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Language Learner Autonomy: Students' and Teachers' Reflection

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ABSTRACT

Language learner autonomy has been defined in a number of different ways. It can be defined as the capacity to control one's own learning. In this era, language learner autonomy is used as one of the learning strategies for all fields of study, especially English learning. This study is aimed at finding out the reflection of students and lecturers on the language learner autonomy. The study employed a mixed-methods approach and recruited 208 participants – EFL students and lecturers. A set of questionnaire and interviews were used to obtain the data. The results show that most of participating students were not prepared to be autonomous learners. Beside that, the concept of language learner autonomy was not familiar to most of the participants, meaning that they had lack of autonomous learning experience. In addition, having limited language competence led the students to have low motivation to learn English. The study implies that a professional training should be conducted to support and promote students and lecturers in the teaching and learning activities.

CCS CONCEPTS

• General and reference~Document types~General conference proceedings

Keywords

Language learner autonomy, students, teachers, reflection

1. Introduction

The concept of autonomy first entered the field of language in 1971 through the Council of Europe's Modern languages Project. CRAPEL, the outcome of the project has given much contribution to the concepts of language learning autonomy by reporting research results in that field. However, various opinions towards the concept of Autonomy learning have been a critical issue over decades among scholars and researchers.

Learner autonomy is a problematic term because it is widely confused with self-instruction [1]. It is also a slippery concept because it is notoriously difficult to define precisely. In addition, defining the concept of autonomy is not an easy task because every context will have different interpretation of concept [2]. In line with the language learning, the autonomous learner is the one who has 'the ability to take charge of his or her learning [2]. Learning should be changed from self-directed learning to be the practice of self-directed learning itself. It means that learners have responsibility to manage their own learning. Autonomy is the capacity to take control over one's own learning [3]. Both definitions still focus on the capability and responsibility to be an autonomous learner. Furthermore, an agreement of defining whether or not a learner is considered autonomous mostly still refer to the claims:

"There is a consensus that the practice of learner autonomy requires insight, a positive attitude, a capacity for reflection, and a readiness to be proactive in self-management and in interaction with others. This working definition captures the challenge of learner autonomy: a holistic view of the learner that requires us to engage with the cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social dimensions of language learning and to worry about how they interact with one another" [1], [4].

In addition, autonomous learners are assumed to take control over their learning management, cognitive process, and learning content [5]. While, successful autonomous learners are those who have diversity of skills, passion and enjoyment for a particular field, a focused and active approach to learning, and finally, pursuit of learning and success [5]. Therefore, characteristics and abilities of learner autonomy should be cultivated so that EFL learners are more likely to make significant decisions and take proactive actions in EFL learning process [5].

Autonomy learning still considered as a new concept in Indonesia. Hence, there are a few studies on autonomous language learning in Indonesian schools and universities contexts [6], [7], [8]. Indonesian students and English teachers are not familiar yet with the concept and principles of autonomous learning [7]. Therefore, commitment is certainly the key to success in teaching, besides competence in the field study to be taught and coordination with other teachers of the same subjects. Commitment of teachers to their profession is a significant variable to make teaching learning efforts fruitful [7]. Beside that, curriculum 13 can support the concept of Learner autonomy in creating effective learning [9]. The effective learning can be realized with the great efforts of

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both students and teachers, meaning that besides the hard work of students to be independent in his/her studies, teacher is considered to be the second vital factor. Therefore, helping students become more conscious of their learning is a concern of many language educators recently [10].

In relations to the role of Indonesian learner and teacher in Indonesia, there are some barriers in applying autonomy learning, that is in terms of education practices and socio-cultural [11]. Culture is still a crucial issue in autonomy learning, meaning that culture refers to national/ethnic cultures such as 'Chinese culture' or 'Western culture' [12]. The idea of learner autonomy has been promoted largely by western teachers and academics, and when attempts to implement it further afield have encountered difficulties, these are often seen as due to cultural differences between 'the West' and other cultures. However autonomy learning cannot describe how autonomy can be fostered and what can be promoted in Indonesia due to the large and diversity in geography and cultures [11]. Hence, a few studies have been conducted on autonomous language learning can be the main factors of the lean information about the development of autonomy learning in Indonesia.

Furthermore, In an attempt to study the relation between culture and autonomy, researchers have looked for the correlation between the students' national/ethnic background and individual variables, such as learning styles, strategies, beliefs, and so on [12]. Most studies support the hypothesis that students with different cultural backgrounds tend towards different learning styles and strategies. Therefore, the traditional educational culture in Indonesia has been obedient to teachers, i.e. students were expected to obey and not to challenge their teachers. Moreover, Indonesian teachers are still occupying teacher-centered approach, thus students become dependent towards their teachers [13].

