

Exploring Students' Autonomous Learning Behaviors at English Language Education

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Abstract

Autonomous learning becomes the goal of successful teaching and learning process. Autonomous learners usually have some behaviors divided into some categories which indicate them as autonomous learners, so that understanding about their behaviors is so important. This study aimed to find out the strongest students autonomous learning behaviors category at English Language Education Department of a private university in Yogyakarta. The other purpose was to reveal the level of autonomous learning. The respondents were 90 students who had already learnt English in this university. Survey as quantitative research method was used and the questionnaire was used as the instrument of this study. The result showed that external resources became the strongest autonomous learning behavior category. It means that the respondents often use resources for their learning, such as internet or books. It was out of the other six autonomous learning behavior categories, namely planning, reflection, setting objectives and levels, materials and classroom activities, learning styles and strategies, and evaluating learning. Then, the level of autonomous learning was in the level of “autonomous”, so that most of them are often do some behaviors of autonomous learning. This study was beneficial for the teacher for providing activities which can train the autonomous learner behavior in learning. Then, it is also important for the students to know about autonomous learning behaviors, so that they can improve their behavior categories which are still less autonomous. Then for other researchers, this research can be the reference for studying the similar topic.

Keywords: Autonomous learning, autonomous learning behaviors

Introduction

Autonomous learning plays a big role in teaching and learning process, especially in higher education. In higher education, learners are expected to take responsibility of their own learning and they should contribute in their learning. As stated by Ertürka (2016), an independent decision maker who applies many kinds of control at the degree of learning management, content of learning and process of cognitive is autonomous learner. Students in higher education are expected to be autonomous learners because they have to be independent learners whom control their learning management, what to learn and cognitive process. They have to learn more after the class is over. And then, the definition of autonomy is related to students' ability to manage their learning. According to Benson (2001), autonomy as the capacity to take charge of one's own learning is the natural product of the self-directed learning practice which the learners establish the learning objectives, progress and evaluation. These two definitions highlighted the relation of autonomy with independence and learning capacity of the students. From these both explanations, we can conclude that an autonomous learner is an independent learner who has ability to control learning by determining the learning objectives, progress, evaluation, content, management and cognitive process.

The researcher believes that most of the students in English Language Education Department are autonomous learners because they have some behaviors of autonomous learner which are included as autonomous learning behaviors categories. These behaviors are categorized as seven categories, namely

reflection, setting goals, planning, evaluating learning, learning styles and strategies, materials and classroom activities, and external resources (Murray, 2008). Learners in English Language Education Department have behaviors which indicate them as autonomous learners. They often browse the material in the internet and open dictionaries for finding the new word. They have awareness for learning outside the classroom. They learn and review the lesson after the class is over. They plan about what they want to achieve and they evaluate about their mistake in filling the task. They have done doing the autonomous learning behaviors and they have different autonomous learning behaviors, so that the researcher want to find out which is the strongest category and which the lowest category of autonomous learners' behaviors is. Then, the researcher would like to find out the level of autonomous learning in English Language Education Department.

Methodology

Quantitative research design was used in this research. The researcher applied cross-sectional survey design because this research is about autonomous learning which becomes the current issue in educational field now on and it becomes the practice of successful language teaching and learning. According to Cresswell (2012), a cross-sectional survey can investigate the current attitudes, beliefs, opinions or practices. The research was conducted this research in English Language Education Department of a private university in Yogyakarta because the teachers taught large classes. Autonomous language learning programs can be tested properly in large classes (Murray, 2008). The respondents of this research

were 90 students of English Language Education Department batch 2016. They were chosen as respondents because they have learnt English in this university for at least two years, so that they have been understood about their learning behaviors.

Closed and structured questionnaire was applied in this research. Cohen, Manion & Morisson (2011), highly structured, closed questionnaire are beneficial for arousing the accepted response frequencies to statistical treatment and analysis. There were thirty four items used and with five scales describing the frequency of autonomous learning behaviors. The researcher gained the data on December 2018 and January 2019 using self-administered questionnaire. The presence of the researcher helps to answer the uncertainties of the questionnaire items (Cohen et al., 2011). The researcher analyzed the data using descriptive statistic. Descriptive statistics describe and present data such as in terms of frequency (Cohen et al., 2011).

