



## **Fostering Autonomous Learning in Oral English Through Role Play: An Exploration in Course Setting**

**Rui Li**

Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia, [msytj620@gmail.com](mailto:msytj620@gmail.com)

**Fazilah Razali**

Corresponding author, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia, [fazilahrazali@upm.edu.my](mailto:fazilahrazali@upm.edu.my)

**Lilliati Ismail**

Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia, [lilliati@upm.edu.my](mailto:lilliati@upm.edu.my)

**Mohd Mokhtar Muhamad**

Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia, [mk\\_mokhtar@upm.edu.my](mailto:mk_mokhtar@upm.edu.my)

**Xiaolan Ma**

Mulan Primary School, China, [1151961770@qq.com](mailto:1151961770@qq.com)

Enhancing student motivation to manage their learning process and attain self-transformation in Oral English learning presents a notable challenge. This study emerged from a Role Play Oral English Course (RPOEC) which utilizes English cartoon film clips to enhance primary students' oral English skills through role play, facilitating meaningful language input and output. Implemented in a Chinese context where English language exposure is limited, this qualitative case study, combined with action research, explores how autonomous learning is fostered through RPOEC. The study engaged a Grade Six class of 30 students (25 girls and 5 boys) in northern China, investigating strategies to trigger learners' interests and form their independent learner identities autonomously, empower learners in their educational journey, encourage reflective practices in oral English learning, and involve learners in evaluative processes. Data, collected through a combination of observations, focus group discussions, and document analysis for three months, were thematically analyzed across four intertwined perspectives: situated learning, interactive communication, cooperative learning, and evaluative discussions. The paper posits that the outlined curricular approach can be tailored to educators' needs aiming to cultivate students' oral English skills within a situated, interactive, and collaborative learning environment, pushing learners towards autonomous engagement.

**Keywords:** autonomous learning, oral English learning, role play, cartoon film, curriculum

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## INTRODUCTION

Autonomous learning represents a shift from ‘directed teaching’ to ‘self-directed learning’ (Holec, 1981). The discourse on learner autonomy elucidates the capacity to control and assume responsibility for the learning process through self-management: setting objectives, making choices, taking decisions, monitoring progress, and evaluating outcomes. Autonomous learning significantly impacts student performance, elevating intrinsic motivation, metacognitive skills, and subject awareness (Lewis & Reinders, 2008). Benson (2013) delineated six domains of learner autonomy: resource-based, technology-based, learner-based, classroom-based, curriculum-based, and technology-based. The multi-faceted theory of autonomy has piqued researchers’ interest, leading to its application in numerous empirical studies in language learning. Baranovskaya & Shaforostova (2018) contends that role play strategy efficaciously enhances student performance in English for Special Purposes (ESP) within an autonomous learning framework. Manuel & Flavia (2021) refined the theory of autonomous learning within the context of language education, emphasizing self-access, autonomous learning modules, and the preparation of teachers for fostering autonomy.

Thus, the employment of role play to enhance students’ oral English proficiency is designed to promote curriculum-based interactive communication, thereby cultivating their confidence and speaking capabilities. This pedagogical approach, which integrates situated learning, interactive communication, and cooperative learning, ameliorates the challenges of oral English development in China, where English-speaking environments are scarce. As posited by Brown et al. (1989), “Many methods of didactic education assume a separation between knowing and doing, treating knowledge as an integral, self-sufficient substance, theoretically independent of the situations in which it is learned and used.” This notion resonates with the current state of oral English learning among Chinese students, where the dichotomy between language acquisition and practical usage may obstruct effective English education. Traditional methods often entail mechanical recitations, which may engender passivity, consequently hampering productive oral English outcomes (Cao, 2020; Liu, 2021). Enhancing students’ motivation to manage their learning and attain self-transformation in oral English learning remains a pertinent concern among English educators in China (Shen, 2021; Mashrabovna & Kizi, 2023). Furthermore, offering comprehensive learning practices related to imparting thinking skills to students has the potential to yield positive learning outcomes, including creative thinking, authentic problem-solving, self-directed learning, and critical thinking (Yasar et al., 2023). Previous investigations into autonomous language learning primarily employ quantitative methods to assess the impact of autonomous learning on educational outcomes, with scant qualitative inquiries exploring the mechanisms and motivations underpinning autonomous learning behaviors. Moreover, these studies often view learning activities as methods or strategies, overlooking curriculum-based approaches fostering autonomous learning. The novelty of this study, drawing upon prior work on autonomous learning and role play, resides in its focus on learning material, research content, research area, and methodology. Utilizing English cartoon film clips as audio-visual learning materials, this research explores autonomous learning behaviors and motivations triggered within a Role Play Oral English Course (RPOEC) framework, delineating a curriculum-based

study on autonomous learning. Employing a qualitative method intertwined with action research in a case study, this inquiry scrutinizes how RPOEC cultivates students' autonomous learning behaviors and motivation, addressing four research questions concerning learner engagement, autonomy, reflection, and evaluative processes. How does the RPOEC engage learners' interests and identities in an autonomous learning process? How does the RPOEC empower learners to take charge of their learning? In what ways does the RPOEC promote reflection on oral English learning among learners? How does the RPOEC facilitate learners' control over and involvement in evaluation processes? Through analyzing students' and co-teachers' experiences and sentiments, emergent themes are presented. The findings may serve as a resource for English educators, especially novices, aiding in understanding how to ignite autonomous learning in RPOEC and incorporate these elements into pedagogical strategy formulation for enhancing students' oral English proficiency.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Autonomous learning**