However, In addition to the practice of autonomy learning in Indonesia, there seems to be a common view among students of Indonesia that learning autonomy merely means that students learn by themselves, in the absence of a teacher [14]. Many students who enter higher educational institutions still bring this trait with them, therefore they lack autonomy in their learning. They are not aware that being independent in language learning in higher education is critical. Independent learning is believed to play a key role in students' success in both academic and career lives [15]. Therefore, students have to be aware that being dependent towards their lecturers is no longer helpful. However, teachers' role can be improved in autonomy learning by having reflection. Through reflection that teachers can refine their practices which will have a direct impact on their students' achievements [15]. For that reasons, in this study we attempt to present the reflections of both students and teachers by digging their perceptions in terms of autonomy language learning.

2. Method

In this study, a descriptive analytical approach was adopted with a qualitative analysis for data interpretation [16]. This study is

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aimed at finding out the reflection of students and lecturers on the language learner autonomy. The subjects of the study were Indonesian English students and lecturers of State Polytechnic of Sriwijaya and IAIN Metro. To address the research question, data were collected through questionnaire and interview. The research question was formulated as follows: What are the students' and lecturers' reflections regarding learner autonomy principles?

A set of questionnaire was developed and modified [7] and it was promoted to Google form for 208 participants. The interviews were given to both students and lecturers to know their perceptions toward language learner autonomy. Data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics to take a look at percentages of the participants' perception on the significance of language learner autonomy, the interview data were analyzed by interpreting the transcription of the interviews.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Learners' Perceptions on Language Learner Autonomy

In this study, perceptions of English learners were obtained by administering a set of questionnaire covering eight items. All the items lead to learner conditions as the central of autonomous learning, students' understanding of autonomy and the role of learners in determining learning strategies that they can use in the process of autonomous learning. In short, students reflected on what they have achieved in the autonomous learning.

Interesting findings were revealed in this study as regards the learners' perceptions on Language Learner Autonomy. Learners are asked to provide answers by choosing a rating range based on a scale, i.e. from strongly disagree, agree, can't decide, agree, and strongly agree. The following was a table that contains a summary of the results of the questionnaire obtained from students' perceptions on language learner autonomy.

It was found that, the first statement about language learner autonomy means learning language without a lecturer, from the total of learners, half of them stated that they could not decide. There were 16 students stated that they strongly disagreed, 28.7% of learners who disagreed, as many as 21.1% of students agreed with the statement given, and there were 9% of students who strongly agreed that language learner autonomy means learning language without a lecturer. It can be concluded that students still confused with the definition of learning autonomy.

The results of the percentage in the second statement showed that students could not conclude that they could make choices about what they wanted to learn. It can be shown from the number of students who cannot decide, disagreed, and also strongly disagreed with the statement given. Thus, it was clear that students have not been able to make choices for their own learning.

Table. 1 Learners' Perceptions on Language Learner Autonomy

No	Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Can't decide	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Language learner autonomy means learning language without a lecturer.	29.2%	28.7%	11.7%	21.1%	9.4%
2	Autonomy means that learner can make choices about how they learn	1.2%	1.8%	47.4%	19.9%	29.8%
3	Learning language is better to do outside the classroom.	2.9%	24%	34.5%	8.2%	30.4%
4	Language learner Autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own English learning materials.	1.2%	25.1%	41%	44.4%	5.3%
5	Language learner Autonomy is promoted when learners have some choices in the kinds of activities to learn English.	29.2%	2.9%	22.2%	45%	0.6%
6	To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	35.7%	2.3%	14.6%	1.2%	46.2%
7	Language learner autonomy is promoted when learner can decide how long they will spend the time for their own learning.	27.5%	4.7%	26.3%	39.8%	1.8%
8	Language Autonomy has a positive effect on success as language learner.	33.9%	1.2%	28.1%	1.8%	35.1%

There were 67.3% of students who stated that they strongly disagreed, disagreed, and can't decide that language learner autonomy could be carried out if the students themselves determined the material to be studied. Thus, it can be interpreted

that in language learner autonomy, students had difficulty in determining the material they have to learn.

According to the students' point of view, language learner autonomy can be promoted if the learners given many choices to carry out learning activities that was fit on their learning needs. There were more than half of the students who strongly disagreed, disagreed, and can't decide with the statement. This also happened when the students were asked to provide the answer to the following statement, to become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning. The response obtained that more than half of them strongly disagreed, disagreed, and cannot decide to the statement.

