

EXPLORING LEARNERS' AUTONOMY IN ONLINE LANGUAGE-LEARNING IN STAI SUFYAN TSAURI MAJENANG

Pipit Mulyah^{*1}, Dyah Aminatun², Sukma Septian Nasution³,
Tommy Hastomo⁴, Setiana Sri Wahyuni Sitepu⁵, Tryana⁶

¹STAI Sufyan Tsauri Majenang

²Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia

^{3,5,6}Universitas Pamulang

⁴STKIP PGRI Bandar Lampung

Abstract

The impact of the coronavirus outbreak on the education system is inevitable that higher education institutions choose to transform their instructional practices to entirely online using specific platforms. This shifting comes with challenges to students as they are demanded to be independent and autonomous. This study investigated the students' readiness and perception towards being an autonomous learner in online language-learning. This case study investigated 25 students who joined online language learning by the WhatsApps group in an English department of STAI Sufyan Tsauri Majenang. The data were gained by giving an online questionnaire, having an online interview with some students who were chosen randomly, and also assigning students self-report. The data showed that the students do not have enough autonomy in online language-learning. It means that the students are not ready to be autonomous learners in online language learning. The result of the study indicated that the students prefer having a face to face class and direct guidance from the teacher where 66.9% of the same students prefer learning in class or face to face meeting. In comparison, only 18.5 % who share no problem having an online class. 14.6% of them enjoy both options. This finding suggests that teachers need some strategies to promote and foster students' learner autonomy to achieve learning objectives in online language learning.

Keywords: Case Study, Autonomy Learning, Online Language-Learning

INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 was commenced by a coronavirus outbreak that gives an impact on the education system across the globe. Indonesia through the ministry of education has issued some restrictions for schools and campuses to conduct classroom-situated instructional practices. Consequently, all teaching and learning activities are shifted to distanced learning or some other names with an equal concept such as online learning, virtual learning, or learning from home. Consequently, the pedagogical decisions are mostly directed to generate individuals to go through lifelong learning and the ability to taking

*correspondence Address
E-mail: pipitmulyahoke@gmail.com

control of any situation (Begum, 2018). It potentially results in a negative impact on learning quality but at the same time impacts the home lives of teachers, students, and their parents (Onyema, et.al, 2020)). The shifting of the educational system by digital and online learning is implemented as the impact of the pandemic demands student-centered learning rather than teacher-centered learning. Online learning has been the only choice for ongoing instructional practices during the covid-19 crisis.

As natural as it is, online learning fosters independence as learners are separated from the school and instructor by space. It benefits them to the extent of a more convenient self-learning environment, individual learning style, and pace flexibility of scheduling, together with access to unlimited internet resources. However, some drawbacks are also there to challenge such as the absence of organized, mandatory, bonding, face-to-face classroom activities (Serdyukova & Serdyukov, 2013) which may affect their ability for autonomous learning. On the negative side, students have limited communication with their instructor, little opportunities to work collaboratively with their peers, restricted from engaging in face-to-face interactions with other participants within their learning community as well as critically important instantaneous feedback which is easily feasible in a classroom-situated environment. Moreover, the lack of face to face interactions does not foster the development of personal relationships in the class, which inhibits the feeling of belonging to a community and trust among peers. This event may negatively affect learning outcomes as learning is a social activity that requires participation in a social group and interaction with members of the group (Wenden, 1997). Class Live Pro, SKYPE, Zoom, Whatapps group, telegram, google meeting, and other telecommunication technologies may be useful in this situation. However, they do not significantly give real and authentic connection.

Due to this condition, the students are demanded to be independent learners as they cannot directly have guidance from the teachers or lecturers. Independent students are also known as autonomous learners (Aminatun & Oktaviani, 2019). Autonomous learners are people who can take charge of their learning act independently, to make decisions about what to learn (Merawati, 2016), and are motivated in the learning process (Smith, Kuchah, & Lamb, 2017). Lengkanawati (2017) states three points in LA: (1) autonomy should be inculcated among learners; (2) its concept, accordingly, should not be misinterpreted as learning without a teacher instead of learners' making choices about how they learned and what activities they did; and teachers involve students to decide what and how to learn could promote autonomy among learners. Smith, Kuchah, & Lamb (2017) argue that

autonomous learners are people who can take charge of their learning act independently, and are motivated in the learning process. The most well-known one is from Holec (1981) in (Aminatun & Oktaviani, 2019) who defined learner autonomy as the “ability to take care of one’s learning”. Another definition is stated by Littlewood that learners’ autonomy as learners’ ability and willingness to make choices independently (Little & Little, 2002). Furthermore, according to Smith, LA is activated when learners have the power and right to learn for themselves (Smith et al., 2017). In line with this, Benson described learners’ autonomy as the ability to take responsibility for, take charge of, or control over the learning on their own (Reinders, 2010). Promoting students to become autonomous learners in language learning can be a way which helps them to acquire English successfully as LA is based on the idea that if students are involved in decision making processes regarding their language competence.

