LEARNER AUTONOMY AS A CHALLENGE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION 4.0 IN INDONESIA

Dwi Agustina[1*)], Dwi Ario Fajar[2)]
English Education Department, Pekalongan University
Indonesia
*dwi.agustina@unikal.ac.id

Abstract

The development of technology has enriched the educational practices in many settings including in Indonesia. The use of technology has contributed a lot to many teaching and learning activities both inside and outside the classrooms in Indonesian contexts especially in foreign language education like English. This is likely to be a good sign to welcome English language education 4.0. However, the success of English language education 4.0 depends also on students' readiness to be more independent or autonomous in their English learning. Our qualitative study has revealed that students in English education department still have difficulties in maintaining their autonomy level in learning. The learner autonomy is dynamic in the way that its level keeps changing. This may turn into a particular challenge for the enactment of English language education 4.0 if the students are not equipped with the skills to maintain their autonomy level in their English learning.

Keywords: learner autonomy, English language education 4.0, qualitative study

Introduction

The development of technology has affected the educational practices in many settings including Indonesia. In the past, most of the teaching and learning activities were conducted within the classrooms with the presence of both the teachers and the students. In that situation, the teachers became the main sources for the students' learning. The teachers usually wrote on the blackboard with the chalk and the students would copy what was presented on the blackboard. However the development of technology has brought an ease to the teaching and learning activities in Indonesia especially in the tertiary education. Nowadays it is not necessary for the teachers to write on the whiteboard as teachers can present the materials through their power points or they can upload the materials and ask the students to download them and bring them to the class. The teaching and learning can also be done through online classes where teachers and students can join the teaching and learning processes from home. Students can also search the learning materials from any resources in the internet. Moreover, the students' work can also be submitted and evaluated through online system. Online examination has also been applied in some settings.

With those kinds of teaching and learning practices, it seems that Indonesian teachers and students are ready to welcome the Education 4.0. Education 4.0 requires the use of more digital technologies (European Commission on Education and Training, 2017) where both teachers and students are required to develop information and media literacy (Aberšek, 2017). Apart from accessing information from the internet, students have the opportunities to share their knowledge in online forums, wikis or blogs and thus they change their role from information user into knowledge creators (Schuster, Groß, Vossen, Richert, &Jeschke, 2015).

Considering the requirement to use more digital technology in the future language learning, students need to be more active, autonomous and independent in their language learning. With the use of technology, they can learn from any place by accessing various materials in the internet. Even, they can collaborate with their friends from different parts of the world in building

the knowledge. Being referred as self-education, Education 4.0 demands students' self-initiation, adaptability, and flexibility in learning (Aberšek, 2017). Thus the success of Education 4.0 seems to be dependent on teachers' readiness, students' readiness and the availability of technological tools to support the language learning. Without teachers' and students' readiness to use more technology in language teaching and learning activities, the development of digital technology may not touch the educational practices in the classroom levels and thus the advancement of digital technology is hardly felt by those involved in the language teaching and learning.

This paper raises the topic on the students' readiness to welcome Education 4.0 in Indonesian contexts. The authors had the curiosity about the Indonesian students' autonomy levels since the authors believe that high autonomy level is needed for the success of the implementation of Education 4.0 in Indonesia.

Methodology

This paper reports the initial findings of the qualitative study on students' perceptions about independent learning. The study aims at finding out how students and lecturers perceive the meaning and the importance of independent learning within students' English learning. As the research has not finished, this paper only reports some parts of the findings, especially on students' views on learner autonomy along with students' level of autonomy.

This study has been conducted in English Education Department, Pekalongan University, Central Java, Indonesia from March 2018. The study itself will last for a year by involving both the students and the lecturers in English Education Department of Pekalongan University.

The authors have used narrative inquiry to reveal students' perceptions about the meaning and the importance of learner autonomy in their English learning. Narrative inquiry is "a form of qualitative

research that takes story as either its raw data or its product" (Bleakley, 2005, p.534). This type of study tries to "understand how people think through events and what they value" (Riley & Hawe, 2005, p. 229). According to Johnson and Golombek (2002, p. 5) narrative inquiry makes it possible for people to "look at themselves and their activities as socially and historically situated". Similarly, Smith (2007, p. 397) highlights that individuals can "understand themselves as selves through the stories they tell and the stories they feel part of." In this way, narrative inquiry fits the purpose of this current study as the authors expect the participants to share how they perceive the meaning and the importance of independent learning for mastering English mainly by telling their stories and experiences in doing the independent study in the past.

