

LEARNER AUTONOMY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS' ATTITUDES

Eka Kusuma Adianingrum
ekakus4v@gmail.com
Tidar University
Indonesia

Abstract

Learner autonomy has acted as an essential trend in language teaching for over 30 years. However, in Indonesian educational context, Lengkanawati (2014a) stated that this term is still rarely discussed even in Indonesian literature. The learners are still not yet to be investigated in order to indicate the applicability of autonomous learning. The writer, therefore, is interested in examining the learner's attitude which is English education students' about learner autonomy in language learning. Some researches indicate that the learners' attitude is one of the factors in developing autonomous learning. This study employed both quantitative and qualitative method by giving questionnaires to English Education Department students at Tidar University and interviewing some of them who have filled the questionnaire. The result of this study is expected as a consideration for the lecturers to be more aware of the learners' readiness in developing autonomous learning in their language teaching and learning process.

Keywords – Autonomous Language Learning, Learner Autonomy, Learners' Attitudes

Introduction

Richards (2015) stated that in recent years, learner autonomy has been an important trend in language teaching. It has been the key theme in the field of foreign language teaching for more than 30 years. Autonomous learning according to Victori and Lockhart (1995) is said to make learning more personal, focused, and since it is based on the learners' needs and preferences, it achieves better learning outcomes. Today, the national curriculum implies that autonomous learning is considered to be fundamental in the teaching and learning process (Lengkanawati, 2017). Regardless of its importance and impact, Lengkanawati (2014a) reported that learner autonomy was very rarely discussed in Indonesian literature. Because of this significant gap, the writer is interested in investigating the learner's attitude towards autonomous learning because researchers indicate that it is one of important factors in teaching practice, especially in developing autonomous learning.

Learner Autonomy. Holec's (1981: 3) definition of learner autonomy was the ability of the learner to take charge of one's own learning by being able to have and to hold the responsibility for these decisions: 1) determining learning objectives, 2) defining the contents and progression, 3) selecting methods and techniques, 4) monitoring the procedures of acquisition, and 5) evaluating what has been acquired.

Autonomous EFL learners in Asia. Reactive is also a common term used to describe the kind of autonomous EFL learners in Asia based on Littlewood (1999). He classified learner autonomy into two levels: proactive autonomy and reactive autonomy. Proactive autonomy is where learners are able to plan, monitor, and assess their learning. In this way, learners establish their own agenda of learning and their own learning direction. This level of autonomy is often seen in Western cultures, such as Australian students. Meanwhile, reactive

autonomy is where learners do not create their own direction, but once it has been initiated, it enables learners to organize their resources independently to reach their goal. For instance, if given a task, learner will learn willingly and may volunteer to form a group to deal with it. Therefore, in Asian, especially in Indonesian educational context, this classification is worth attention. The concept of learner autonomy is only recently being explored and one must consider cultural and social constraints that are different to those of Western cultures.

Methodology

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative method because the data was first collected by giving each participant one questionnaire and after that, the writer conducted an interview section to four selected participants who had answered the questionnaire. The questionnaire is a modified one from Lai Man Wai Conttia's dissertation paper entitled *The Influence of Learner Motivation on Developing Autonomous Learning in an English-for-Specific-Purposes Course* (2007).

Then, the writer collected all the information and they were discussed, arranged, and analyzed in order to be compatible with the study's purpose. The interview section was clarifying their answer and their reason why they chose it, especially the part where they had different answer from the other participants. About giving feedback, good language teacher, and practice (statement number 17, 18, and 20 on questionnaire) were compulsory questions. It also includes the research questions below.

Research questions (RQ)

How is the attitude of English Education students about autonomous learning?

How autonomous English Education students are?

Participant

The subject of the study is 15 students of English Education Department of Tidar University. One student is from 7th semester, eleven students are from 5th semester, and three students are from 3rd semester. It was chosen randomly by the researcher because not all students were willing to answer the questionnaire. At the end, the researcher only got female students as the subject.