LA gains its popularity in European countries where Sinclair (1997); Kubota (2002); and Holliday (2003) believe that the implementation of autonomous modes of learning particularly concerning the perceived imposition of western values of educational pedagogy on to Asian learners. In Indonesia, Learner autonomy in any educational institution has not commonly been listed as significant, and most teachers seem to be hardly acquainted with LA (Lengkanawati, 2017). Holliday (2003) and Littlewood (2000) argue that Asian learners, although influenced by teacher-led and exam-oriented school learning experiences, do have at their disposal critical and autonomous learning strategies. . It is in line with Borg and Busaidi (2012) that although LA has been a key theme in the field of foreign language learning for over 30 years, the space for the availability of extensive literature is limited (Adamson & Sert, 2012).

Accordingly, this study initiates the investigation to LA in the different nuances of learning mode regarding the outbreak of coronavirus disease. Accordingly, this study is specified to investigate learners’ autonomy in learning virtually which is not frequently gauged lately. Accordingly, the students’ perception of learners’ autonomy in online learning is investigated.

RESEARCH METHOD

This is a case study aiming at investigating the students’ perception of being an autonomous learner in online learning due to the coronavirus pandemic. The participants of this study were 25 students in the second semester. The instructional practices were held using the WhatsApps Group. This platform allows learners and teachers to share

multimodal texts such as written text, voice notes, pictures, and videos. The application is used in all, but not limited to, the meetings where the learners are demanded to participate actively. This study used an online questionnaire to obtain data, online interviews, and self-report. The participants filled ALQ (Autonomy Learner Questionnaire), which is adopted from Karagol (2018) in (Reinders, 2010) and five random students were selected for the interview. Descriptive analysis will be used to interpret the data gained from an interview. In scoring the data, the scales from the Likert Scale were ranked, and each scale has a different point. "Always true" weighed five points, "mostly true" weighed four points, "sometimes true" got three points, "rarely true" has two points, and "never true" got one point. In the interview session, the questions we are asking about students' understanding, perception, the importance of learner autonomy, and online learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The distributed questionnaire aims at investigating the learners' perception of readiness for self-direction. The data from the questionnaire is analyzed and showed in Table 1.

Dimension	Items	Almost true	Mostly true	Sometimes true	Rarely true	Never true	Weighted average
Readiness for self-direction in online learning	Online learning gives us flexibility especially in terms of time	14	7	4	0	0	4.12
	Online learning period does not reduce the interactivity and communication between lecturer and students	12	10	3	0	0	4.36
	Online learning helps me all the time	6	8	5	6	0	
	Online learning motivates me to learn	8	6	6	5	0	

The first dimension concerns students' readiness for self-direction in online learning and their perception of the benefits of online learning. The mean of this first item showed 4.12, which is dominated by the students' perception that online learning gives them flexibility in terms of time. While the mean of the second item is higher than the first item that most of the students stated online learning still keeps their communication. In short, the students are ready to do self-direction while they have online learning. However, they have some difficulties in online learning, as stated in the third item. Thus, the interaction in online learning does not help the students all the time while in language learning the interaction must increasingly be learner-to-learner and raising the need (Mackness et al., 2010) in (Serdyukova & Serdyukov, 2013). Autonomy, motivation, and learning resources are three elements within language learning which influence each other. Autonomous learners are motivated and ready for self-direction in their language learning (Ushioda, 1996). So, in online language learning teachers also share the responsibility of developing students' motivation (Dornyei, 2001).

Another view to analyze is the students' perception of the nature of independent work when learning the language. Three questions were given and Table 2 shows the students' perception towards independent work in language teaching.

