

Students' Autonomous Learning Activities outside the Classroom to Master English as a Foreign Language

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ABSTRACT

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The complexity of foreign language learning and its restricted time to learn in the classroom need proactive efforts from the English students outside the classroom with full initiative and effort. This study tended to investigate to what extent students' autonomous learning activities outside the classroom to master English (four English skills). This study applied a descriptive quantitative design. It was conducted at a state university in Majene, West Sulawesi, Indonesia in the academic year 2021/2022. The population was English education students in the second and third years. There were 62 students who participated in this research. They were selected by using a convenience sampling technique. To gain the data, this research employed a questionnaire as a research instrument which consists of 16 items of statements. The data, then, were analyzed by employing descriptive statistics. Based on the data analysis, it was found that students' autonomous learning activities outside the classroom are still limited to activities that are entertaining for them. Apart from that, it has not been found that their extra efforts are done independently to become more proficient in every English skill. This indicates that students are still passive learners. By knowing the independent learning efforts carried out by students out of the classroom, English lecturers are expected to be able to design policies or teaching strategies to guide students so that they can increase their efforts by optimizing the wealth of available independent learning resources.

Keywords: *autonomous leaning; EFL; learner autonomy; learning; outside the classroom*

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INTRODUCTION

A foreign language is different from the second language in several aspects, such as learning environment, function, and purpose. Stern in Peng (2019) defines a foreign language as a language that is not officially used in a country. People learn it consciously for certain purposes like business, jobs, or further education. While the second language relates to a language that is used for official public communication. The government uses that language for administration, such as mailing and corresponding. It is not a mother tongue, but it plays important roles similarly to it.

In second language learning, the environment indirectly contributes to students' second language mastery. Students can experience a second language from social interaction around them. In contrast, in foreign language learning, both teachers and students are necessary to work hard to master it. Both parties have to create a learning environment in the classroom (Mohamad, 2018). Through that settled environment, students are able to acquire foreign language input as much as they can. They also can create chances in which they are able to produce that foreign language both in oral and written form. In foreign language learning, there is no natural ambiance. It is all by-designed and effortfully.

In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language. By counting on their knowledge and experiences, English teachers try to design and manage the

classroom so that their students are able to use that language. However, the learning duration at school is very restricted (Sokip, 2020). A number of Indonesian students only learn English for around ninety minutes per meeting. Each meeting is conducted once a week. It means that they only have 360 minutes a month which is similar to six hours a month. While at an Islamic college in Indonesia, students who take the English education programs spend approximately four to five hours a day on the weekdays. If comparing the wide range of English materials to that duration, it is not enough for English students to improve their receptive and productive skills in English.

Daflizar (2020) assumes that in the Indonesian context, students receive and produce English only in the classroom. Once the English class has just finished, they immerse themselves again in their local languages. In this situation, the amount of exposure to a target language is restricted. They have to design chances out of the classroom to use it independently. However, a number of researchers found that autonomous learning was something unfamiliar for students and they were not ready for that. Several factors influencing it were that students had a lack of motivation to learn English and that students depend themselves on teachers' control (Cirocki et al., 2019; Hermagustiana & Anggriyani, 2019). This ambiance should be allowed to drag on and must be responded in the right ways.

English mastery cannot be handed over only to English teachers or lecturers. One of the main keys of English learning success is the student itself (Ayish & Deveci, 2019). Dewey in Carpenter argued that learning was what students did, not what teachers did (Carpenter, 2013). It implies that students have more important roles to provide or to create their learning experiences. In other words, teachers or lecturers are only learning facilitators. The students have more responsibility for themselves. They can explore more learning experiences through autonomous learning. It refers to a concept in which students are responsible for their own learning and requires them to learn more actively (Rahman & Suharmoko, 2017). Students' dependency to the lecturers has to be reduced.

Autonomous learning is important for students because it develops them. Students who are autonomous learners will actively be looking for knowledge to respond to the rapid change in social life (Unjana et al., 2018). Guglielmino in Anjana mentions that when they become autonomous language learners, they will be confident, have good mental preparedness, are keen on learning, and have the initiative to learn. They will also know the appropriate learning strategy for themselves. With autonomy, students will be aware to initiate, carry out and evaluate their learning. They will learn by heart without any force from anyone. This brings numerous benefits for students and leads the students to be lifelong learners.

