

Fostering English as Foreign Language Students' Autonomy Level in Vocabulary Development

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This research aimed to explore the students' autonomy level in vocabulary development and teachers' role in fostering students' autonomy level. This research explored university students' level of autonomy in English learning and to gain a better understanding of teachers' role in promoting LA in vocabulary development. A qualitative case study design was conducted to analyze the data. The findings showed that the students capable of controlling their learning strategy, motivation, and emotion understood the best condition to study; in this case, the student may control their learning vocabulary capacity, influencing their autonomy level. Furthermore, the teacher's teaching strategy also influenced the student's autonomy level. The more teachers engaged students in the classroom activity, the more they could control their learning strategy, which meant their autonomy level was getting higher. The research's implication is allowing the student to select their preferred method of learning can assist them in increasing their vocabulary. Practical strategies to learn vocabulary must be included to develop learner autonomy because learners' input in the academic context plays a vital role in independent vocabulary learning.

Keyword: *English as a Foreign Language, Learner's autonomy, Case Study, Vocabulary Development*

INTRODUCTION

The changes of the civilization are directly related to the flow of information and knowledge. The rapidity of changes must be accompanied by the speed at which learners and teachers learn something and the accuracy of the teachers in teaching. This case also applies in learning English. In language learning, autonomy 'as the capacity to take control over learning' (Benson, 2011) plays a vital role. Benson (2013) stated that autonomy is the requirement for effective learning; the learner not only become better language learner, but they will be the responsible and critical member of community if the learner succeed in developing autonomy.

Therefore, Learner autonomy was gained numerous researchers' interest in recent years. Benson (2011) stated that nowadays, the theory and practice of autonomous learning have growth.

Related to the language teaching and learning, there are some results of the study that proved that the key to vocabulary development is learner autonomy (Tuan,2011; Kameli et al., 2012; Li, 2015; Hu and Zhang, 2017).

Vocabulary is an essential aspect to learn language because it relates directly to listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Sokmen (1997) stated that, due to the limitation of the time in the learning vocabulary in the classroom, it would be impossible for the learner to gain all the vocabularies they need. Thus, the learners must manage their vocabulary learning effectively. Tuan (2011), in his study, states that vocabulary development requires a higher level of autonomy as well as more responsibility from learners themselves.

Some studies on the teachers' knowledge conclude that teachers are an active agent that has their own life, learning and professional histories and knowledge based on their histories then. From those criteria, they will make a complex decision about what they will teach and how they will teach (Sakui, 2002). Surprisingly, however, there are still a relatively small number of studies conducted from an insider viewpoint by non-native speaking EFL teachers to investigate the relationship between their learning and teaching. Therefore, the gap of this research to the literature is in the context of the study and the learning strategy teacher used in the teaching activity. Almushraf (2018) argued that the students' autonomy is significantly influenced by the teacher practice, for instance, teacher's teaching strategy used in the classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many theories have formed the idea of the student's learner autonomy. One of the ideas comes from John Dewey (1916), in his book entitled *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the philosophy of education*. John Dewey as cited in Benson (2011) stated that the importance of teaching and learning is to establish the environment of teaching and to learn that supports a student's persistence than the pure acquisition of knowledge and subject matter. Furthermore, Holec (1981) establish the term of the learner autonomy refer to the "taking responsibility over one's learning." Dickinson (1993) stated the total control over themselves in the learning process is the autonomous learner.

In comparison, Benson (2011) stated that 'autonomy is the capacity to take control of one's learning. Since the construct of the 'control' appears to be more open to an empirical investigation than the construct of 'charge' or 'responsibility.' It means that Benson (2011) argues that autonomy can be researched through the control rather than the construct autonomy itself. These are following dimensions of control over learning by Benson:

1. Control over learning management.
2. Control over the cognitive process.
3. Control over learning content.

The relation among those dimensions of control over learning above is that active learning management depends upon control of the cognitive process involved learning, while control of cognitive process necessarily has consequences for the self-management of learning. Autonomy also implies that self-management and control over cognitive processes should involve decisions concerning the content of learning (Benson, 2011).

