

EXPLORING LEARNER AUTONOMY IN ONLINE CLASSES AMONG INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS

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Abstrak

Pandemi telah membuat seluruh sekolah memindahkan kegiatan belajar mengajar ke daring. Perubahan ini datang dengan tuntutan untuk siswa menjadi lebih mandiri. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui keyakinan siswa terhadap otonomi pelajar mereka serta praktis siswa dalam meningkatkan otonomi pelajar selama masa pandemi. Subjek dari penelitian ini adalah lima belas siswa sekolah menengah atas. Dengan menggunakan penelitian kualitatif, penelitian ini memakai wawancara semi terstruktur dan buku harian sebagai instrumen penelitian. Wawancara semi terstruktur dilaksanakan untuk mengumpulkan data mengenai keyakinan siswa terhadap otonomi pelajar mereka. Sementara itu, buku harian diisi oleh siswa untuk mendapatkan data mengenai praktik siswa dalam meningkatkan otonomi pelajar. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa, meskipun lebih memilih pembelajaran tatap muka, kebanyakan siswa menunjukkan karakteristik pelajar otonom seperti mampu menentukan tujuan pembelajaran dan materi pembelajaran sendiri. Selanjutnya, siswa menunjukkan banyak aktivitas pembelajaran otonom di luar kelas.

Kata Kunci: siswa, keyakinan, otonomi pelajar

Abstract

Global pandemic has made all school move the teaching-learning process into online. This change come with the demand for students to be more autonomous. The aim of this study is to examine Indonesian high school students' beliefs on their learner autonomy as well as students' practices in developing learner autonomy amidst the global pandemic. The subjects of this study were fifteen senior high school students. By employing qualitative design, this study used semi-structured interviews and learning logs as the research instrument. Semi-structured interviews were done to gather data about students' beliefs on their learner autonomy. Meanwhile, learning logs were filled by the students to obtain data about students' practices in developing learning autonomy. The findings of this study indicate that, albeit preferring face-to-face learning, the majority of students demonstrate characteristics of autonomous learners such as being able to set learning goals and choosing their learning materials. Furthermore, students show various autonomous learning activities outside their classroom.

Keywords: students, belief, learner autonomy

INTRODUCTION

The term learner autonomy was first raised by Holec (1981) who defined learner autonomy as learners' capability to understand their own goals and strategies for knowing and evaluating their development. Learner autonomy also refers to learners' ability to take responsibility for their own learning by making their own decision in choosing learning objective, identifying their progress, selecting learning methods and techniques that suitable for them, monitoring the input of L2, and evaluating what has been produced (Lengkanawati, 2017).

The words "learner autonomy" here carries the meaning that learner autonomy is a capability to do independent action and freedom. However, there are some definitions of learner autonomy that include both independence and interdependence. Dam (2003) and Lewis (2014) suggested that learner autonomy could be

defined as learners' capacity to work both independently and in co-operation with others to take responsibility for their learning and to shift between individual and group behaviors to serve their own needs. Therefore, autonomy is a complex concept. Following these definitions, Blin (2004) suggested that learner autonomy involves both individual and social constructs that are related and influence each other.

The variety of learner autonomy's definition by different researchers shows that the concept of learner autonomy is different for different people, and hence it will be easier to define autonomous learner's characteristics first. Cirocki (2016) argued that autonomous language learners: (1) have an intrinsic motivation to learn target language, (2) make decision and take responsibility for their own learning, (3) set realistic

individual goal of their own learning, (4) make decision on content, materials, and assessment, (5) understand their weakness and strength, (6) comprehend classroom discussion and know why they learn it, (7) can and willing to adapt new learning, (8) select and implement strategies that suit for them as well as negotiate between their needs and their classmates' need, (9) monitor progress and evaluate outcomes, (10) involve in collaborative learning, and (11) reflect their learning experience.

