that could help students even after the tutoring sessions had ended. Tutor #4 shared that SDL training is most profitable when tutors have a recurring relationship with a tutee. This tutor suggested a follow-up training session to practice strategies through role-play.

Final survey. In response to the first of seven questions on the final survey, tutors estimated the extent to which they had incorporated SDL into their tutoring sessions across the fall semester. Three tutors reported having encouraged tutees "quite a lot" in doing SDL, while one tutor claimed having done so "a little bit." When reporting on observable improvements in student learning related to SDL use, tutors provided mixed responses. One tutor indicated "quite a lot," two indicated "some," and another indicated "a little bit." When describing successful SDL activities, one tutor preferred assigning videos and conversation practice, such as with roommates. Another tutor "favored introducing students to additional sources that they could explore to supplement their in-class activities." Tutors also described their perceptions of positive change that SDL recommendations seemed to have made on student attitudes. Three tutors felt that SDL strategies had resulted in "some" positive change while the fourth tutor reported "a little bit." One tutor explained that when SDL activities were mentioned, tutees would seem "excited and motivated during the tutoring session." However, when asked later about the activity, tutees would often admit that they had not done the activity. As expressed by one tutor, "Once a student has internalized that it can't be anyone else's responsibility to master the material, it changes their attitude usually for the better." Another tutor explained, "The students felt more control of the final product. It was their work, not mine."

In response to the sixth question, tutors estimated the value of the SDL training on their tutoring work. Three tutors reported "quite a lot" while one tutor reported "some." Additional comments varied in specificity ranging from requesting more follow-up training, valuing SDL as an additional teaching tool, and expressing increased awareness for advocating student use of SDL. As explained by one tutor: "The training did a great job of helping me to better understand how different students can progress through different 'stages' of self-direction, so that I could better tailor my suggestions." In response to the seventh and final question, tutors indicated the extent to which SDL "sufficiently influences student success." Two tutors responded with "quite a lot" while the other two responded with "some." One tutor explained the need for teaching tutees to go beyond being students and to becoming professionals. Another tutor signaled the value of SDL for students needing study strategies. As posited by one tutor, "SDL may not help everyone, but it seems to help enough people to be worth doing it."

DISCUSSION

To advance findings from earlier SDL studies (Cheng & Lee, 2018; Gan, 2004; Gan et al., 2004; Grover et al., 2014; Karatas et al., 2015; Lai et al., 2013), we explored how SDL-trained tutors promoted SDL strategies among their tutees. More specifically, we examined the impact of SDL training on tutors and on how they assigned SDL assignments to tutees during one semester of tutoring sessions. We now discuss the impact of this SDL training on the tutors' tutoring sessions vis-à-vis three research questions.

RQ#1: Frequency with which SDL-trained tutors recommend SDL strategies to their tutees

All five SDL-trained tutors recommended SDL strategies to their tutees. As a group, they did so in 155 of their 418 tutoring sessions, with a frequency of 37%. We believe that, by having assigned SDL-inspired assignments in their tutoring sessions, tutors were attempting to boost tutees' SDL strategy use and promote learner autonomy among adult learners (Knowles, 1975, Merriam, 2001). Yet, the frequency of SDL use per tutor shows a different picture; their individual frequencies ranged from 11% to 100%. We believe that tutors with higher frequencies (87% and 100%) had internalized their role in promoting SDL to create language learner autonomy (Gan, 2004; Karatas et al., 2015; Khiat, 2017; Yarahmadzehi & Bazleh, 2012). We also believe that tutors with lower frequencies (27% and 36%) had minimally internalized their role in promoting SDL to create language learning autonomy. Finally, we feel that the tutor with the lowest frequency (11%) had not internalized the role of the teacher in promoting SDL. Although it should be noted that no base-line data is available for how often these tutors might have assigned SDL-like assignments without explicit SDL training, the findings suggest that the tutors who promoted SDL most frequently had internalized their role in promoting awareness of SDL, while the tutors who promoted SDL only occasionally just had an awareness of the need for SDL.