There are a number of ways to promote students' autonomous learning. One of them is motivation support for the students. Autonomous learning cannot run well without students' motivation (Rahman & Suharmoko, 2017). To take responsibility for their learning, students have to possess strong eagerness that comes from intrinsic motivation. The eagerness is reflected in the form of learning-objectives formulation, learning-activities design, learning-methods selection, and learning-process assessment. Teachers play an important role to motivate the students and keep it stable so that they have a desire to learn independently and consistently (Jingnan, 2011; Khonamri et al., 2020).

To achieve a high level of foreign language learning, students are demanded to be independent learners. They should involve in various supporting activities outside the classroom to get more exposure. For instance, to be more fluent in English students are highly recommended to join an extracurricular such as an English club. It was found that students who joined an English club called Teknokrat English Club (TEC) in Teknokrat University showed better academic performance in English. They even were able to be a championship in English Debate Contests (Kardiansyah & Qodriani, 2018). It shows that autonomous learning initiated by the students contributes to their better English improvement.

Language learning outside the classroom is totally different to language

learning in the classroom. Inside the class, students learn structurally. They rely on their teachers' teaching design. They have to follow every single step of learning process which has been stated in the lesson plan. In contrast, out-of-classroom learning gives freedom for students to determine their learning resources, media as well as strategies. However, students have their learning authority, but it does not mean that learning outside the classroom is aimless. Benson argues in Daflizar (2020) that out-of-class language learning aims to expand students' knowledge and language skills. They carry out it independently in mixed up ways.

Independent learning addressed to university students is appropriate because they are already classified as adult learners who are able to take responsibility for themselves. Students at the secondary education level are considered sometimes still not ready for the challenges of learning. In one case it was found that freshmen still carried their study habits when they were still in secondary school. They have not shown behaviour as independent learners. They still rarely respond when studying and tend to be passive (Rokhani, 2012). This shows that to be an independent learner, it requires a process. In other words, it takes a long time to develop independent learners (Qassimi, 2021). Similarly, to become an adult one has to go through a long process from children, teenagers to adults. Independent learners must take the initiative and act without

waiting for instructions because they feel the need to do it.

To learn independently, students may find a number of challenges, such as what students in English education department encountered. They found difficulties to maintain the level of their autonomous learning. It went ups and downs due to unfavourable environment (Agustina & Fajar, 2018). Students thought that they had no partner to practice their language and had lack of strategies to learn particular aspects of a foreign language (Inayati & Mawan, 2021). Because of those difficulties, they were pessimistic enough to conduct autonomous learning.

Nowadays life becomes more modern and offers a lot of ease. The prospects for self-study are greater. Assumption about English teachers as dominant figure or main resources of learning (Üstunluoglu, 2009) is no longer valid. Plenty of English resources are adequate to access out of the classroom, such as English songs, videos, books, podcasts, etc. Students may optimize those available resources through autonomous learning to foster their English mastery. For instance, they can read English texts; consume foreign language media (radio, tv, podcast, video or movie); speak to the ones who are able to speak English too; immerse themselves in native countries, practice with feedback, and be brave even having mistaken (Budden, 2015). Those activities support students' English mastery in terms of all language skills.

Several activities above employ technology, since it is inevitable that it has great potential to assist independent language learning, either it is connected to internet network or not. For instance, students are able to use search engine machine to find online reading resources. They can enrich their new vocabularies towards the resources. In addition, they also can build interaction both in spoken and written contexts with other people by using various platforms. Technology creates more opportunities for students to absorb and to produce foreign languages either in formal or informal contexts. It proves how technology contributes to students' autonomous learning when it used as it has to be.