The concept of “autonomous learner” was pioneered within language education by Holec (1981) in his discourse on autonomy and foreign language learning, advocating a transition from “directed teaching” to “self-directed learning”. He characterizes an autonomous learner as one adept at orchestrating learning behaviors, thus democratizing language learning by furnishing the conceptual apparatus for the meticulous planning, construction, and execution of courses tailored to the learner's needs, motivations, and traits, thereby empowering learners to navigate and regulate their own progress (Henri, 1981). A cornerstone of autonomous learning is the learners' accountability in orchestrating their learning journey: setting objectives, making choices, taking decisions, monitoring progress, and evaluating outcomes. Concurrently, students indulge in sustained target language interaction within their groups, progressively attaining proficiency. Bruner (1986) encapsulates autonomous learning within two tenets: learner involvement and learner reflection. The former entails educators aiding learners in assuming control of their learning through wholehearted engagement in the learning cycle: planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Comparatively, learner reflection involves aiding learners in engaging reflectively with both the process and content of learning, nurturing the capacity for ‘reflective intervention’ within the encountered knowledge and the learning process itself. Swain (2005) introduced a third tenet, emphasizing the pivotal role of target language usage in oral English teaching evolution, portraying language acquisition as a dialogic process necessitating profound language processing and mental exertion.

Language learner autonomy, a nuanced facet of learner autonomy, harnesses a ubiquitous human capacity emanating from behavioral impetus and emotional necessity. As posited by social psychologist Deci & Flaste (1996), self-fulfillment is contingent upon a sense of autonomy or volition in our actions. This self-fulfillment is predicated upon the fulfillment of two other needs: competency, enabling learners to tackle and surmount optimal challenges, and relatedness, ensuring a connection with others amidst effective and autonomous endeavors. In this motivational framework, autonomy's freedom is validated by learners' competence and tempered by their relatedness,

implying that authentic autonomous actions spring from a learner's self-concept. Cotterall (2000) underscores curriculum-based perspectives on autonomous learning, asserting that language courses should be geared towards facilitating learner autonomy, mirroring learning objectives within language acquisition, providing specific tasks fostering learning strategy development, and enhancing motivation and reflection. Dam (2011) contends that autonomous learning signifies a paradigm shift from teacher-guided to self-guided learning, promoting an active student role in the assessment process, thereby inciting reflection, evaluation, and awareness of learning progression.

In recent years, research on autonomy has burgeoned, applying theoretical frameworks to practical studies utilizing novel techniques or online platforms, particularly amidst the Covid-19 period. Aminatun & Oktaviani (2019) delved into the utility of the language learning application Memrise to augment students' autonomous learning skills, observing an enhancement in independent learning and English proficiency. Lenkaitis (2020) probed the nexus between second language (L2) learning and learner autonomy via synchronous computer-mediated communication on Zoom, finding Zoom an effective medium for fostering learner autonomy and authentic language experiences. Mulyah (2020) examined students' readiness and perceptions towards autonomous online language learning. In addition, myriads of studies have integrated autonomy theory (Lee, 2017; Little et al., 2017; Palfreyman, 2020), unveiled strategies (Saeed, 2021; Putro et al., 2022), and explored perceptions of autonomous learning within English language teaching (Khotimah et al., 2019). The creative outputs resulting from autonomous learning, particularly those that emphasize creative problem-solving abilities, have a significant impact on students' learning processes and their production capabilities (Puchongprawet & Chantraukrit, 2022). Alkandari & Al-Failakawei (2022) implemented a task-based project to bolster autonomous learning and found that involving participants in the reverse learning project augmented their sense of and beliefs in self-regulation and responsibility. Saputra et al. (2021) posited that employing the Creative Cognitive-Behavior Counseling Model (CCBCM) could foster the development and effective enhancement of students' self-regulation abilities.