Results and Discussion

Strongest Autonomous Learning Behaviors Category

There were 7 autonomous learning behavior categories and each behavior had different mean score based on the respondents' response. The strongest category of autonomous learning behavior was external resources with the highest mean score was 3.99. Then, the second highest mean score was planning as it had 3.86 as the mean score. Reflection became the third highest mean score of the autonomous learning behavior and it had 3.80 as the mean score. Then, the next highest mean score was 3.53 about setting objectives and levels as the

autonomous learning behavior category. Then, the next highest mean score was about materials and classroom activities with 3.50 as the mean score. Next, the category of learning styles and strategies had 3.50 as the mean score. The lowest mean score was about evaluating learning as the category of autonomous learning behavior and the mean score was 3.28.

The data showed that the strongest autonomous learning behavior of the students was external resources as the category. Most students did the behavior of external resources frequently. Students often do the behaviors included in this category, such as using internet, dictionary and other materials in learning. This might be because using resources was the easiest things to do or it was tangible for the students. As stated by Najeeb (2012), learners should be given skills to find out the material and resources outside the classroom, so that they will know which is the good material or resources and which is not good. Thus, students can access the resources inside or outside the classroom and they can get usual about knowing the good material for their learning. Resource plays an important role in learning because if the students have a willingness to learn, but they do not have enough resource, the learning process will not maximally done. This is the easiest way which undergraduate students can do to improve their learning. External resource is the doable things to do, such as finding the resources through books, other material, dictionary or internet.

There were some items related to the behavior of students related to external resources, such as students used dictionaries and reference books, students used the Internet and information technology, and students used other

reference materials. Resources help students to add their knowledge based on their needs. There are some resources that can affect the autonomous learning, such as class environment, libraries, computers, and other information resources and these information resources can provide much information to learners for getting more extracurricular knowledge based on the need of the students (Liu, 2016).

Then, autonomous learning can be reached through internet. For increasing the autonomous learning ability, the internet supplies a very beneficial environment for students (Lin-lin, 2015). Internet also helps learners to make a beneficial environment of learning autonomously. “Because of the fact that students access to the Internet outside the classroom context is growing considerably, there is a good chance that while using it they will trigger autonomous learning” (Talkowska – Wojciechowsk, 2015). So, internet becomes the good chance for learners for being autonomous learner.

Next, the use of internet and information technology helps learners in becoming autonomous learners because it is tangible or easy to use. As stated by Zhong (2008), one of the most important learning approaches which dominantly draws the main part and students’ learning individual-orientation is autonomy English learning through internet. It means, learning English using internet proves the aim of students in learning. Then, internet is also easy to use for massive learners or for learners in larger classes. It makes students have a good quality of performance. Making an efficient and high-quality performance in individual or mass learning of English can be reached by learning English through internet (Zhong, 2008). Then, a good information technology as learning resources is very

beneficial for constructing knowledge in language teaching and learning. To construct knowledge, a learning tool should be crafted, and quality resources and the use of good technology should be accessed (Marshall et al., 2003)

And then, reading books or newspaper as the resources can assist students to increase students' English skill. As explained by Razeq (2014), "other external resources that students could be encouraged to take advantage to improve their English skills are reading English newspapers and talking to foreigners" This statement means, reading newspaper in English and talking to English native speaker can increase the skills of English.

Level of Autonomous Learning

The total mean score of the English Language Education Department students from the 34 items of behaviors which are included in some categories was 3.64. And then, it belonged to category of "autonomous" because the score was between 3.71 and 5.00. It means that most of the students in English Language Education Department of a private university in Yogyakarta always or often do the autonomous learning behaviors. Holec (1981), stated that autonomous learner determines the objectives, define the contents and progressions, selects methods and techniques to be used, monitors the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.), and they also evaluate what has been acquired. Holec examined the characteristic of autonomous learners as they are able to define their objectives, contents, progress, and they can select method and technique and also do evaluation of learning.

There is also mentioned by Ikonen (2013), the characteristic of autonomous learner is they are critical evaluation of and reflection on information, and they show active and critical participation of the community which can develop community. It clearly highlighted that autonomous learners are critical thinking in participation in a community. Then, autonomous learners also motivated learners if we compare them to non-autonomous learners. “In general, autonomous learners are more highly motivated than non-autonomous learners” (Hobrom, 2004).

Conclusion

The result showed that the strongest autonomous learning behavior category was external resources with 3.99 as the mean score. It means that students always or often do the behaviors included in this category, such as using dictionaries, references books, internet, information technology, and reference materials in learning. Then, the level of autonomous learning of the students at English Language Education Department of a private university in Yogyakarta was “autonomous”.

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