Autonomous learning is one of the forms of educational reform (Ma et al., 2013). Therefore, it is not surprising that a number of teachers are striving to make their students become autonomous learners. However, before implementing certain efforts to students, it is important for teachers or lecturers to know in advance the extent of independent learning activities that have been carried out by students outside the classroom. Thus, the teacher can connect these activities with the learning design that will be set in the classroom. Because it is undeniable, the activities that students do outside the classroom are a habit of their enjoyment. Teachers can take advantage of their out-of-class learning habit to explore their autonomous learning potential.

A number of researchers have conducted research with various topics about it. Notwithstanding, few researches investigate students' autonomous learning activities particularly for activities outside the classroom to master English skills. Previously, Daflizar (2020) has described Indonesian tertiary students' engagement in autonomous English language learning outside the classroom, but in his research, he only generalized kind of activities which is more often done by students. He found that mostly students engaged more in receptive activities rather than productive activities. In contrast, this research intends to investigate to what extent students' autonomous learning activities of each language skill outside the classroom. In addition, this research also compares which receptive and productive skill that students more prefer and not.

METHOD

This research applied quantitative research design to observe quantifiable phenomena. The population of this research was undergraduate students of English education study program of at a state university in Majene in the level of sophomore and junior. The total number of the population was 79 students. To recruit them as participants in this research, the author employed convenience sampling technique in which they were selected based on their availability and willingness to fill out the questionnaire. There were 62 students who participated in this research.

To collect the data, this research employed a questionnaire as a research instrument. The questionnaire was developed by adapting a theory from Budden which accommodated four aspects of language skill. Each aspect was represented by four statements; therefore, there were 16 statements in the questionnaire. On top of that, there were four options for each statement to respond. They are (1) very often, (2) often, (3) seldom, and (4) never. Each participant selected only one option for each statement. In terms of data analysis, this research used descriptive analysis to investigate the proportion of students' autonomous learning activities outside the classroom to master English and to compare which receptive and productive skill that students more prefer.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are a number of students' activities in autonomous English language learning. Those activities were listed in the questionnaire and divided into four language skill sections. Student responses to the questionnaire are described in the following tables:

Table 1. The proportion of students' autonomous learning activities outside the classroom to improve their listening skill

| Statements | Options' Percentage | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| | Very often | Often | Seldom | Never |
| I watch English video/ movies | 19.3 | 59.7 | 21 | 0 |
| I listen to English songs | 50 | 37.1 | 12.9 | 0 |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|------|------|-----|
| I watch English news broadcasts | 3.1 | 33.9 | 56.5 | 6.5 |
| I listen to English podcasts | 3.2 | 12.9 | 62.9 | 21 |

The table above depicts information about the percentage of several activities which students do out of the classroom independently to foster their listening skill. It is noticeable that mostly students often watch English video/ movies and very often listen to English songs at a rate 59,7% and 50% respectively. None of them even claim that they never do those both activities. On top of that, around 56% students seldom watch English news broadcast, and almost 63% of them seldom listen to English podcast.

Activities which done very often and often by more than half of participants in this research are categorized as usual activities, while activities which seldom and never done by students are as categorized unusual activities. It means that out of four autonomous activities beyond the classroom to improve students' listening skill, two of them are usual, and the others are unusual.

Table 2. The proportion of students' autonomous learning activities outside the classroom to improve their reading skill

| Statements | Options' Percentage | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-------|------------|-------|
| | Very often | Often | Very often | Never |
| I read English Novels | 0 | 8 | 71 | 21 |
| I read social media posts in English | 19.4 | 53.2 | 25.8 | 1.6 |
| I read English magazines/new spapers | 0 | 16.1 | 62.9 | 21 |

| | | | | |
|--|-----|------|------|-----|
| I read English academic articles/books | 3.2 | 25.8 | 64.5 | 6.5 |
|--|-----|------|------|-----|

The table above illustrates percentage of students' independent learning activities outside the classroom in terms of efforts of reading skill improvement. It is clear that mostly students seldom explore English reading resources, particularly novels, magazines/ newspapers, and academic articles/ books at a rate 71%, just under 63%, and almost 65% respectively. Nevertheless, the majority of students claim that they often read English social media posts. Its percentage is approximately 53%.