### **Role play in oral English learning**

The term "role play" encompasses a multitude of practices in contemporary settings, manifesting in drama, games (both online and offline), simulations, and its application across various industries. Consequently, its definition is subject to the context of application. In the context of this article, "role play" is construed as a pedagogical activity within an educational setting. Richards & Nunan (1990) analogizes role play in the classroom to drama performance, wherein students assume distinct roles within specified scenarios, enacting typical events pertinent to those scenarios. Therefore, the operational delineation of role play in this discourse embraces the theatrical elements centered on performance, with simulation serving as a crucial conduit for students to hone their English speaking skills. The literature underscores the pedagogical merit of role play as a potent instructional and training modality, accentuating its capacity to augment social skills. This is achieved by immersing individuals in novel hypothetical scenarios while furnishing a secure, relatively repercussion-free milieu for participants to refine specific skill facets (Asriyani et al., 2019; Stevens, 2015). Role play harmoniously dovetails with the oral English learning trajectory by proffering diverse

narrative contexts and communicative interfaces (Wu, 2019). This engagement necessitates that players transcend their ego identities to embody distinct personas, thereby fostering empathy. Such empathetic engagement propels students to embody varied personas across disparate scenarios, enriching their competency in expressing English across a spectrum of situations. Role play, therefore, engenders a distinctive psychological ambiance conducive for comprehending and articulating the English language as required (Galloway, 1984; Wu, 2015). In a related endeavor, Tipmontree & Tasanameelarp (2020) employed role play activities to enhance Thai EFL students' oral English communication aptitude. Role play not only galvanizes active participation but often incites players to craft their own narratives and characters, engendering a vibrant, experiential learning milieu (Gusmuliana et al., 2021). Through the lens of these discussions, role play emerges as a dynamic, interactive pedagogical strategy, holding substantial promise for enhancing the oral English proficiency of learners within an engaging, experiential classroom paradigm.

## **METHOD**

### **Research design and procedure**

This study stemmed from a desire to delineate the experiential dimensions of students' oral English learning within a RPOEC framework. Employing action research proposed by Johnson (2012) in conjunction with a qualitative case study methodology, the endeavor sought to crystallize a pedagogical guideline for RPOEC. The course structure was envisioned as a cyclical and iterative process comprising five stages: Access Learning, Pre-rehearsal, Pre-performance & Discussion, Rehearsal, and Performance & Discussion (see Table 1). Spanning 50-minute sessions held bi-weekly, the course utilized English cartoon film clips or series, alongside PowerPoint presentations with audio-visual script lines to stimulate and facilitate learning. Excerpts from English cartoons such as "Zootopia," "A Bug's Life," and the series "Peppa Pig" served as the narrative backdrop for role play scenarios. Each cartoon episode spanned 3 to 5 class sessions to complete a learning cycle (see Figure 1). Initially, given the students' nascent English competency, a heavier emphasis on rehearsal was deemed imperative. The flexibility of the RPOEC procedure (see Figure 1) allowed for modification and repetition contingent on the evolution of students' oral English aptitude.

### **Participants**

The case study centered on a Grade Six class within a northern Chinese primary school, encompassing 30 willing participants (5 boys and 25 girls). The choice of primary students was underpinned by several considerations: their inherent active disposition and penchant for imitation align with the imitative essence of role play; the relatively lesser academic workload in primary settings facilitates research conduct; by Grade Six, students have amassed a foundational English vocabulary conducive for engaging in role play activities; and their advanced grade level augments articulation capabilities, enriching data collection during interviews.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Data was collected through observations, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and document analysis. Utilizing phone cameras, both the learning experiences and FGD

sessions were recorded. Each FGD, comprising 18-20 students, delved into feedback and recommendations for performers' enactments, with participants simultaneously serving as audience members. Data, encapsulating students' experiences and sentiments within the RPOEC framework, underwent iterative examination across five cycle-actions within a term, leading to three refinements of the RPOEC guidelines, culminating in its final rendition (see Table 1). The action research, embodying a fully participatory ethos, was executed by the researcher-as-teacher alongside a co-teacher. Given the pragmatic challenges of written field notes, video recording emerged as a robust tool for capturing in-class experiences, enabling repeated reviews to ensure comprehensive data capture. Meticulous preparation and explicit strategies were deployed to uphold data trustworthiness, reconciling the dual roles of teacher-researcher, establishing observation protocols, and strategizing video instrument placement. Employing semi-structured questions and group focus interviews, data encompassing students' feelings and perspectives on the role play course's facilitation of autonomous oral English learning were collated. Employing inductive thematic analysis (Patton, 1990), data analysis yielded four predominant themes revolving around 'how RPOEC triggers students' autonomous learning', thereby elucidating the genesis of learner autonomy within this pedagogical milieu.