Although these five tutors had reported 155 assignments as SDL, only 119 of these 155 assignments (77%) were appropriately labeled as SDL. Per definitions provided during the tutor training, 36 of these SDL-labeled assignments (23%) were not SDL. The tutors with a high rate of appropriately labeling SDL assignments (85% and 87%) appear to have reached a strong understanding as to what constitutes SDL. The tutors with a somewhat lower rate of appropriately labeling SDL assignments (76% and 67%) appear to have an emerging understanding about SDL. The tutor who appropriately labeled SDL for 33% of SDL-reported assignments shows little understanding of SDL. Benson (2013) pointed out that knowing how to use SDL is not a characteristic common to all students; similarly, this study's findings suggest that understanding the nature of SDL is also not a characteristic common to all tutors, even with some initial SDL training. The wide range in frequencies with which SDL-trained tutors applied SDL in their respective tutoring sessions suggests a need to adjust the tutor training. In other words, a tutor's readiness to promote SDL in their tutoring sessions might mirror a learner's readiness to proceed through the SDL stages (Grow, 1991; Nakata, 2010).

Higher frequencies in reporting SDL assignments did not necessarily correlate with higher frequencies in appropriately labeling these assignments as SDL. On the one hand, Tutor #1 reported SDL assignments in 58 of 58 sessions (100%), of which 44 of these 58 assignments (76%) were appropriately labeled as SDL. On the other hand, Tutor #2 reported SDL assignments in 41 of 153 sessions (27%), of which 35 of these 41 assignments (85%) were appropriately labeled as SDL. Notwithstanding, the lowest frequency in reporting SDL assignments (11%) correlated directly with the lowest frequency in appropriately labeling assignments as SDL (33%). Here, Tutor #4 reported SDL assignments in 12 of 106 sessions (11%), of which just 4 of these 12 assignments (33%) were appropriately labeled as SDL. This finding begs the question as to whether there was a misunderstanding as to what constitutes an SDL assignment and suggests the need to place greater emphasis during the tutor training as to what actually constitutes an SDL strategy as well as the importance of assigning SDL strategies. Similar to how language learners do not usually use SDL materials and strategies on their own (Tse, 2012), some of these ESL tutors were also not promoting

SDL strategies on their own (i.e., after the initial training had ended and without any follow-up training). Consequently, although the initial 90-minute SDL training appears to have guided some tutors in using SDL strategies, other tutors appear to have needed ongoing SDL training, especially during that first semester when being asked to promote SDL in their tutoring sessions.

Therefore, a primary recommendation is to plan for an extension of SDL training that goes beyond, and more in-depth, then the initial, introductory training. Since time is frequently limited for in-person training, online training, such as through the use of a local listserv on the topic, could expand the length of the training and allow tutors to share both ideas for SDL assignments and success stories with students. In addition, ongoing mentor support, perhaps provided by the coordinator of the center or by an experienced tutor well-versed in SDL, could help tutors newer to the concepts of SDL work through what assignments are and are not SDL-related and how tutors can promote student growth in SDL even in short-term tutoring relationships.

RQ#2: Types of SDL activities recommended by tutors to their tutees

In this study, tutors assigned SDL assignments to their tutees for learning language skills (39%), using technology (25%), practicing language creatively (20%), and learning through sociocultural contact (16%). This responds to earlier studies that called for teachers to teach SDL strategies to language learners (Cheng & Lee, 2018; Gan, 2004; Gan et al., 2004; Grover et al., 2014; Karatas et al., 2015; Lai et al., 2013). All five tutors in this study assigned SDL activities for learning language skills. Such activities supported speaking, listening, reading, writing, and pronunciation with similar frequency. However, because grammar was rarely included in SDL assignments, this could be an area for additional focus in future trainings.