Finding and Discussion

Attitudes in learning English as foreign language

No.	Items	Agree	Disagree
1	I know and understand what autonomous learning means.	47%	53%
2	I have a clear idea why I need to study English.	87%	13%
11	The lecturer should motivate me to study English.	80%	20%
14	Using English outside the classroom is important for developing good language skills.	100%	0%
15	I often use English outside the class	40%	60%

Based on the finding, there are only 47% of the participants who know and understand what

autonomous learning means. The rest did not know what it actually means. However, after the researcher conducted the interview section, all of them in reality know the concept of autonomous learning but they are not familiar with the term so they answered disagree. They are more familiar with the term of independent learning and they think it is a good student-centered learning with lecturer as the guidance.

Most of the students (87%) have a clear idea why they need to study English. They believe that English is important to learn because it is a global language which is in context with today's era, globalization or the borderless world. However, their intrinsic motivation to study English language is still low because most of them (80%) believe that outsider, or in this case is the lecturer should motivate them to study English. Based on the interview, their motivation is not always steady, therefore, it will be much better if the lecturer motivates their students to learn English.

Autonomous learning should also happen outside the class and all of the participants agree with the statement of using English outside the classroom is important for developing good language skills, but practically most of them (60%) do not often use English outside the classroom. The interviewee said that she does not feel motivated in using English outside because of the environment. Her surrounding is not used to speak English because they usually speak in national or local language and it is rare to find people who speak English, as for them, English only acts as a foreign language which is only taught in school.

From the data and its analysis above, the researcher found that students have positive attitudes in learning English and learn independently. However, the reality contradicts with what they have believed. The case happens because of the external factors that can affect their motivation to learn.

Determining learning objectives

The statements number 9, 12, and 13 are the representatives on how the learners think about determining the objectives of learning language.

No.	Items	Agree	Disagree
9	I like the teacher to set my learning goals.	47%	53%
12	It is important to make decisions about one's own learning.	100%	0%
13	Effective language learners make decisions about their own learning.	80%	20%

Although all of them think that it is important to make decisions about one's own learning, 20% of them think that it will be more effective if not all decisions are from the learners because they think lecturer is also important to be included in making decision for them. They think lecturers have already known the needs of the students. One of them also thinks that classmate can influence their decision too. However in practice, 53% of them disagree that lecturer is the one to set the learning goals because actually the one who knows best about what their goals in learning language is the students themselves. Therefore, the learners' attitude about being able to determine the learning objective is positive but in real life practice, not all of them are ready to make decision on learning by themselves.

Progression

No.	Items	Agree	Disagree
3	I need teacher's help in learning English every time.	53%	47%
4	It is an important thing for me to see the progress I make by myself.	100%	0%
5	The teacher should tell me every time I make progress and error.	87%	13%
16	I know which aspects of my English I want to improve.	87%	13%

They all think it is important for them to see the progress they make by themselves. It means that they take charge on monitoring their progress by themselves. From the interview, they believe that it is better to see the progress by their own self because the progress they made is something they should know best so that they are able to improve their ability although sometimes they also need someone, in this case lecturer or classmates, to give them a sight that they have made progress or monitor their progress in learning language. That is also the reason why 87% of them agree that the teacher should tell them every time they make progress and error. In that case, they will know which aspects of their English they want to improve by themselves but some (13%) still needs a little more guidance to make them know which aspects of my English they want to improve because.

Selecting methods and techniques

No.	Items	Agree	Disagree
10	I like the lecturer to tell me what to do.	80%	20%
18	The language lecturer plays an important role in successful language learning.	93%	7%
19	I believe I can find for myself the best ways to learn a language.	60%	40%
20	Practice plays an important role in successful language learning.	100%	0%

They agree 100% that practice plays an important role in successful language learning. They believe that practice is a must in learning language because without practice, learning language will not be perfect. Based on the interview, three of the respondents cannot practice alone, therefore, they need a partner or group to do it. However, one prefers to practice alone. The underlying is the reason they do practice is often because of the lecturer's instruction. If not because of that, they will rarely practice not only they think it is useless because only a few people understand, but also they sometimes forget about it because of not being included in their habitual activities. That is also the reason why 80% of them like the lecturer to tell them what to do. Being told what to do next by the lecturer is when the students are able to do something independently after, still with the guidance from the lecturer. Therefore, nearly 100% of them agree that the language lecturer plays an important role in successful language learning. They said that the lecturer should be aware of the students' needs and give them space to explore their ability, their best way to learn, etc. The lecturer acts as the facilitator

and guidance for them so that when they do not know what to do, the lecturer will give them instruction and when they make mistake and error, the lecturer will tell them and help them overcome it especially when the students really need it.