Table 1  
Guidelines for the RPOEC framework

Procedure & Material	Description
Access learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Video Exploration: Engage with English film clips to immerse in linguistic and contextual cues.</li> <li>▸ Linguistic Instruction: Introduce pertinent English knowledge, focusing on vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical structures.</li> <li>▸ Role play Orientation: Instruct on the fundamentals of role play enactment.</li> <li>▸ Surface-Structure Imitation: Facilitate initial mimicry of dialogues and expressions.</li> <li>▸ Workshop Session: Organize into groups, brainstorm, and initiate prop and costume selection.</li> <li>▸ Assignment: Assign script recitation tasks to foster familiarity with dialogues.</li> </ul>
Pre-Rehearsal ( <i>Round 1</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Workshop Session: Establish settings and prepare for role enactment.</li> <li>▸ Group Learning: Foster collaborative knowledge assimilation.</li> <li>▸ Initial Rehearsal: Engage in enactment rehearsals to refine performance.</li> </ul>
Pre-Rehearsal ( <i>Round 2</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Workshop Session: Establish settings and prepare for role enactment.</li> <li>▸ Rehearsal: Refine performance.</li> <li>▸ Discussion: Facilitate group discussions to suggest improvements.</li> </ul>
Rehearsal ( <i>Reinforcement</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Workshop Session: Fine-tune settings and address any performance anomalies.</li> <li>▸ Reinforcement Rehearsal: Engage in further enactment rehearsals to enhance fluency and expression.</li> </ul>
Performance ( <i>Formal</i> ) & Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Workshop Session: Finalize settings and ensure readiness for formal performance.</li> <li>▸ Formal Performance: Execute the role play, showcasing mastery of the learned material.</li> <li>▸ Reflective Discussion: Facilitate a discussion to reflect on performance, extract learnings, and suggest improvements.</li> </ul>
Learning Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Visual Stimuli: Utilize English cartoon film clips as engaging audio-visual learning materials.</li> <li>▸ Scripted Presentations: Employ PowerPoint presentations with audio-visual script lines to guide learning and performance.</li> </ul>

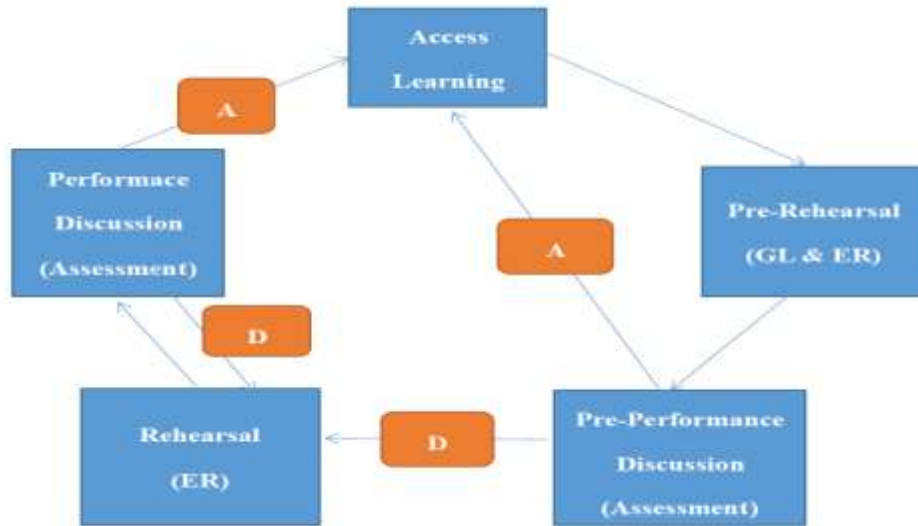


Figure 1

Implementation flow of the RPOEC framework. A: Agree; D: Disagree; GL: Group Learning; ER: Enactment Rehearsal

## FINDINGS

### Emergence of autonomous learning

The inquiry into the utilization of the RPOEC for enhancing primary students' oral English proficiency yielded an intriguing theme: the emergence of "autonomous learning" from the learners' experience.

*During each session, particularly during rehearsals, numerous students spontaneously sought clarification from the teacher, inquiring about word pronunciations or sentence meanings. This proactive quest for understanding was not teacher-driven; rather, it emanated from the students' recognition that each individual's performance impacted the collective outcome, reflecting an interconnected learning ecosystem.*

*Remarkably, before the commencement bell, students already transitioned into the learning mindset. Some delved into line reading aloud, others engaged in memorization activities. Despite the ambient play-sounds permeating from the exterior, students remained undistracted and immersed. A collaborative teacher reflected on this phenomenon with astonishment, noting the unprecedented level of active and spontaneous engagement displayed by the students. (Classroom observations by the researcher)*

### Themes facilitating autonomous learning

The learners' experiences within the curriculum-structured RPOEC divulged four pivotal themes elucidating how role play in oral English learning fosters autonomous

learning. These themes, examined from four intersecting perspectives—situated learning, interactive communication, cooperative learning, and evaluative discussion—were embedded within the curriculum implementation process, spanning from Access Learning to Performance with Discussion (see Table 2). The insights gleaned from focus group interviews, exploring the genesis and evolution of learning behaviors, underscored that these four thematic dimensions are intertwined and integral in propelling learners towards autonomous learning. The synergistic interaction among situated learning, interactive communication, cooperative learning, and evaluative discussion emerged as a robust catalyst for nurturing learners' autonomy.