Theoretical framework and approach

Constructivism underlies this study. In the constructivist approach, the teacher's role is not as the center of the learning process. The approach provides the environment to the student to learn autonomously because teachers do not give some instruction, direction, or structures. The constructivist approach represents the student-center learning. Dewey, as cited in Benson (2011) stated that the student's interaction in the environment should solve their problem. Thus, their needs are satisfied. The language learning that is seen as the adaptive process is the root of the constructivist approach to be applied in the learning process, and it makes an effect in the theory of autonomy in language learning.

In Dickinson's (1993) five characteristics of autonomous learning, the student is responsible for their learning process, and it asserts the learning than the teaching. The students are encouraged to learn autonomously and need each other and in teamwork, and they need to practice it in the social context (Little, 2007). Problem-based learning is one of the examples of autonomous learning. The teacher provides the issue to the students, and they try to find out the solution in a group. It helps the student to increase their competencies either through speaking or writing.

Explanatory Practice (EP) is the strategy introduced by Po-Ying (2007). He used it to assist Chinese university students in learning English. The strategy is based on Dickinson's (1993) five framework model, and the result shows that student enthusiasm to learn English using EP.

Fostering autonomy in vocabulary development

The critical aspect of gaining understanding in listening, speaking, reading, and writing a new language is vocabulary development. Learning vocabulary autonomously can maximize the students' development vocabulary. There are some studies that prove the statement.

The study conducted by Kameli et al. (2012) in the postsecondary setting, observed some factors which are affected in the students' vocabulary learning strategy of Malaysian University EFL. The effect which affects the most is the degree to which the teacher encouraged student learning, the amount of peer-review support, and the method of teaching. The participants explain that doing a task in the classroom and using a textbook can help them in learning vocabulary. Furthermore, learning vocabulary in a group or with peers can be a positive or negative effect. The other student can make a positive attitude in learning new vocabulary.

The other example of a study conducted by Kristmanson et al. (2013), Li (2015) and Schuster (2012) also prove the evidence that autonomous learning in school is needed. While the previous study focuses on the strategy that affects vocabulary development, these studies focus on tools such as portfolio, diaries, and private class sessions. The researcher theorized autonomous

learning, both theory, and practice, and tried to find out the differences in the implementation in a secondary school within China, Canada, and Australia. The finding shows that intercultural awareness is a must for the teacher to understand how EFL students develop their learning process through class participation and the portfolio and two strategies that improve autonomous learning. The findings also emphasize the teachers' role in the learning process that assists students' autonomous learning. Students assume that as a facilitator, assistant, and counselor teachers have a significant role because the teacher supports their learning process.

Students' role in autonomous vocabulary learning

Autonomous learning means taking control over one's own learning/teaching. According to Tuan (2011), the teachers have to support the students to increase students' vocabulary by using the words based on the real-life and also taking notes. It means learning vocabulary autonomously has to encourage the students to learn vocabulary actively out of the classroom because on some occasions, learning in the classroom has limitations.

Butler and Lee (2010) investigated 254 EFL students in South Korea about the autonomous in vocabulary learning. The result shows positive value toward autonomous learning in vocabulary building. It is marked by increasing their English performance. Another result shows that autonomous learning enriches the students' vocabulary because the students evaluate their learning by themselves and self-edit them. It can be concluded that according to Butler and Lee, autonomous learning promotes to enrich students' vocabularies. Another study was conducted by Tseng and Schmitt (2008) that emphasizes the motivation toward students' vocabulary development. There are 49 of Taiwan University students, and 210 China University students that divided into 130 are men and 129 are women that are involved in the study.

The researcher collects the data by the questionnaire and the vocabulary test that was controlled by the Psychometric scale. The finding shows that self-regulation is the fundamental aspect of autonomous learning, especially in vocabulary development. The result suggests that motivation can encourage learning behavior and give understanding to the student the essential of autonomous learning and study. It can be concluded that the integration of motivation and self-regulation toward vocabulary learning should be introduced in the school because of their importance to the learning.