Tutors #1 and #2 focused mainly on SDL assignments for learning through sociocultural contact, while Tutor #5 assigned most of the SDL assignments for creatively practicing language. These three tutors were also the primary assigners of SDL assignments for using technology. They were also the most active in assigning follow-up activities that supported SDL strategies regardless of assignment type; this suggests that these tutors found ideas that worked and used them. We also suspect that these three tutors believed strongly in the value of autonomous language learning and so motivated their tutees in seeing how SDL could "enrich their daily life" (Grover et al., 2014, p. 17). In fact, one of these tutors reported in the final survey having noticed that tutees were interested in one type of assignment and thus decided to continue with it. This anecdotal incidence relates to how language learners, upon seeing evidence of their own progress, are motivated to continue using SDL strategies (Cheng & Lee, 2018).

RQ#3: Tutor perceptions of how SDL training has influenced their tutoring practice

Tutor perceptions of promoting SDL among their tutees correlated with how tutors promoted SDL strategies. In the final survey, when assessing SDL impact on tutees' learning, two of the four respondents reported "quite a lot." Their response correlated with their high number of SDL assignments, which, in turn, illustrated a concerted effort by these tutors in promoting SDL among their tutees. This finding suggests that these two tutors are actively employing the SSDL model for teachers (Grow, 1991) while also guiding language learners from dependence to independence (Nakata, 2010). The other two tutors assessed the SDL impact on tutees' learning as "some" or "a little bit." Yet, these tutors had exerted only a limited effort at promoting SDL among their tutees. For SDL to have a positive effect, it must be positively promoted (Gan, 2004; Gan et al., 2004).

On the final survey, three tutors expressed how this training was valuable in learning to guide tutees in using SDL and in having a potential impact on learner success. This final survey and the frequencies of SDL assignments suggest that the training was effective. Yet, we must now tailor such training to meet specific points that have emerged from our data. Similar to how training in SDL can have a positive impact on students' readiness to engage in SDL activities (Yarahmadzehi & Bazleh,

2012), well-focused training can probably also have a positive impact on tutors' readiness to promote SDL among tutees.

An interesting case is Tutor #4 who, in the initial survey, had expressed that SDL is best taught when students were being tutored repeatedly by the same tutor, thus providing long-term contact. Indeed, this belief bore out; Tutor #4 reported promoting SDL in only 12 of 106 tutoring sessions (11%) and, of these, only 4 assignments were appropriately labeled as SDL. Incidentally, this tutor also mentioned in the initial survey that follow-up training would be needed and suggested that role plays would be helpful in training tutors to support students through different stages of SDL growth. This comment, while accurate and helpful, also demonstrates that the tutor understood SDL to be used only, or primarily, in long-term teaching relationships. Given that the training included a skit with a long-term teacher-student relationship, future training must emphasize how short-term contact with a student can also lead to increased SDL use.

Through further training, tutors can increase their ability to promote SDL among tutees. Tutor #1 requested this in the initial survey; even at the beginning of the semester, this tutor realized that more ideas would be useful. By having additional time to share ideas in training, the tutors who are strongest in sociocultural strategies, technology-related strategies, and creative strategies could share potential assignments with the other tutors. Ideas for propelling language learners towards independently studying subjects such as grammar, which are traditionally very teacher-dependent, could be discussed. In addition, since the notion of SDL as a "tool" in a "toolbox" of other teaching skills appeared in several comments, further training could emphasize the role of SDL in all types of learning situations. Training tutors in SDL is not simply about meeting the needs of tutees in tutoring sessions during a given semester; it is about promoting autonomous learning among all language learners and, by doing so, reaching positive correlations between SDL, student language learning, and teacher roles (Cheng & Lee, 2018; Gan, 2004; Gan et al., 2004; He & Valcke, 2012; Nakata, 2012).