Table 2. Students' perception of independent work in language learning

Independent work in language learning	Items	Almost true	Mostly true	Sometimes	Rarely true	Never true	Weighted average
	I would like to continue online learning on my own without a teacher	4	3	9	9	0	3.96
	By online learning, I can learn to work on my own	6	5	11	3	0	3.8
	By online learning, I can solve my problem	8	6	5	4	1	3.46

The statement in the second dimension concern with learners' beliefs relating to the independent work in language learning. From 3 items, the highest mean is in the first item, which showed that most of the students are not having the willingness to continue online learning, and they need the teacher to guide them. The second item showed that most of the students are not able to learn to work on their own by online learning, supported by the last item which indicated that some of the students could not solve their problem without teacher help. In brief, the students' beliefs about independent work in language learning are still low. It is different from the theory that students who have learner autonomy can take responsibility for, take charge of, or control over the learning on their own (Reinders, 2010). Autonomous learning and independent learning are often used as synonyms (Morrison, 2011; Murase, 2015). Not only having self-direction, online language learning which demands learner autonomy also need their learning strategies and self-regulation. By reviewing the result of the second dimension statement, there are contradictory findings between students' responses and autonomous learner theory.

Further, the absence of classroom situations, as well as teachers in person, may have an impact on the learners. Accordingly, their perception of these factors is delved and the students' perception towards the significance of classroom and teacher is portrayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Students perception of the importance of classroom and teacher

Importance of class/ teacher	Items	Almost true	Mostly true	Sometimes	Rarely true	Never true	Weighted average
	I need face to face guidance rather than online guidance from my teacher	11	8	3	2	1	2.88
	I can learn English only when the teacher beside me	12	10	3	0	0	4.36
	I always need to work and study with my friends	11	7	6	1	0	4.12

The third dimension which concerns on importance of class/ teacher showed that the highest mean is in the second item. It indicated that the students most need the teacher beside them. It is supported by the first and third item that they prefer to have face to face learning to get direct guidance from the teacher and work together with their friends. It is concluded that the students still consider the importance of class and teacher. It is in line with the jobs of the instructor is to facilitate, aggregate, review, summarize, and reflect on class activities (Rodriguez, 2013) in (Mısır, Koban Koç, & Engin Koç, 2018). Online language learning is associated with “individualism” as it limits the students to engage their teachers and peers.

To be more specific, the absence of teachers directly has probably affected the learners but the role should remain the same. Accordingly, Table 4 shows their perception of the role of the teacher in language learning.

Table 4. Students’ perception of the role of teacher

Role of teacher:	Items	Almost true	Mostly true	Sometimes	Rarely true	Never true	Weighted average
explanation/ supervision	I always need teacher explanation	10	9	4	2	0	4.08
	I like direct feedback rather than online feedback	8	12	3	1	1	4.00
	I like being controlled directly by the teacher	6	12	6	1	0	3.92

The fourth dimension concerns teachers’ roles related to explanation and supervision. It showed that the highest mean is in the first item. It indicated that the students need the teacher explanation. They also prefer to have direct feedback rather than written feedback in online learning. It is supported by the third item that they like to get direct supervision from the teacher. It is concluded that the students count on teachers’ roles in explanation, supervision, and support. This finding is contrary to the statement that learners have the power and right to learn for themselves (Smith et al., 2017) but in line with Anggia and Nahdaleni (2017) that supervision to learning English is considered necessary. Online language learning changes teachers’ role from delivering information to becoming a

learning facilitator (Dornyei, 2001). The teacher's central role (Balcikanli, 2008) in the students' lives is strongly significant in instructional practices as they are often seen as their model of language learning, mentors, and advisors (Adamson & Sert, 2012). The students' perception in the fourth dimension is contradictory to the demand for online language learning. Teachers are acknowledged that their central role was as a facilitator, but being a facilitator in online and face to face meeting is different as media used limits the engagement.

The questionnaire result concluded that in general students are still weak for being autonomous learners. From the fourth dimension, most of the students still need teachers' guidance and prefer to have face to face meeting rather than an online meeting which show students dependency on language learning. The result has a different idea with the theory which said that autonomous learners could learn by themselves in any condition (Benson, 2006) (Alonazi, 2017). There are two proposed pedagogy for students' autonomy, weak and robust version (Smith, 2003). Weak version autonomy is regarded as "capacity which students currently lack and so need training, or identify it with a mode of learning, for example, self-access, which students need to be prepared for.

In contrast to the weak version, the stable version assumes "students are, to greater or lesser degrees, already autonomous, and already capable of exercising this capacity". Then the role teacher may perceive students as having either strong or weak autonomy, and this affects their teaching practice. Teachers who perceive learners as having substantial autonomy may choose pedagogies that enhance their students' current level of autonomy. In contrast, those who perceive their students have weak autonomy may teach students strategies to enable them to become autonomous. Under these circumstances, autonomy can be seen more as a product of instruction (Smith, 2003). Teachers have to teach students perceived to be lacking in autonomy to be autonomous, and their autonomy is therefore constructed through learning activities that are created by teachers (Holliday, 2003).