Although the terms learner autonomy does not explicitly appear in Indonesian education discourse (Cirocki et al., 2019), the ministry already made a move to train students to become autonomous learners in the most recent curriculum. Unlike in the previous curriculum where teachers were primary sources of knowledge, 2013 curriculum permits students to learn by finding information by themselves. It is emphasized that the purpose of the teaching-learning process is to promote critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, creativity, innovation, and collaboration among students (Kemendikbud, 2017).

Yet, it cannot be denied that it is a challenge to implement learner autonomy in Indonesian classroom context because of some issues. Some of the issues are the norm in Indonesian learning culture such as the principle of unquestioning what the elder says, the concept of elder knows everything, and the belief that teachers never wrong (Dradjowidjojo, 2001). Furthermore, most Indonesian students are raised in a condition of being knowledge receiver from teachers. As a result, students are not able to know their needs in learning English (Padmadewi, 2016) and are not ready to implement learner autonomy (Cirocki et al., 2019). Hence, expecting Indonesian students to act autonomously tend to be difficult (Hidayati & Husna, 2020).

Many studies have been conducted to explore learner autonomy in Indonesian context which mainly related to the implementation of 2013 curriculum. Some previous studies found that teachers reacted positively to 2013 curriculum and tried to promote learner autonomy in their classroom (Ai, 2018; Khotimah et al, 2019; Lengkanawati, 2017; Ramadhiyah & Lengkanawati, 2019). On the other hand, despite knowing and showing positive attitude on learner autonomy, students were still accustomed to the teacher-centered learning and only showed interest in learning activities that were integrated to technology used such as listening to song and watching movies (Khotimah et al., 2019; Ramadhiyah & Lengkanawati, 2019). Furthermore, Warni et al. (2018) found that technology used beyond English classroom could encourage the development of learner autonomy.

The relationship between technology and autonomy is dynamic. Autonomous learners can see technology as a

tool to learn languages. At the same time, technology affects the development of autonomy. Hao et al. (2019) pointed out that technology helps student to learn both inside and outside their classroom activities. Technology gives an opportunity for learners to access target languages and freedom they need in order to practice in autonomous learning (Hamilton, 2013 cited by Lai, 2019). It also gives authentic situations that are full of challenges and resources that learners can use to support autonomous behavior (Pellerin, 2017 cited by Lai, 2019). Technology can expose learners to English native speakers in a digital social environment which they cannot experience in their local environment. Moreover, technology can introduce learners to diverse study methods as well as diverse topics that can suit their interests.

According to 2013 curriculum, information and communication technology (ICT) is an important component that should be utilized in every subject including English. ICT is technological tools and resources that are used to create, process, and share information (Alkamel & Chouthaiwale, 2019). The implementation of ICT involves the use of technology including hardware, device, media, delivery system, and software. Azmi (2017) stated that the use of ICT could help learners to acquire linguistic skills, establish interaction with other speakers, and broaden their knowledge about different cultures.

The application of technology in teaching-learning process cannot be avoided during the global pandemic of coronavirus disease. The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture instructed education institutions to carry out the teaching and learning activities from home due to the increasing spread of coronavirus (Kemendikbud, 2020). As a result, all teaching and learning process are shifted to online learning.

A study conducted by Hidayati & Husna (2020) indicated that majority of students seemed to enjoy their online English learning experience since they engaged in many different types of language learning activities. Through this study, Hidayati & Husna (2020) also found that 79% of students displayed an act of autonomous learner which influenced by their various online English learning activities. In a contrary, other study conducted by Muliayah et al. (2020) showed that 67% of students preferred face to face class as oppose to online learning. This study also indicated that most students didn't show enough autonomous act in online English learning. From these two studies, it can be concluded that students experienced online learning differently. Some students showed a great autonomous act in online learning while others were not.

It is worth to note that none of the studies specifically focus on students' belief on their learner autonomy and

students' practices in developing learner autonomy during the coronavirus global pandemic. Therefore, the present study try to explore learner autonomy in online classes among EFL students with two research questions: (1) What beliefs do the EFL students hold about their learner autonomy in online classes amidst the global pandemic?, and (2) What are EFL students' practices in developing learner autonomy amidst the global pandemic?