Table 2  
Themes facilitating autonomous learning

Theme	Category	Description
Situated Learning	Input with meaning	<i>S: We can identify the problems on our own, as we are required to recite our scripts in sequence. If someone forgets a line or misunderstands the dialogue, we pause the rehearsal to address the issue. This halt is not a setback, but a collaborative endeavor to ensure our partners grasp the material well, facilitating the seamless continuation of our rehearsal.</i>
	Output with meaning	
	Learning by doing	
Interactive Communication	Target	<i>S: The members of my group are very supportive. When I struggle with enacting a scene in English, they guide me on how to improve. If I don't rectify my mistakes, it hampers our collective ability to deliver a captivating performance. This shared understanding motivates me to correct my shortcomings, fostering a spirit of unity and collective achievement.</i>
	Language use	
	Engagement	
	Experience learning	
Cooperative Learning	Peer support	<i>S: Our ability to cooperate significantly influences the quality of our performance. If I stumble or forget my lines, it impacts my partners and our overall presentation. This realization compels me to exert extra effort. It's a shared responsibility, and through our combined efforts, we excel together. (Interviews with students)</i>
	Empower	
	Model strength	
	Discussion and debate	
	Target learning	
Evaluative Discussion	Self-Access	<i>T: What are the strengths observed in this group performance? S: "XX has mastered the lines quite well, enabling a fluent and natural performance." Student 2: "XX's expressive intonation during the performance really stood out; he embodied the character of Doctor Bear convincingly. S: When Peppa exclaimed 'disgusting,' both the tone of voice and facial expression conveyed the sentiment effectively. T: What areas could this group improve upon in their performance? S: XX struggled with remembering the script lines, often pausing or stumbling. S: XX had difficulty understanding her partner's English. For instance, when Doctor Bear asked her to stick out her tongue, she failed to respond with the appropriate action until prompted again. T: How might these issues be addressed for enhanced performance? S: Repetition could be key; memorizing the script lines through multiple readings might help. S: Watching the film multiple times and simulating it repeatedly could foster a better understanding of the English dialogues, enabling the linking of relevant actions to the spoken words. (Interviews with students)</i>
	Peer-Access	
	Peer Feedback	



## DISCUSSION

### Autonomous learning fostered through situated learning in PROEC

The investigation of the RPOEC revealed its effectiveness in enabling students to engage their interests and identities within the learning process, aligning with Little's (2007) assertion: The core of learner autonomy is characterized by a willingness, proactive stance, and reflective approach to one's education, through which learners exercise their agency to manifest learning behaviors. This emerges from the inherent features of the RPOEC learning material, coupled with the experiential learning ethos of "learning by doing." The audio-visual cartoon film materials provide narrative contexts for students to simulate and enact scenarios, thereby immersing them in meaningful English input and output processes. This cyclical learning journey, spanning from Access Learning to the final step in RPOEC, particularly shines during group rehearsals where students collaborate to enact scripted scenarios. Success in these enactments hinges on a thorough understanding and usage of English, transcending mechanical rote recitation. Illustratively, in a scenario from "Peppa Pig,"

*George's inability to memorize and comprehend Peppa's instructions halted the rehearsal, underscoring the necessity of understanding English for effective enactment. (Rehearsal observations by the researcher)*

Situated learning in RPOEC demands more than mere verbal recitation; it requires the embodiment of intonation, gestures, and emotions, elevating the understanding and expression of English. For instance, in another scenario from "Peppa Pig,"

*(Rehearsal observations by the researcher)*

The actors initially struggled to convey emotions authentically, reverting to mechanical recitation. However, as they acclimatized to the RPOEC approach, their performances gradually mirrored the emotive and contextual richness of the cartoon characters, as seen in a scenario from "Zootopia,"

*The characters Judy and the fox exchange dialogues:*

*Fox: "Nice costume, loser. What crazy world are you living in where you think a bunny could be a cop?"*

*(Performance: The actor adopted a mocking posture.)*

*Judy: "Kindly return my friends' tickets."*

*(Performance: The actor's voice and facial expressions embodied bravery and resolve.)*

*Fox: "Come and get them. But watch out. Cause I'm a fox, and like you said in your dumb little stage play, us predators used to eat prey. And that killer instinct's still in our DNA."*

*(Performance: The actor theatrically stretched out his claws, showcasing fake fangs to intimidate bunny Judy, with a voice tone dripping with disdain and malice.)*

*Judy: "You don't scare me, Gideon."*

*(Performance: The actor feigned fearlessness in her voice; however, her tear-filled eyes and twitching nose betrayed her emotions.)*

*Fox: "Scared now? Look at her nose twitch, she is scared. Cry, little baby bunny! Cry!"*

*(Performance: The actor reverted to a mocking posture.) (Performance observations by the researcher)*

The insightful responses garnered from focus group interviews probed the transformation observed in students' learning behaviors. According to Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning, learner autonomy is both a social-interactive and an individual-cognitive phenomenon: the exercise and development of an individual learner's autonomy both support and are dependent on the exercise and development of the autonomy of all other class members. It was discerned that the amalgam of situated learning, interactive communication, cooperative learning, and evaluative discussions was instrumental in catalyzing this transformation within the RPOEC milieu. The RPOEC creates a "micro-social situation" encompassing both "psychological and social dimensions," which facilitates language learning through meaningful engagement and experiential practice. These elements are connected to the autonomy-related theme of "Participation" (Palfreyman, 2020). These elements, while distinct, interacted in a seamless synergy, fostering a conducive learning environment that transcended the mechanistic recitation habit, ushering the students into a realm of meaningful enactment and deeper comprehension of oral English.