Among three independent activities done by students outside the classroom, there are three of them which are not familiar for students. There is only one reading activities usually done by the students based on their initiative; it is to read English social media posts.

Table 3. The proportion of students' autonomous learning activities outside the classroom to improve their speaking skill

| Statements | Options' Percentage | | | |
|---|---------------------|-------|------------|-------|
| | Very often | Often | Very often | Never |
| I start an English conversation when I meet an English teacher outside the classroom. | 0 | 8.1 | 75.8 | 16.1 |
| I start an English conversation when I meet | 0 | 16.1 | 77.4 | 6.5 |

| | | | | |
|---|-----|------|------|------|
| classmates outside of class. | | | | |
| I start an English conversation when I meet an English native speaker. | 3.2 | 3.2 | 37.1 | 56.5 |
| I start an English conversation when I meet someone who can speak English | 3,2 | 25.8 | 61.3 | 9.7 |

The table gives information about the rate of independent activities done by students out of the classroom as attempts to elevate the level of their English-speaking skill. Overall, more than half students confess that they seldom start an English conversation when they meet their English teachers and classmates as well as someone who can speak English. Its percentages were almost 76%, around 77%, and 61.3% respectively. None of students even admit that they very often start English conversation to their English teacher and classmates out of the classroom. In addition, it is reported that mostly students never start English conversation to English native speakers.

It means that all of the out-of-classroom speaking activities above are unusually carried out by the students. The high percentage of "seldom and never" options illustrates lack of spoken language production in the target language by students outside the classroom.

Table 4. The proportion of students' autonomous learning activities outside the classroom to improve their writing skill

| Statements | Options' Percentage | | | |
|--|---------------------|-------|------------|-------|
| | Very often | Often | Very often | Never |
| I write social media captions in English | 12.9 | 54.8 | 29 | 3,3 |
| I write English comments on people's posts on social media | 1.7 | 17.7 | 62.9 | 17.7 |
| I use English when texting WhatsApp messages to English teachers | 3.2 | 12.9 | 61.3 | 22.6 |
| I use English when taking notes on presentation I pay attention to | 1.6 | 19.4 | 62.9 | 16.1 |

The table shows the proportion about students' autonomous activities out of the classroom in terms of producing English texts. It is clear that the majority of students seldom write English texts outside the classroom. Almost 63% of students report that they seldom write English comments on people's posts on social media; approximately 61% of them seldom use English when sending written messages through WhatsApp to their English teachers; and 62.9% of them seldom take notes by using English when they pay attention to a presentation. Nonetheless, they often write English texts outside the

classroom in the context of caption writing on social media.

The data above describes that target language production outside the classroom in written form is something unusual for most students too. They only construct English sentences into texts when they post captions in their social media.

In educational reform, autonomous learning is presented to alter the target which was initially more focused on teaching rather than focus on learning. Students are expected to be more proactive to engage themselves in learning activities and to gain learning experiences. To achieve autonomous learning, there are five principles that required to consider: high frequency of student involvement in learning, resources provision, enrichment of accessible learning resources, preferred offers, freedom to choose and make decisions, encouragement, and reflection (Ardana Reswari & Kalimanzila, 2021). This research is more focused on the activeness of students to engage in a number activities as an effort to master English as a foreign language.

Autonomous learning activities done by the students to improve their listening skill

To be more specific with the results of the findings of this study, it can be seen that the majority of students usually listen to English songs and watch English movies. They learn English from those entertaining activities or entertainment-related learning resources. They enjoy these types of activities as parts of efforts to improve their listening skill. Students often do it because

the activities are considered fun and appealing (Albiladi et al., 2018). It indicates that fun activities are able to make students motivated to learn independently and express their willingness.

Beside that, it is not surprising that they tend to learn independently through watching movies because adult English learners consider movies as authentic resources to learn a foreign language, and effective to improve their language skills as well as enrich their vocabularies. They admit that watching movies assists them to do self-English learning out of the class. The employment of movies in language learning brings a number of benefits such as their motivation, oral communication skill enhancement, and cultural awareness increase (Albiladi et al., 2018). Watching English movies regularly is beneficial for the improvement of students' receptive skill (listening).