When the learners were asked about learning time, most of the students are disagreed, strongly disagreed, and cannot decide that they could decide how long they would spend the time for their own learning. In the last statement, the language learner autonomy gives a positive impact on the success of language learner. Students seemed doubtful about the statement, more than 60% of students can't decide, disagreed and strongly disagreed for this statement.

In general, students still have difficulty in giving their perceptions related to language learner autonomy. As learners who learn independently, students are not able to determine their own way of learning, find out their learning needs, determine the right time for them to learn, determine the appropriate learning materials for themselves, and to evaluate their own learning outcomes. Many students constrained by language learner autonomy, they are still confused what to do in language learner autonomy.

In shorts, when they were asked to reflect on the learning that has been done after they learn independently, many students still need the teacher's help in learning. Students seemed to depend too much on their teachers [6]. They need guidance in each learning process, in determining the material, how to learn, and in evaluating their learning outcomes. They were not ready to become autonomous language learners.

3.2. Lecturers' Perceptions on Language Learner Autonomy

The questionnaire was also given to English lecturers. The purpose of this questionnaire was to determine the lecturers' perceptions on language learner autonomy. There are eight statements related to the autonomy learning process. Most of the statements were about the students' autonomous learning, the minimum role of lecturers in the learning process. The following table showed the percentage of responses given by lecturers to the statements about language learner autonomy.

In the first statement, the majority or 70.1% of the lecturers agreed and strongly agreed with the statement. They argued that in language learner autonomy students were totally independent of the role of the lecturer. But some of them were strongly disagreed, they assumed that lecturers have a role in the students' independent learning process. The second statement was about autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside classroom. More than a half of respondents agreed and strongly agreed to this statement. Only a few of them disagree with this statement.

No	Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Can't decide	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Language Learner Autonomy requires the learner to be totally independent of teacher.	2.6%	7.9%	18.4%	57.9%	13.2%
2	Autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside classroom.	0%	7.9%	28.9%	36.8%	26.3%
3	Language Autonomy has a positive effect on success as language learner.	0%	0%	21.1%	36.8%	42.1%
4	Language learner Autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials	0%	2.6%	15.8%	65.8%	15.8%
5	To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	30%	09%	7.9%	42.1%	20%
6	Learner-centred classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing Language Learner Autonomy.	0%	0%	18.46%	42.1%	39.5%
7	Language Learner Autonomy implies a rejection of traditional teacher- led ways of teaching.	0%	15.87%	36.8%	39.5%	7.9%
8	The lecturer has an important role to play in supporting Language Learner Autonomy.	0%	0%	5.3%	42.1%	52.6%

Based on the results of the percentage in the third statement which is about language autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner, there are 0% or none of lecturers who disagreed with the statement, most of them agreed and strongly agreed that language autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner. It was the same like the previous statement, when the lecturers were asked with the statement "language learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials", there were 81% lecturers agreed and strongly agreed with the statement.

The lecturers also believe that learners in language learner autonomy must have the ability to evaluate the results of their independent learning. This was consistent with the results of the questionnaire which showed that more than 90% of the lecturers agreed and strongly agreed with the statement. It was the same as the previous statement, when the lecturers asked to respond to the statement about "learner-centred classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing Language Learner Autonomy", none of them said that they disagree or strongly disagree. Most of them agreed that learner-centred classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing language learner autonomy.

But this is different when the lecturer was asked to respond to the following statement, Language Learner Autonomy implies a rejection of traditional teacher- led ways of teaching", some of them couldn't decide their response. Some said disagree, maybe because they still believe that traditional teaching was also still needed.

The last statement showed that the lecturers still have a big role and contribution in the learning process, for classical or students' autonomous learning. It can be seen from the total presentation, 94.7% of lecturers stated the importance of the role of lecturers in supporting the success of students' autonomous learning.

From the overall response given by the lecturer, it can be concluded that basically the role of the lecturer in the learning process was still needed, both the role in the form of direct guidance in the learning process or guidance in the form of motivation and encouragement to students to keep the spirit of participating in jointing the learning activities or independent learning. Most lecturers were not ready to make their students as autonomous language learners because of their limitations in introducing learning strategies and learning models that can be used by students in learning independently. To have great efforts, lecturers do not only have teaching competence but they should also have knowledge about learners' individual potency, like learning strategies [13].