The data from an online interview tried to investigate students' perceptions of learner's autonomy in online learning. Five students are chosen randomly and interviewed online. The first question is about their understanding related to learner autonomy. Almost all of them gave their opinion, such as "... learner autonomy is when the learners can learn by themselves'. "...when the students get material and understand it without teachers help" or when we can learn something individually, no need any guidance". The first question indicated that most of the students understand learners' autonomy.

Regarding their perception of being an autonomous learner in online learning, some of them stated that "...online learning is interesting, but I cannot have enough interaction with my lecturer and friend". "... I cannot work collaboratively with my friends, and sometimes I cannot solve my problems". "the class is too large, so I cannot have one-to-one communication". "... I need teacher help and explanation directly". This item showed that they generally understand learner autonomy. Still, they assumed that online learning does not facilitate them because they are active in real class rather than in online classes, which limits their interaction. The students do not seem eager to learn autonomously as they lack willingness in reading and searching material on their own in online learning. It revealed that 66.9% of the same students prefer to study in class or face to face meeting, while only 18.5 % do not mind having online class even fewer, 14.6%, enjoy both options. In online language learning, students need to have the willingness (motivation and confidence) and ability (skills and knowledge) to achieve learning objectives together (Reinders, 2010). The interview result indicated that students did not feel comfortable with online language learning and were anxious about doing their role. The learners' level of motivation is seen as the effect and be affected by their level of autonomy.

Wenden (1998) as cited by Thanasoulas (2000) states that self-useful in raising students' awareness of their learning strategies. The kinds of self-reports: a reflective report in which students are asked they are thinking while they are performing a task; and retrospective participants are asked to think back or retrospect on their learning. In self-reports, students answer prepared-table related to their feeling particular things, problem techniques to tackle these problems, and their views on optimal reacquiring specific skills and ways of dealing with learning tasks. The instructor can ask their students to write a self-report to do a particular activity or task in the class to make the students conscious of having done in their learning. Table 5 shows the result of students' self-report

Table 5. Students' Self-Report

Meetings	Self-learning	Time management	Self determination	Planning	Self confidence	Independency	Self - starter
1 st	Good	V					
	Average		V	V		V	
	Poor				V	V	v
2 nd	Good						
	Average	v		V			v
	Poor		V	V	V	V	
3 rd	Good						
	Average	V		V	V		
	Poor		V		V	V	V

The result of the self-report reveals that, in the first meeting, the students had already possessed good self-learning criteria. It can be seen how they managed to search, read, and make the task given by the lecture. In terms of time management, self-determination, and independence, the findings showed that these three criteria had applied at an average level. This case was characterized by students' ability to work on their task individually, but at certain times, they also need the support of their lecturer. In terms of planning, self-confidence, and self-starter, students showed a poor performance. It is because of their lack of willingness to participate in online activities such as question and answer sessions. Students seemed to be afraid to put themselves forward as a volunteer to present their tasks.

In the second meeting, the self-learning and independence criteria had already possessed by students. Their ability to learn independently is still low, but they can solve some problems as they can find some sources related to their tasks from the internet. The rest of the criteria, such as time management, self-determination, planning, self-confidence, and self-starter, were on the average level. At this meeting, the student's self-report showed behaviors that were not much different from the first meeting.

Self-report from the third meeting reveal that students' behavior in terms of self-learner, self-determination, and independence criteria are still on an average level, even some are at a poor level. They stated in the interview session that they are bored with online learning and tired because many lecturers gave them assignments. Thus, in terms of time management and, self-confidence, planning, and self-starter, they had a reduced level. They are not able to manage their time to have an online class, plan, and do their assignments.

By reviewing students' self-report, the result showed that the students have reactive autonomy. There are two versions of autonomy that comprise *proactive* and *reactive autonomy* (Littlewood, 1999). Proactive autonomy is prioritized in the West, and it covers the capacity suggested by Holec (1979) of "determining the objectives, defining the content and progressions, selecting methods and techniques to be used, ... [and] evaluating what has been acquired". In contrast, reactive autonomy "does not create its directions, but, once a direction has been initiated, enables learners to organize their resources autonomously to reach their goal". Some examples of independent learning activities conducted by students possessing reactive autonomy include learning vocabulary, working through past examination papers, and collaborating in groups to do assignments.