Key Findings

Through this discussion, several key findings were identified. These findings serve to improve future SDL training for ESL tutors in this language program and perhaps also in other language programs that may wish to introduce SDL. Based on these findings, we offer the following recommendations:
- ✓ Provide SDL training and plan for ongoing training support so that tutors can share SDL ideas and success stories, thereby extending training efforts.
- ✓ Focus on what constitutes an SDL strategy and the importance of assigning SDL strategies.
- ✓ Demonstrate how grammar can also be included in SDL assignments.
- ✓ Reinforce that the purpose of teaching SDL goes beyond an individual tutoring meeting; instead, it assists the learner's development as a language-learner in general.
- ✓ Suggest that when tutors find SDL strategies that work, they should continue using them.
- ✓ Point out that short-term contact with a student can also lead to increased SDL use.
- ✓ Emphasize the role of SDL in all types of learning situations.

LIMITATIONS

This study's major limitation is its small participant size and single-site setting. This limitation calls for additional studies, but with larger numbers of both participants and settings. Another limitation is how the study, though it sought to determine whether assignments were appropriately labeled as promoting SDL, did not seek to determine whether the training matched SDL readiness stages manifested by the tutor participants. This is an area for future investigation. Another area for investigation is exploring tutee perspectives regarding the effect of SDL and, by doing so, increase the English program's efficacy in promoting SDL.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effect of training ESL tutors in SDL for the purpose of encouraging language learners to function autonomously within the context of an English language program's tutoring center. The study concluded that SDL training was successful to a degree. Based on Client Report Forms completed by tutors following each tutoring session, SDL assignments were included in 155 of 418 sessions (37%). Both experienced tutors and novice tutors recommended effective SDL activities to their tutees. However, both groups of tutors also inappropriately labeled some activities as SDL when such was not the case. The most creative SDL assignments came from tutors who had the most experience teaching ESL. Tutors who assigned more SDL assignments were the most successful in guiding tutees with using SDL. These tutors were also the most successful with interweaving language-building SDL strategies with sociocultural, creative, and technology-related strategies.

IMPLICATIONS

This study supports a recommendation to train teachers and tutors in SDL principles and to promote SDL among language learners. English language programs want students to assume responsibility for their own learning. Recognizing this importance, teachers often encourage students in autonomous language learning. However, it is now time for language programs to take a more active role in promoting SDL. The principles of SDL provide the means; programs must find the way.

Today, most educators agree that adults learn best when they personally invest in identifying, planning, and managing their own learning (Knowles, 1975). This idea also resonates with language educators. Anecdotally, most educators can identify highly successful language students as ones who seek alternative and relevant sources of input, design ways to apply learning outside of the classroom, and create opportunities to practice language. Too often, however, language educators view these successful components as inherent character traits, rather than teachable skills, as evidenced by the heretofore limited application of SDL in language-learning classrooms.

Findings from the current study illuminate steps for improving the SDL training received by tutors and thus teachers. The training should clarify that attempts to promote SDL will lead to improved future training; hence, any training is better than not having initiated this process. Language teachers should be encouraged to work towards the goal even if initial steps are not perfect. Programs should emphasize the impact that both short-term and long-term contact can have in demonstrating SDL principles to language learners. SDL trainers should provide extra time, if possible, for ample discussion and brainstorming about suggested strategies and assignments for SDL empowerment that would be appropriate for the program's student profile. After the training has been completed, program administrators could promote idea-sharing mechanisms among tutors so that the momentum from the training does not fade as time passes. Finally, the program should consider continuing the training through weekly interaction (e.g., through an emailed listserv) comparing SDL assignments with non-SDL assignments so that tutors can better understand the difference and grow to becoming more proficient promoters of SDL strategies among their tutees.

English language programs need to become creative in finding time and resources to engage their teachers in SDL training. Findings from earlier research studies supported the claim that students can be taught SDL for developing autonomy in language learning (Cheng & Lee, 2018; Gan, 2004; Gan et al., 2004; Grover et al., 2014; Tse, 2012). These studies also demonstrated that being self-directed is strongly correlated to success in language study. To that end, the current study provides a concrete example of how the training of tutors (and teachers) in SDL principles can result in language learners being trained in SDL and encouraged to employ SDL in their ongoing language-learning efforts.

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