60% of the participants believe that they can find the best ways to learn a language by themselves. However, the rest cannot do that. They said that the lecturer should determine precisely and implement many methods for them in order for them to recognize the best way to learn.

Evaluating what has been acquired

No.	Items	Agree	Disagree
6	I have my own ways of testing how much I have learned.	80%	20%
7	I like to look for solutions to my problems by myself.	60%	40%
8	I know when I have made an error in English.	33%	67%
17	Feedback plays an important role in successful language learning.	100%	0%

The highlight is how feedback plays an important role in successful language learning. They said that feedback from the teacher is the most effective one rather than getting feedback from classmates. They believe that the teacher knows more about what they need to know and do for their best. By getting feedback from the teacher, they believe that it can help them to be better learner in learning language.

Most of them (80%) have their own ways of testing how much they have learned and 60% of them tend to look for solutions to problems by themselves. Therefore, for evaluating, they have already been independent although the rest still argue that they still need assistance from their lecturer and friends. However, if they make mistake, 67% of them tend to be told first it can be by the lecturer or friends.

How autonomous English Education students are?

Based on the interview we have conducted, all answers indicate the same answer which is they are less of autonomy because firstly, although the students mostly have a clear idea why they need to study English by themselves, they will only do it just because of task given from their lecturer, or by being instructed by the lecturer to do something.

Therefore, what the researcher can find and observe is that they are actually reactive learner. They can only work independently after given task and instruction. Most of them feel that the lecturer should work hard in order to make their students motivated to learn independently in the learning process. This is a proof that the kind of autonomous EFL learners in Asia based on Littlewood (1999), which is reactive learners, is considered as an appropriate term to call them related to learner autonomy.

Conclusion

Based on the finding and data analysis, the researcher can conclude that students have

positive attitudes about autonomous learning. However, the surrounding environment of the students greatly affects their motivation to be autonomous. They are mostly independent learner in case of determining learner objectives and evaluating what has been acquired. For selecting method to learn and progression in learning, they are still dependent with the lecturer although they argue that the lecturer should only help and guide them a little in order to give them space to learn by themselves. Therefore, the kind of autonomous EFL learners in English Education students at Tidar University based on Littlewood (1999) is reactive learners.

References

- Borg, S., Al-Busaidi, S. (2012). *Learner Autonomy: English Language Teachers' Beliefs and Practices*. London, England: British Council & University of Leeds.
- Clark, C. M. and Peterson, L. (1986). 'Teachers' thought processes'. In M. C. Wittrock (ed.) *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, New York: Macmillan, pp. 255-296.
- Conttia, L. (2007). *The Influence of Learner Motivation on Developing Autonomous Learning in an English-for-Specific-Purposes Course* (2007). University of Hongkong, Hongkong.
- Diaz, Claudio., Alarcon, Paola., Ortiz, Mabel. (2014). *A Case Study on EFL Teachers' Beliefs about the Teaching and Learning of English in Public Education*, 171-186.
- Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy and foreign language learning*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Lamb, M. (2004). It depends on the students themselves': Independent language learning in an Indonesian state school. *Language, Culture, and Curriculum*.17 (3), 229-245
- Lengkanawati, N.S. (1997). *Kontribusi strategi belajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing dan Bahasa Indonesia sebagai bahasa asing*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). IKIP Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia.
- Lengkanawati, Nenden Sri. (2017). Learner Autonomy in the Indonesian EFL Settings. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics* (6):2, 222-231.
- Lengkanawati, N.S. (2014b). *Learning achievement as reflected in language learning strategies and learner autonomy*. A paper presented at TEFLIN International Conference, 6-9 October, 2014
- Littlewood, W. (1997). Self-access: why do we want it and what can it do? In P. Benson & P. Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning* (pp. 79-92). New York: Longman.