3.3. The Results of Learners' and Lecturers Interviews

In this study, beside the questionnaire the researchers also used interviews as an instrument to collect the data about learners and lecturers reflection on language learner autonomy. The purpose of giving the interview was to know the understanding of students and lecturers about language learner autonomy which was in the last current time has been done even though unconsciously. In addition, interviews were also conducted to find out the reflection of students and lecturers on language learner autonomy. Some questions related to language learner autonomy were given the students and lecturers.

There are 3 questions addressed to students; 1) What is your interpretation of "learner autonomy"?, 2) Do you think learner autonomy plays a crucial role in language learning? Why? Why

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not?, 3) To what extent do you consider yourself an autonomous language learner?. While the lecturer was given 3 questions, 1) 1) What is your interpretation of "learner autonomy"? 2) Do you think learner autonomy plays a crucial role in language learning? Why? Why not?, 3) What can you do to help your students to become more autonomous?, The results of interviews obtained through recording then transcribed into narrative form. Interviews were conducted only with some students and lecturers.

The following were some of the results of the interviews transcription that have been conducted with several students and lecturers.

The first question: What is your interpretation of "learner autonomy"?

Rosma :hmmmm...(no answer)

Laras : Autonomy learner is ability to take control at one's learning individually to collaborate with others.

Resi I do not know.....

Hanni : Learner autonomy means that learner pick and take control on term of what will they learn and how will they learn for their own learning.

The second question: Do you think learner autonomy plays a crucial role in language learning? Why? Why not?

Rosma : I am not sure about my answer....

Hanni : I think learner autonomy plays a crucial role in language learning because it can allow learners to have the experience of being diligent.

The third question: To what extent do you consider yourself an autonomous language learner?.

Laras : Yes, because I have done my language learning individually and I control my ability.

Hanni : I consider myself an autonomous language learner because I get approach, method, and strategy to learn the target language and I can develop the target language by my own language.

Rosma : I am not sure whether I am an autonomous language learner or not.

Fivty I am a dependent learner. I need a teacher to guide me all the time.

The results of the interviews showed that basically not all students understood what is meant by learner autonomy. Only some of them already knew about learner autonomy. Along with the definition of learner autonomy, some of them also did not understand that language learner autonomy influenced their language learning. However, when it came to the last question, their personal opinions emerged about whether they were included as autonomous learners. Some admitted that they were already autonomous learners, some were not sure that they have become autonomous learners, and others said that they were dependent learners, meaning that they were dependent on the teachers' guidance.

Questions addressed to lecturers also get various response, this was shown in the following interview results.

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The first question: What is your interpretation of "learner autonomy"?

Ning : For me, learner autonomy refers to the principle that learners should take a maximum amount of responsibility for what they learn and they learn it.

Yusri : Leaner autonomy means students take responsibility for their own learning and learn to learn, actively manage their learning, seeking out learning opportunities and using appropriate learning strategies.

The second question: Do you think learner autonomy plays a crucial role in language learning? Why? Why not?

Rika : From the point of me, learner autonomy has a crucial role in language learning, Language success starts with independent learning. The more independent the learner, the greater success of their language learning is. But, this is heavy work that must be completed by the lecturer.

Jim : Of course, since motivation and independent learning is the beginning of autonomy learning, the success of language learning is also determined by these two things.

The third question: What can you do to help your students become more autonomous?

Jim : As lecturers we can do many things, motivating students to learn the language, introducing various strategies that can be done in learning, and the important one is to make learning a language as a habit. But this also requires some extra works.

Ning : I will always build upon my students' prior knowledge, choose engaging contexts and topics, create flexible tasks, keep them active, allow them some choices, and get students to reflect on their learning.

The above results of the interviews showed that lecturers also have various opinions about the term of learner autonomy. They had different opinion about how to make their students more independent and became autonomous language learner. Some faced problems in making their students as an autonomous language learner. From the overall results of students and lecturers interviews, it can be concluded that language learner autonomy was not fully understood by both students and lecturers.

4. Conclusion

This study concluded some reflections of students and lecturers based on the results of questionnaire and interviews. Reflections of the students include, 1) the students had limited knowledge about learner autonomy, 2) the students need more knowledge about language learning autonomy, especially about learning strategies that can be used in language learner autonomy, 3) the role of the teacher was still needed by students to become autonomous learners. Reflections from lecturers, 1) lecturers were not ready to design language learner autonomy for their students,

2) lecturers must learn more about various models, strategies, and learning techniques specifically to equip students to become autonomous language learners. The study implies that a professional training should be conducted to support and promote students and lecturers in the teaching and learning activities.

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