*S: We are able to identify issues on our own because we need to recite our scripts in sequence. If someone forgets a line or doesn't understand what is being said, we have to pause the rehearsal, address the issue, and assist our peers in understanding it well.*

The alterations in students' enactment within the RPOEC framework illuminated a paradigm where students recalibrated and restructured their learning strategies to align with the pedagogical exigencies. This adjustment involved the capacity for self-directed learning, which in turn would empower the individual to manage affairs with greater responsibility (Tran & Duong, 2020). Notably, this capacity is nurtured through peer feedback and adherence to the narrative and linguistic principles embedded in the English cartoon film episodes utilized in the course. The concept of situated learning emerged as a catalyst, galvanizing students' autonomous learning identities throughout their learning journey. This mirrors Henri's (1981) assertion that learners, equipped with the capacity to direct their learning behaviors, engender a more democratic language learning process. By availing conceptual tools for planning, constructing, and conducting courses tailored to meet the learners' needs, motivations, and characteristics, situated learning empowers learners to navigate and manage their learning trajectory (Pham, 2023).

*S: I really appreciate you, teacher. Before this course, I believed that memorizing and reciting were the only effective ways to learn English. However, now I've come*

*to realize that learning English can be enjoyable, almost like playing a game or 'Playing House,' while still being educational. (Interviews with students)*

The empirical data, elucidating students' sentiments towards their learning experiences, underscored the intertwined roles of situated learning, interactive communication, cooperative learning, and evaluative discussions in stimulating students' engagement, and fostering their identity formation within the learning process. Engaging with learners' agency seeks to instill a sense of both individual and collective responsibility for their learning, with the aim of fostering a self-transforming community of practice (Palfreyman, 2020). Drawing on the theoretical prism posited by Brown et al. (1989), situated learning was construed as a co-production of knowledge through active engagement. This ideation resonates with the notion that knowledge acquires significance within its contextual domain of production and application. Such a premise posits that effective knowledge acquisition transcends isolated, theoretical engagement, urging for its practical immersion in relevant scenarios (Ellen & Svetlana, 2021). This echoes John Dewey's advocacy for "Learning by Doing," where the quintessence of authentic knowledge acquisition is encapsulated in the act of "doing." Such a process delineates a path of active exploration, a confluence of action and reflection, accentuating personal understanding (Dewey, 1974). The RPOEC framework encapsulated this theoretical essence by immersing students in interactive scenarios to practice oral English. Through simulative and communicative engagements, students navigated the theoretical and practical terrains of language learning, epitomizing a symbiotic relationship between learner involvement and the cultivation of learner autonomy. This pedagogical voyage elucidates a harmonious interplay between theory and praxis, portraying the RPOEC as a vibrant ecosystem where situated learning blossoms, nurturing students' autonomous learning endeavours.

#### **Autonomous learning fostered through interactive communication and cooperative learning in PROEC**

The thematic arcs of interactive communication and cooperative learning in the RPOEC framework serve as potent catalysts, steering learners towards the helm of their educational voyage, and fostering reflective engagements in oral English learning. Observational data unfurled a narrative where students were nudged into the realm of interactive communication with their peers, particularly during rehearsal and performance sessions. The onus of successful performance hinged on the students' aptitude to exchange meaningful messages in alignment with the contextual essence embodied in the cartoon film materials utilized. This pedagogical design, where students responsively engage with their interlocutors to culminate performances, seeds a vibrant ecosystem of interactive communication amongst participants.