On the contrary, most of students rarely watch English news broadcast and listen to English podcast. These activities probably seem too serious for students; therefore, they are not interested in them. In fact, English podcasts are effective in assisting EFL students to hone their listening skills like English songs. Through quasi-experimental research in one of Senior High School in Jakarta, it was found that students who were in experimental group showed better performance after learnt listening by using Podcast. It gave significant impact on students' listening comprehension. (Abdulrahman et al., 2018). Even though it is proven to be

effective, the English podcast has not been optimized by students at a state university in Majene as a learning resource for independent learning. There needs to be an effort from English lecturers to design an English podcast that is comfortable and entertaining like a song so that students are interested in optimizing it.

It is inevitable that interest is one of motivational variable to learn proactively and independently. Motivation is able to influence how speed or how energetic someone to work on something and how aggressive they are to achieve their goals (Sumbawati et al., 2020). People around students, such as parents, teachers and relatives, have a big influence to increase students' motivation to develop them to learn more independently (Kemala, 2016). Aoki and Boud in Kemala argue that autonomous learning does not mean learning alone. Students need supportive people around them to interact with in the form of social support. Through encouragement from them, students may want to get out of their comfort zone and try new things such as developing their listening skills through listening to news broadcasts.

Autonomous learning activities done by the students to improve their reading skill

Regarding reading activities that students do outside the classroom, one activity that students usually do is reading English social media posts. They rarely read English texts from novel, magazines/newspaper, and books/ articles. This implies that students are more interested in

reading information on their social media homepage. This also means that the students have a tendency to obtain information through passive reading resources originating from the internet. This is quite relevant to the findings of Obaidullah and Rahman which states that students consume a big slice of time using social media than reading books (Obaidullah & Rahman, 2018). These findings present the facts of how the phenomenon of shifting students' reading habits is.

As one of the skills that is very important to improve someone's intellectual ability, the development of reading skills must be a concern. The results of this study indicate that students rarely do reading activities from various sources when they are outside class hours. This may be because they do not have a high reading interest. Based on a study conducted by Central Connecticut State University in the US regarding reading interest, it was revealed that Indonesia was ranked 60th out of 61 countries that were sampled (Tif & Kes, 2016). Let alone reading texts that use foreign languages, reading texts using their own native languages is not very interesting for them.

So that students are involved in reading many types of reading sources, except reading social media posts, it is necessary to trigger students by presenting a synopsis of books or some of the contents of magazines and articles on social media to attract their curiosity. If they are curious, they will find out more information from

the original reading source. Prohibiting students or asking students to limit their activities on social media and forcing them to read articles, magazines or books is unlikely to be effective since they have pleasure on it. It requires new ways and new approaches, so that they are interested in reading from active resources and initiative to start it.

Autonomous learning activities done by the students to improve their speaking skill

It was found that mostly students infrequently initiate to start using spoken English in various moment such as when they meet their English teachers, classmates, as well as people who are able to speak English. Most of them even never try to begin a conversation with the native speakers. Students' psychological factor affect their reluctance to speak English. Ningrum et al (2019) revealed that students felt insecure when people laughed at them due to mispronunciation. They had difficulties to construct spoken sentences and used proper tenses. In addition, they were confused about choosing the right diction to express something according to the context. They do not want to look like a fool.

One of the interesting, satisfying, motivating and confident ways to learn English independently is by using robots. Lee et all (2011) developed a robot that could help students learn foreign languages. Based on the results of the analysis, the use of the robot was considered effective to improve students' speaking skills. With the rapid

development of science and technology, now digital robots that work similarly can be found in a number of applications which provided in Play store and App store of smartphones. This is certainly useful to learn autonomously, particularly for students who do not dare to speak due to shame if they are laughed at by people around them. Robots will not laugh at them when they speak stammered English and mispronounced.

Teachers have to encourage students that learning a foreign language takes times and efforts. If they do mistakes during their learning process, it is not a big deal. They are able to learn from those mistakes and keep more practices. It is very important to increase students' self-confidence, because it has significant relationship with students' academic performance (Arshad et al., 2015). Riani in Mega and Sugiarto (2020) found that students with high self-confidence performed better in speaking rather than those who had low self-confidence. Without their confidence, students have no willingness to start a verbal communication in a foreign language.