CONCLUSION

The present study focused on exploring the students' perception of learner autonomy in online language learning in STAI Sufyan Tsauri Majenang. This finding was achieved through investigating online language learning as the solution to preventing coronavirus spreading, which demanded students to be autonomous in language learning. It revealed that 66.9% of the same students prefer to study in class or face to face meeting, while only 18.5 % of them found no trouble having an online class. The other 14.6%, enjoy both options. These results suggest a promising future for learner autonomy in a particular context. It reflected that the current instructional practices in online language learning demand a transmission period from the traditional approaches to student-centered approaches. The research findings clarified that the students learning autonomy is weak and cannot demand to be autonomous learning as instant. The students still need direct support and guidance, like in face to face meeting. It also demands teachers' role as a knowledge provider, facilitator, manager, resource, and counselor. The findings of this study suggested that English language teachers must encourage autonomous learners in their online classrooms. Moreover, the findings showed that teachers were hindered by some difficulties including learners' lack of independent learning skills, rules and regulations applied in schools, and teachers' lack of basic strategies to encourage autonomous learning. For further researches, there is a need to investigate the factors which influence the students' lack of independence in online learning.

REFERENCES

- Adamson, J., & Sert, N. (2012). Autonomy in learning English as a foreign language. *International Journal of Global Education*, 1(2) 23-27.
- Alonazi, Saleema M. (2017). The role of teachers in promoting learner autonomy in secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. *English Language Teaching*. 10(7), 183-190. Doi: 10.5539/elt.v10n7p183
- Aminatun, D., Oktaviani, L. (2019). Memrise: Promoting students' autonomous learning skills through language learning application. *Metathesis: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teaching*. 3(2), 214-220. Doi: 10.31002/metathesis.v3i2.1982
- Anggia, A., Nahdaleni, I. (2017). Learners' Autonomy in Out-of-Class English Writing Learning Activity of the Third Semester Students of English Education Study Program of Universitas Bandar Lampung. *English Education: Jurnal Tadris Bahasa Inggris*. 10(2). 227-241.
- Balcikanli, C. (2008). Fostering learner autonomy in EFL classrooms. *Kastamonu Education Journal*, 16(1), 277-284.
- Begum, J. (2018). Learner Autonomy in EFL/ESL Classrooms in Bangladesh: Teachers' Perceptions and Practices. *International Journal of Language Education*. 2(2), 96-104.
- Borg, S. & Al-Busaidi, S. (2012). Learner autonomy: English language teachers' beliefs and practices. London, England: British Council & the University of Leeds.
- Holliday, A. (2003). Social autonomy: Addressing the dangers of culturism in TESOL. In D. Palfreyman, & R.C. Smith, (Eds.), *Learner Autonomy Across Cultures: Language Education Perspectives*. (pp. 110-126), New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kubota, R. (2002). The author responds (Un) Raveling racism in a nice field like TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36 (1), 84-92.
- Lengkanawati, N. S. (2017). Learner Autonomy in the Indonesian EFL Settings. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 24(2), pp. 222-231.
- Littlewood, W. (2000). Do Asian students really want to listen and obey? *ELT Journal* 54(1), 31-36.
- Little, D. (2002). Learner autonomy and language learning. *Studies in English Language & Literature*. 28(1), 229-242.
- Merawati, M.J. (2016). Language Learning Autonomy and Language Research. *Jurnal Bahasa Inggris Terapan* 2(2). 1-8
- Mısır, H., Koban, K., Didem., Engin K, Serdar. (2018). An analysis of learner autonomy and autonomous learning practices in massive open online language courses. *Arab World English Journal*. 4(4), 24-39. Doi: 10.24093/awej/call4.3

- Onyema, E.M., Eucheria, N.C., Obafemi, F.A., Sen, S., Atonye, F.G., Sharma, A. and Alsayed, A.O. (2020). Impact of coronavirus on education. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 11(13), 108-119.
- Reinders, H. (2010). Towards a classroom pedagogy for learner autonomy: A framework of independent language learning skills. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*. 35(5), 40-55. Doi: 10.14221/ajte.2010v35n5.4
- Serdyukova, Nataliya., Serdyukov, Peter. (2013). *Student autonomy in online learning*. CSEDU 2013 - Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Computer Supported Education. Vol. 2, 229-233.
- Sinclair, B. (1997). Learner autonomy: The cross-cultural question. *IATEFL Newsletter*, October-November, 139, 12- 13.
- Smith, R., Kuchah, H., Lamb, M. (2017). Learner autonomy in developing countries. *Autonomy in Language Learning and Teaching: New Research Agendas*. 3(3), 7-27. Doi: 10.1057/978-1-137-52998-5_2
- Wenden, A. L. (1997). Autonomy in language learning. *System*. 25(4). 584-588. Doi: 10.1016/0346-251x(97)90169-x