METHOD

Based on the research questions of the present study, the research was conducted by using a qualitative approach with semi-structured interview and diary as the instrument to collect the data. Qualitative approach is an inductive approach to get a deeper understanding of person's or group's experience in contextual settings (Wahyuni, 2012).

The subject of this study were fifteen senior high school students. All participants were from the same public school which implemented curriculum 2013 and did the whole teaching-learning process through online learning. The researcher purposely chose students from language class since they learned both general English and literature English. Moreover, the teacher agreed that the students in this class were more active compared to students from other classes in the same school.

To collect the data, the researcher used semi-structured interview and learning log as the research instrument. Semi-structured interview requires interview guideline to help researcher focus on the topic without limitation and to develop more related question which makes it possible for researcher to obtain more detail data (Wahyuni, 2012). The researcher used a guideline that consisted of open-ended questions to direct subjects into answering in more depth responses about their belief on learner autonomy. The interview guideline was adapted from Lin & Reinders (2019) and Daflizar (2017). The guideline was developed by following the characteristics of autonomous learners as argued by Circoki (2016) to see how they perceived themselves. Some examples of the questions being posed were "Can you set up your own learning goals? How do you do that?" and "What do you think about online classes? And do you like it?"

The interview for this research were conducted with fifteen participants on different occasion according to their own availability. Due to the pandemic, the interview was conducted in online setting through WhatsApp call. The interviews were done in Indonesian to anticipate the language barrier. Each interview was recorded with subject's permission was transcribed.

Furthermore, to gain data about students' practices in developing learner autonomy, the researcher used learning log. The learning log being used was adapted from Litzer

and Bakieva (2016). The learning log was filled by the students for three weeks using either English or Indonesian, depending on subject's preference. In their learning logs, students wrote down what kind of English learning activities that they did, what goal they tried to achieve, and how they felt about it.

Following the framework of qualitative analysis developed by Ary et al (2010) there are three phases in analyzing data, they are familiarizing and organizing, coding and reducing, and lastly, interpreting and representing. First, researcher read and reread the data as well as organize the data. All data were grouped on the students' name. Then the data were classified and coded according to the answer. The researcher chose which aspects of data should be minimized or set aside. The last step was interpreting and reporting the data. The data was reported in the form of descriptive and narrative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

EFL students' belief of their learner autonomy in online classes

Interview Theme	Summary
Setting learning goal	Most participants stated that they could set their own learning goal, while the rest said that they still needed their teachers' help.
Selecting and implementing learning strategy	Most students revealed that they could recognize what learning style worked best for them.
Evaluating learning progress	Students revealed that they still "confused" with how to evaluate their progress, hence relying on teachers' evaluation.
Identifying weakness and strength	Students said that they did not have any problem in identifying their weaknesses and strengths and tried their best to overcome their weaknesses.
Choosing learning material	Most students believed that they could find materials by themselves. However, there were three students who stated that teachers should be the one who chose their learning materials.
Having intrinsic motivation	All students agreed they learned English hoping it would help them in getting jobs or scholarship.

Participating in collaborative learning	Most students stated they had a study group that helped them in learning English. However, there were also some students who disliked their study group or did not have study group.
View on online learning	Even though there were some students who liked online learning, most students stated that they disliked it.

From this part, the researcher found Indonesian EFL students' belief on their learner autonomy in online classes amidst the global pandemic. The first characteristic of autonomous learners concerns on their ability in setting their own learning objective. Eight out of fifteen students stated that they could set their own learning goal. They explained that, before learning something, they set a learning goal first to help them making decision on which part to focus.

(Student 8) *"Yes, I can set a learning goal. I usually write what I want to learn and my target in the future."*

(Student 13) *"Yes, I can. It helps me to focus, so I usually make a goal before learning something."*

On the other hand, there were also some students who revealed that they never made a learning goal. They stated that they needed other people, especially teacher, to know what their goal in learning certain things. One of them also admitted that sometimes they didn't know why they learned something.