*S: In this performance, I found myself more courageous than the last time. No matter what happened during the performance, we came together and were able to resolve issues through discussion. I really enjoy this activity, as it can bring unexpected joy and pleasure.*

*S: The members of my group are very supportive. If I struggle with enacting a particular action in English, they guide me on how to do it correctly. We discuss and*

*share methods for improvement, recognizing that if I don't rectify the issue, it hampers our collective ability to deliver a good performance.*

*S: Our performance thrives on mutual cooperation. If I stumble or forget my lines, it affects my partners and our group's overall performance. Therefore, I am motivated to invest more effort. It's not just about individual roles; we are in this together. (Interviews with students)*

Delving deeper, responses gleaned from focus group discussions illuminated the scaffolding role of peer support, providing a cushion against the inherent frustrations tied to knowledge acquisition. Noels (2018) proposes that to create the optimal conditions for learners to flourish, initial focus should be given to the character of the dialogue, which is identified as “support from significant others.” This encompasses informative feedback, interpersonal immediacy, and support for autonomy. Reflective dialogues have unveiled a tangible sense of freedom among students in managing their learning activities. A pronounced challenge lay in grappling with the pronunciation of new vocabulary and assimilating English comprehension—a hurdle often exacerbated in traditional classroom settings where teacher-induced criticism could engender a retreat from active engagement or kindle a weariness towards learning. Conversely, the collaborative cradle of group learning within RPOEC ameliorated these pressures, propelling students towards problem-solving with a bolstered sense of courage. Empowerment, as it relates to autonomous learning, signifies the capacity of learners to take control of their own educational journey (Palfreyman, 2020). The ethos of empowerment resonates within the RPOEC framework, creating a supportive learning environment where students independently navigate their learning paths. Given the diverse English proficiency spectrum, empowerment fostered a nurturing environment where each student, regardless of their proficiency level, could make informed decisions pertaining to their learning pathways (Noels, 2018). This empowering milieu significantly buoyed the cultivation of learner autonomy. Moreover, the concept of model strength has emerged as a facilitative force, enabling proficient learners to guide their teams towards improved performances (Noguchi, 2018). This dual-faceted mechanism not only exemplified a positive learning trajectory for others to emulate but also ignited a competitive fervor within and amongst groups. This competitive impetus dovetailed with the discussion and debate-oriented learning objectives, instigating a self-directed learning ethos and promoting reflective engagements in oral English learning. Such an orchestrated blend of interactive communication and cooperative learning, underscored by the principles of empowerment and competitive motivation (Palfreyman, 2020), rendered the RPOEC framework a fertile ground for nurturing learner autonomy, thereby enriching the pedagogical discourse on fostering self-directed and reflective learning experiences.

A robust curriculum theory mandates an interactive paradigm of teaching and learning, as postulated by Barnes (1976). Barnes elucidates the notion of action knowledge, defined as the assimilation of acquired knowledge for personalized applications, which serves as a cornerstone for autonomous engagements beyond the formal educational milieu. He underscores the pivotal role of integrating ‘school knowledge’ into ‘action knowledge’ through exploratory endeavors aimed at problem-solving within small

collaborative groups. Adhering to this principle, the design and implementation of RPOEC endeavor to foster a conducive environment for the flourishing of primary students' oral English capabilities through interactive communication within situated scenarios. RPOEC's pedagogical architecture, laden with abundant rehearsals and performances, propels students into frequent interactive engagements, thereby empowering them with agency over their learning trajectories. This pedagogical design dovetails with the ethos of learning-by-doing, thereby catalyzing the emergence and nurturing of oral English competencies, while also fueling a burgeoning interest in self-directed and self-instructional oral language learning. Moreover, the procedural elements of 'rehearsals and performance' facilitate reflective engagements in oral English learning, instigating internalized responsibilities for contemplation, organization, evaluation, alternative propositioning, and representation of tasks, which subsequently serve as scaffolds for learners in their future educational endeavors (Al-Khreshah, 2022).

Transitioning to the realm of cooperative learning, this pedagogical strategy, as described by Slavin (1995), encapsulates a collaborative learning voyage where learners exchange viewpoints, pool knowledge resources, co-construct knowledge, and foster a spirit of exploration and cooperation through discussion and dialogue. In the context of RPOEC, the imperative of teamwork for successful performance engenders a sense of 'interdependence', thereby nurturing trust and camaraderie amongst participants, which in turn, fuels autonomous learning impulses. This resonates with Stover's (2005) assertion on the invigorating impact of a 'sense of team community' and the cognizance of individual responsibility towards collective success. Consequently, cooperative learning within RPOEC steers learners towards autonomous engagements, buoyed by a shared identity and mutualistic endeavors aimed at goal attainment. Furthermore, echoing Palfreyman (2020) argument on the internalization of higher mental functions through social interaction, RPOEC's cooperative learning milieu sets the stage for spontaneous (autonomous) learning, incited through interactive engagements with peers that contains participatory, exploratory, and interpretative learning procedures, further underlines the transformative power of group dynamics, shaped by peer support, empowerment, model strength, and discursive engagements, in fostering learner autonomy within the role play learning framework of RPOEC. The amalgam of interactive and cooperative learning strategies within RPOEC stands as a testament to the potential of well-orchestrated pedagogical designs in nurturing autonomous learners, thereby enriching the tapestry of educational discourse.