Despite of those psychological factors, language factors also influence students' willingness to speak English. When students have restricted foreign language vocabularies, they definitely cannot speak a foreign language. One of the reasons why students have lack of English vocabularies is because they have difficulty to memorize. They feel bored to memorize a list of words (Amalia & Anggraeni, 2021).

Therefore, it is recommended for students to find convenient and interesting method for them to absorb a bunch of English vocabularies. If they already have a lot of vocabulary, then this will indirectly affect their confidence. As a result, their enthusiasm to conduct autonomous learning in English verbal communication may increase.

Autonomous learning activities done by the students to improve their writing skill

To improve their writing skill, this study revealed that students frequently post English captions on social media. Surprisingly, when they comment on others' social media, they do not use English. They also seldom practice writing English texts when they send message through WhatsApp to their English teachers and when they take notes from a presentation they listen or watch. This shows the dominance of Indonesian language used by students in contexts where they have the opportunities to hone their English writing skills such as when texting an English lecturer.

Writing is seen as a difficult skill to master. It is a time-consuming process due to the numerous sub-components that must be brought together. In addition, students have been exposed to audio-visual elements throughout their lives and are new to the discipline of writing (Sarwat et al., 2021). Moreover, students have low reading interest which certainly has an impact on their ability in writing (Anjani et al., 2022). Therefore, it is not surprising

when students become unproductive in writing.

Students' reluctance to write in a foreign language may be influenced by the difficulties they encounter. There are three main aspects which affect students' difficulty in writing. To begin with, linguistics aspect. When students have limited English vocabulary, they have no materials to construct into sentences. The next is cognitive aspect. Some students may memorize a bunch of vocabularies, but they cannot organize their idea, so that their message cannot be delivered to the readers in the form of written text. The last is psychological aspect or content. To write, someone has to possess an idea about that. When they have no idea to write, then there will be no writing (Pratiwi, 2016).

Nevertheless, students basically have started to show an effort to improve their writing skills by posting English posts on their social media accounts. It is just that students have not optimized other opportunities such as giving or replying to written comments in English on their social media, so that interactive written English communication occurs. If this is used, then their ability to compose English sentences can increase. It needs the role of the teacher either in the form of policies or in the other forms so that students are eager to practice written communication in English.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that students have not shown autonomous learner behaviour in

their efforts to master English. Their activities outside the classroom related to English learning are still limited to entertaining activities such as listening to English songs and watching English movies. They rarely do activities that can hone their reading, speaking and writing skills in English, even though a number of English resources available to explore independently, particularly online resources. If students from English major only learn English in the classroom, then their learning outcomes will not be much different from students from non-English majors. A phenomenon like this is certainly concerning.

Among those four skills, English speaking is an activity that is rarely done by students outside the classroom. Of course, the absence of a speaking partner is not the main obstacle not to speak because outside the classroom, students also often meet as well as lecturers. If students feel embarrassed to be laughed at by their friends if they make mistakes, then students can practice speaking using applications that use artificial intelligence in which there is a robot figure who is able to communicate in English.

It is necessary to assist students to increase their awareness regarding their learning responsibilities and understand its urgency. After that, it has to be followed by a number of efforts to lead and encourage them to learn independently outside the classroom. Because awareness which is not manifested into actions means useless. By considering the tendency of students in

learning something entertaining, then the adaptation and implementation of edutainment can be a consideration for teachers to promote their autonomous learning.

This study has a number of limitations. This research only discuss English skills, therefore; future researchers can include English components to be able to find more comprehensive data regarding students independent efforts in English mastery. In addition, This study uses a convenient sampling technique where this technique is very susceptible to bias, cannot be used to draw conclusions for the entire population. Further researchers are recommended to use a sampling technique that has a small potential for bias.

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NF conveys and implements research ideas with data collection assisted by NA. During the writing process of this article, NN and RB assisted NF in correcting the manuscript.

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