In collecting the data, the authors employed convenience sampling and thus the participants were the students who were available and willing to participate in the study. At first, the authors informed the students in English Education Department about the study and invited those who were interested to join the interview. In the interview, the authors asked the participants to tell their experiences in conducting the independent learning especially in their English learning. Each interview lasted for about twenty minutes. The interview was conducted either in Indonesian or English depending on the students' preferences.

This paper reports the initial findings from the interviews with 14 students. Twelve students came from semester six and two students came from semester eight. To analyze the data the interviews were transcribed and then coded. By coding the transcripts, it is expected that some patterns emerge in the data. The code used here is "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldana, 2013). In this study the data being coded vary from a single word, sentence (s),

to a full paragraph. Once the coding finishes, categories or themes were generated (Creswell, 2014). The last step of the analysis involved the process of interpreting the research findings.

Findings and Discussion

The findings show that all of the participants perceived the importance of doing independent learning to increase their English mastery. They also perceived the need to be autonomous or independent learners in mastering English. Most of the participants had developed high autonomy level and built the habits of doing independent learning activities. However, their stories revealed that their autonomy level changed across the time. Sometimes they were autonomous but sometimes they were not. It was hard for the students to maintain their autonomy because of various reasons.

First, some students reported that their motivation decreased across time. One of them said:

> "I was so diligent in my first semester. I did so many independent learning activities. … But then I stopped and I did not know why."

Laziness also contributed to students' lack of consistency in doing independent English learning:

> "I felt that laziness became my problem. I did not want to go out to learn [with friends in the library".

In addition, most of the participants said that they had no schedule for learning. Some asserted that they only studied when they had assignments from the lecturers. An example of their statements was:

> "I usually learn when I have homework or tasks to do. If there is no task then I did not study at home."

Even when some felt that they were quite consistent in learning English independently, they still perceived that their learning frequency has decreased. One of the students said:

> "I don't know why, but I feel that my learning activities are not as many as in the last semesters"

Another student reported the same thing:

> "I think my learning has been decreasing across the time.

Problems in learning with friends were also felt to affect students' autonomous learning activities. The problems were related to their friends' less positive attitude towards a study group:

> "My friends did not want to be invited for any learning activities done together".

Other problems faced by the students cover the lack of agreement among friends about the schedule or activities in learning. One of them openly said:

> "In learning together with friends, there were some problems such as disagreements about time, place, methods, and so on".

The statement above shows that students need communication skills and problem solving skills especially to overcome the issues in working with friends. For those who prefer to learn independently without friends, mostly they learnt at home because their parents provided the learning facilities. However, sufficient facilities did not necessarily guarantee that the independent learning activities were done by the students. One of the participants acknowledged this.

> "My parents provide everything for me, the internet access, computer, laptop, printer, mobile phones, but I just did not use them for learning."

This shows that students' willingness to learn is important. Unless students want to use the technological tools to support their learning, they will not feel the benefits of

using the advance technology to support their English learning.

Unsupportive atmosphere was also thought to be parts of students' problems in maintaining their learning activities. A student articulated this problem in the following statement:

> "Well, I think my home is not really supporting me in doing any kind of independent learning activities. I have my nephew and nieces staying with me and they are so noisy. I have to help my parents as well to do the household. Even, sometimes the cats are too noisy and they really disturb my learning."

From the description above the student seems to face the issues on maintaining the learning concentration. On one hand the student needed a certain degree of concentration for learning, but on the other hand she could not ignore the calls from the parents who needed some helps to do the household. As the noise from the nephew and nieces as well as the cats was hard to avoid, this student may need some training on handling concentration issues.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that basically students were aware of the importance of being autonomous and independent learners of English. However, they have not been able to maintain their autonomy level as English learners due to a wide range of reasons described above. In a particular time they were eager to do independent learning activities but at another time they just did not want to do them. This suggests that the students in English Education Department in Pekalongan University still faced the problems in maintaining the consistency of conducting independent learning activities. Students also experienced the increase or decrease of their autonomy levels in learning English. This becomes a call to equip the students with the skills to maintain their autonomy level in learning English. In addition, problem solving skills may be needed so that students are ready to handle the problems they face in conducting independent study. Without those skills, students' inability to maintain their levels of autonomy may present a particular challenge for the enactment of English language education 4.0 in their English learning.

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