#### **Autonomous learning fostered through evaluative discussion in PROEC**

Evaluation within the RPOEC framework transcends mere assessment, morphing into a pedagogical strategy that positions language as a vehicle for orchestrating learning experiences. It harnesses discussion modules including self-assessment, peer-assessment and peer feedback which serve as reflective tools, catalyzing the evolution of learners' strategies and igniting the mechanisms of autonomous learning (Mynard & Stevenson, 2017). This evaluative process bifurcates into process evaluation, rooted in rehearsal engagements, and outcome evaluation, emanating post-performance. Process evaluation predominates during the rehearsal phase, where students are entrusted with

the dual tasks of self-access and peer-access. These approaches facilitate reflection on their learning and experiences in a narrative and reflective manner, which can either promote or impede autonomous language learning (Shen et al., 2020). The rehearsal setting illuminates any hindrances or deficiencies that may impede the seamless flow of interactive communication, thereby mirroring the contours of challenges that necessitate introspection and amelioration. This rehearsal-driven evaluation furnishes a structured yet nurturing environment, endowing learners with a sense of security, direction, and agency over their learning trajectory.

On the flip side, outcome evaluation unfolds in the aftermath of performance, chiefly encompassing peer feedback and recommendations. This post-performance discourse cultivates a culture of self-regulated learning and self-diagnosis, propelled by an intrinsic motivational undercurrent. The evaluative comments rendered by peers not only dissect the performance of others but also reflect, albeit indirectly, on the evaluators' own strengths and weaknesses (Noguchi et al., 2018). This reciprocal evaluative dialogue fosters a 'mirror effect', wherein the critiques and accolades bestowed upon others reverberate as reflective prisms for self-evaluation.

*T: What are the strengths of this group performance?*

*S: "XX memorized the lines thoroughly and delivered a fluent and natural performance.*

*S: XX expressed intonation well in his performance, resembling a real Doctor Bear.*

*S: When Peppa said 'disgusting,' both her tone of voice and facial expression conveyed the sentiment effectively. (Interviews with students)*

*Interpretation: The collected data elucidate the degree to which actors have assimilated the English script, utilizing it meaningfully, which serves as an indicator of their diligent engagement to meet learning requisites. Moreover, such exemplary engagements serve as a benchmark, delineating the effort and standards requisite for peer learners. This reflective mechanism aids learners in recalibrating and prioritizing their learning strategies, fostering informed decision-making.*

The assessment framework depicted in Table 2 articulates a two-pronged evaluative approach. Initially, it celebrates the learning endeavors of students, showcasing exemplary performances as model patterns, while also spotlighting areas of improvement for those who encountered challenges. The benefits of peer interaction include notably enhanced cognitive thinking and reduced anxiety from exposure to errors. The advantages of peer-assisted learning become more pronounced during more complex tasks and with the more challenging problems within those tasks (Jarean et al., 2023). The evaluative standards are anchored to the learning materials, particularly the English cartoon film clips which students emulate and enact. Subsequently, this evaluative paradigm empowers learners by immersing them in the assessment process. The cycles of Rehearsal and Performance render the learning process and its outcomes visible, bolstering self-diagnosis and self-directed learning. This evaluative engagement propels learners through a 'work cycle' of planning, negotiation, and decision-making. Moreover, as peer learners unearth individual challenges and targets, this evaluative

procedure incrementally elevates its ambition, mirroring the learners' growing proficiency in orchestrating their learning journey (Shen et al., 2020). Collectively, the discussion-centric evaluation modality cultivates an invigorated evaluative ambiance, facilitating proactive engagement in oral skill enhancement.

## CONCLUSION

Three fundamental principles underscore the development and exercise of learner autonomy in the domain of oral English within the RPOEC framework: learner involvement, learner reflection, and target language utilization. The RPOEC adheres to these autonomy-enhancing principles across four integral dimensions of learning: situated learning, interactive communication, cooperative learning, and evaluative discussion. These dimensions collectively address the core inquiry of how RPOEC catalyzes autonomous learning amidst students' engagement with oral English. The details of these dimensions elucidate a comprehensive narrative: the engagement of learners' interests and identities within the learning process, the empowerment of learners to take charge of their learning trajectory, the promotion of reflective practices concerning oral English learning, and the facilitation of learner control within evaluative engagements. Through the lens of RPOEC, learners experience an elevation in their linguistic awareness, enabling them to discern and appreciate the meaningful utilization of English, thereby nudging them towards autonomous learning. Moreover, the procedural architecture of RPOEC, characterized by participatory, communal, and collaborative dynamics, emerges as a quintessential catalyst for nurturing autonomous learning within primary students' oral English learning landscape. The structured guidelines within RPOEC, rich in rehearsal and performance opportunities, incessantly propel students towards interactive communication. This environment, where control over learning is vested in target language engagement, allows learners to exercise agency over their learning process. This alignment with the principle of learning-by-doing not only resonates with the emergent oral English competency but also ignites a robust interest in self-directed and self-instructed oral language learning. Through this multi-dimensional approach, RPOEC unveils a conducive ecosystem for learners to explore, reflect, and flourish autonomously within the realm of oral English.

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