Another characteristic is selecting and implementing learning strategies. Most of the students claimed they knew what learning style suit them and that they already applied it.

(Student 3) *"I picked up what learning strategy makes me comfortable and then do it."*

Despite being able to set their goal and select proper learning strategy, further interview stage revealed that students still "confuse" in evaluating their learning progress. They still relied on their teacher to evaluate their learning outcomes.

(Student 2) *"I'm still confuse because sometimes I don't know how much progress I made. Sometimes, I felt like I was good at somethings, but then I realized that I wasn't actually good at it. Sometimes, I'm also really lazy to learn and it makes my progress not stable."*

(Student 4) *"For example, we have a test and then the teacher evaluates us, that's how I know whether I'm good or not."*

However, it was found that students could identify their weaknesses and strengths in learning. They stated that they tried to overcome their weaknesses. Two students

revealed that they could not recognize their strength since they had "so many weaknesses" (S2&S3)

In response to question whether they could choose their own learning material, most students claimed they were able to do so. They stated that, usually, they found more materials from internet, especially Google. Moreover, they believed that it was their own responsibility to choose learning materials for themselves. (Student 14) *I usually find material from Google or YouTube. In my opinion, it is me who should find material. I'm the one who study, so I should be the one who choose.*

On the other hand, three students thought that it was their teachers who were responsible to find materials for them. They stated that it was because "teachers know what students need best." (S10, S11 & S12)

The other characteristics of autonomous learner is having an intrinsic motivation to learn target language. The result indicated that all students learned English in hope that it could benefit them in the future such as helping them to be accepted into overseas colleges or jobs. One student stated that they wanted to live-in English-speaking country, hence learning English.

Being autonomous learner also mean they can engage in collaborative learning. Most students revealed that they had study groups to learn English. Most of them felt happy since they could "share materials to each other" (S2, S3, S5, S11 & S14) and "motivated each other" (S8, S13 & S15). However, there were also students who stated they could study better when they were alone, hence thinking that "study group was tiring" (S12 & S14). On the other hand, there were also students who never be in study group to learn English.

In response to question regarding the online school they should attended, most students agreed that they did not enjoy it. Most students also thought that their English got worsen ever since online school. According to them, in online school, the problem lied on lack of learning materials from teacher, increasing number of assignments, and technical difficulties. This is reflected on some of the quotes below.

(Student 11) *"I don't like online school. There are some teachers that online give assignment but do not give any explanation, so all of us are confused."*

(Student 5) *There are so many teachers who can't use technology, so they cannot share the materials to us. This is why I don't like online school.*

(Student 10) *"Sometimes, there are problem with my internet connection which made me late to the meeting."*

(Student 1) *"I feel like my English got worsen since online school started. I think it's because it's not effective."*

However, there were also some students who liked being in online school and believed their English ability got better ever since the online school started. According to them, it was because they had more free time and could search on internet. One of them also revealed that studying alone in their room helped them to feel more relax.

(Student 4) *“Yeah, I think my English get better now. For me, I can learn a lot of things because I can search on internet twenty-four seven.”*

(Student 5) *“It’s because I have more time at home compared to when I have to go to school. In school, we have limited time, but in house, there are so many free times that we can study whenever we want.”*

Despite the different opinion on online school, all students agreed that they already adapted to online school.

The result also indicated that most students believed they were an autonomous learner, more so during pandemic where they engaged in online classes.

(Student 1) *“Yes, I’m an autonomous learner because, in this pandemic, I have to do everything myself and no one teach me.”*

(Student 9) *“Yes, because as student in online school, I can’t rely everything on teacher, I have to learn by myself.”*

(Student 12) *“Yes, in this situation, I am forced to be an autonomous learner.”*

Some other participants who believed that they were not autonomous learner stated that they still needed help in learning English.

(Student 6) *“No, I still need help from people around me in learning English.”*

EFL students’ practices in developing learner autonomy

This part provided students’ practices in developing learner autonomy amidst the global pandemic. In filling out the learning log, students appeared to show variety of activities involving English learning. They started their learning logs with English class that took place at Google Meet. After that, they studied English using some learning materials their teacher gave them. In studying English from the school learning material, they agreed that they did it to prepare themselves for the upcoming exam.

Activity: Reading books from school and learn for English exam

Goal: to prepare myself for exam, so I can get a good grade and good value

(Student 15)

After that, they filled out their learning logs with various out-of-school autonomous learning. All of them appeared to use YouTube. Some of them stated that they used YouTube to gain more English vocabulary and to learn more materials such as pronunciation of words,

TOEFL learning practices, new phrases in certain situation, and even tips on how to learn English. There were also some students who revealed that they watched YouTube video based on their interest such as funny videos, their favorite idols’ video, or video related to their hobby.

Activity: I watch YouTube on channel Mr D about explaining the difference in how to read words

Goal: to know the different in how to read word in English

(Student 6)

Activity: I saw YouTube from Naila Farhana about phrases in English

Goal: to understand and learn English

(Student 1)

Aside from YouTube, other mainstream medias that they often used outside the school hour were movies, songs, novels, and comics (which already translated to English). The goal in doing these activities were mostly to entertain themselves. However, they also acknowledged that they gain more vocabulary from the movies they watched, the song they listened to, or from the novels and comics they read. The vocabulary learning occurred by accident since they were presented with various English vocabulary from the conversation in movies or songs and the writing in novels and comics.

Activity: listening to “Runaway-Aurora”, “Astronaut in the Ocean-Masked Wolf”, “Tomboh-Destiny Rogers”, “Versace on the Floor-Bruno Mars”, “Think About Us-Little Mix”, etc

Goal: to encourage myself in studying for midterm (I felt happier when I study while listening to music), to learn the vocabulary, to learn the hidden meaning

(Student 3)

Activity: read the manga “Terror Man” chapter 1-150 in English translation

Goal: increase vocabulary and fill spare time

(Student 14)

In the interview, five students admitted that they regularly communicated in English outside the classroom setting. They said that the online game they played helped them to get in touch with some foreigners which allowed them to communicate using English. One student also admitted that they communicated with foreigners on Twitter (S11). And the other one student said that they had a study group which spoke English whenever they met (S6). This was also showed in their learning log.

Activity: speak English with my sibling

Goal: to practice our speaking skills in daily life even though we are still not good

(Student 13)

Activity: Weekend is time to play online game Growtopia

Goal: I play while communicating with foreigners, so I can better understand English
(Student 6)

Discussion

EFL students' belief of their learner autonomy in online classes

The first research question focused on what belief EFL students hold about their learner autonomy in online classes amidst the global pandemic. As the interview result showed, most students believed that they were autonomous learners and they also showed the characteristics of autonomous learner as argued by Cirocki (2016 cited by Circoki et al., 2019).

Considering the finding, the present study aligns with the study that was conducted by Hidayati & Husna (2020) which indicated that 79% of students displayed an act of autonomous learner that influenced by their various online english learning activities. The finding showed a potential of promoting autonomy in digital learning within Indonesian education.

However, this study contradicts the previous study which stated that most Indonesian EFL students did not have enough autonomy in online English-learning during the pandemic (Mulyah et al., 2020) and that they were still dependent on their teacher (Khotimah et al., 2019; Ramadhiyah & Lengkanawati, 2019). These studies found that students still needed direct support from teachers as knowledge provider and facilitator.

It seems that the problem lies on students' difficulty in adapting to new learning environment. As Hidayati & Husna (2020) pointed out, the development of students' learner autonomy in online classes, as the way to prevent covid, was the force from the situation. This point was shown in the present study when students explained that, in this pandemic, they had to be autonomous learners since they felt like they could not rely on anyone including their teachers. Without direct assistant from teacher, students felt the need to explore their own learning.

However, this study also found that the majority of students seemed to find evaluating their learning progress as difficult task. Students revealed that, in order to evaluate themselves, they got help from the teachers. As Lamb (2004) pointed out, self-evaluation in Indonesian context is unfamiliar since the curriculum make learning as an activity to be assessed through the national exam. Moreover, in Indonesia, students respect their teacher and are encouraged to trust them on everything that they say (Dradjowidjojo, 2001) which make students think that teacher should be the one who define their learning progress.

Despite showing characteristics of autonomous learners and able to adapt with online classes, the majority of students stated that they preferred face-to-face meeting over online school. The three highlighted problem were: (1) teacher's ability to provide learning material, (2) number of assignments, and (3) accessibility of internet and technology for both teachers and students. This is in line with some previous studies. Bakri (2021) found that, in online classes, the availability of learning material was lacking and teachers' ability in providing material was still limited. Setoningsih (2021) also found that students complained about the deadline of assignment that was too short and sometimes they received more than one assignment in a day which they found to be something stressful. Moreover, Agung et al. (2020) found that internet connection was the major problem of online learning considering that some students had to deal with poor phone signal.

EFL students' practices in developing learner autonomy

The second research question focused on EFL students' practices in developing learner autonomy amidst the global pandemic. As the learning log result showed, students' practices could be divided into two categories which were in-classroom activity and out-of-classroom activity. As for the in-classroom activity, students joined the google meeting from their teacher and followed their explanation. Meanwhile, in out-of-classroom activity, students showed various activities. All of them appeared to use YouTube, and they also used other mainstream media such as movies, songs, novels, and English-translation comics. The media that they consumed were based on their personal interest.

Considering the finding, the present study is in line with some previous studies. Khotimah et al. (2019) and Ramadhiyah & Lengkanawati (2019) found that students were more interested in technology or internet-based learning activities such as listening to songs, watching movies, and watching YouTube video as their out-of-classroom autonomous learning.

It was also noted that students had their own goal in every activity they did. In learning English from school learning material, they agreed that they did it to prepare themselves for the upcoming exam. However, when it came to YouTube, movies, songs, novels, and comics, their goals were various. Most of them stated that they consumed the media to entertain themselves as well as to gain new vocabulary. This is in line with the research conducted by Trinder (2017) who found that students felt they could enhance their vocabulary development in internet-based learning.

Aside from consuming media on internet, it was found that students were also practicing their English-speaking skills outside the classroom. The activities were varied, some students practiced their speaking with people around them, but there were also students who talked with native speakers on internet using a social media or online games that they played. As Al-Zoubi (2018) pointed out, one of the out-of-classroom English exposure is interaction with English native speakers which allows students to use English in real situation. Lee (2017) also pointed out that English learners obtained English vocabulary while playing game as they were forced to understand game content and engaged in multiplayer games which allowed interaction with other English users.

CONCLUSION

This study provided information about EFL students' belief on their learner autonomy and their practices in developing learning autonomy amidst the global pandemic. It was found that the majority of students showed characteristics of learner autonomy despite having a negative perspective on online school. Furthermore, it was found that students showed various learning activities outside classroom activities.

Despite all the difficulties in online learning, the present study showed there were potential that students were fostering learner autonomy. Students still needed teacher's guidance and support in particular part of learning, but these results indicated a promising future for learner autonomy among Indonesian EFL learners.

Suggestion

It is suggested for teachers to explore learner autonomy in their teaching practices such as giving students more freedom in choosing learning activities based on their interest and helping them with their self-evaluation. It is suggested for teachers to involve in training and workshop to be more familiar with the use of technology, so that students can have more enjoyable online learning.

Nevertheless, this study had a minimal number of participants and cannot represent all Indonesian students. Further studies are needed with more participants and specifically explore the factor of students' autonomy in online class.

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