To convince the statement of self-assessment in vocabulary learning, Chang (2012) conducted the study that investigates students' ways of becoming an autonomous learner in the writing development. The participants of the study are three male and 11 female University students in Northern Taiwan. The researchers identify the students' selecting topic and rewrite their writing independently by online feedback. The data was collected by the learning surveys, interviews, and writing samples. The finding shows that the students respond to their work and choose their topic and revise their work by themselves. However, another result also shows that the teachers have an essential role in the students' success in students' writing course.

The gap in the literature

Numerous researches are examining the development of learner autonomy in the educational field. However, there is only a little research focused on the teachers' role in fostering learner autonomy in vocabulary development for EFL students (Alrabi, 2017; Alzubi *et al.*, 2017). This study tries to understand the teachers' role in promoting autonomous learning in vocabulary development. Therefore, the following research questions of this study are:

1. What are the levels of learner autonomy for EFL Learners in vocabulary development at university in Indonesia?
2. To what extent do teachers promote learner autonomy for vocabulary development in the university English Language Classroom?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a case study design to explore university EFL students' level of autonomy in English language learning and the teacher's role to promote autonomous learning. This study also uses a cross-sectional case study research design (Stake, 1995). There are only a few manipulations or even none in the collecting in the specific time. Data were collected in a semi-structured interview with students and teachers. Classroom observation took place from June 2019 to July 2019. This study was conducted in one of the public universities in Indonesia. The university consists of some departments, while English language teaching department was chosen to conduct this research. The participants were selected from level five of the undergraduate classroom. A classroom consists of twenty-five students. Six students are selected to be participants with detail, i.e., three females and two male students are selected from the teacher-centered classroom. Pseudonyms have been used to protect their privacy.

Classroom observations were conducted twice in a week for four weeks. Each observation period lasted 45 minutes during the participants doing interaction in the classroom, and the teacher implemented the camera recorded instructional methods, and the researchers also used a notebook to make field notes. Semi-structured interviews and audiotaped were conducted three times to the participants during the study. The first interview in the first week is conducted to gain general information about their learning and their perception of learner autonomy. The second interview was in the third week to gain the current instructional method applied in the class and the effectiveness of the method, and the last interview was in the last weeks to gain the information that might be different to the initial.

The data that was recorded from the interview with the students and teacher are transcribed, and the data that were collected from the observation were coded manually. The data analysis was guided by Benson's (2011) three dimensions of control. The lecturer in the same major who was not involved in this study, served as a second checked researcher to increase the validity of the inference drawn from the data (Saldana, 2015). Then, this study used thematic analysis that was defined by Braun and Clark (2006) as an analytic technique for "identifying,

analyzing and reporting patterns within data” by systematizing and designating in-depth data detail.

RESULTS

There are two results from this study which are based on the interaction among the students and with the teacher in the learning and teaching context. The first result is that the student has varied in the autonomy level, which is identified in low, moderate, and no high level. However, most of them are categorized into the moderate autonomy level. The students still confuse how to define autonomy and they are still in their point of view that autonomy is learning by themselves without any help from the other. Therefore, to give more understanding what autonomy is and the concept of autonomy, the researcher explained it before doing the observation and the interview. The second finding is the method that teachers applied in the classroom could develop to learner autonomy. However, she did not realize it because she does not seem to understand the concept of autonomy. The findings are described below based on the research question that was formulated:

3. *What are EFL Learners' autonomy levels in terms of vocabulary development at university in Indonesia?*

To answer this research question, this study employs the definition of autonomy by Benson (2001) that consists of 'control in learning process' to get closer analysis of each student's autonomous level. After that, the students were placed on the continuum categories from high to the low level of autonomous (Mushraf, 2018) based on the data collected from the interviews with the students and the student's participation in the class observation. The high-level means that the student is able to meet the three of capacity to take control over learning. While, moderate means that the students only meet the two of capacity to take control over learning and the last, 'low' means that student only meets one or does not meet the capacity to take control over learning. This following table is the summary of the students' autonomy level based on Benson's concept feature of control over learning:

Students	concept feature of control over learning exemplified	Learner autonomy level
Juna	2,3	Moderate autonomy level
Anna	1,2	Moderate autonomy level
Arnold	1,3	Moderate autonomy level
Elisa	1,2	Low autonomy level
Lisa	3	Moderate autonomy level

Notes: feature 1: can control over learning behavior, 2: can control the learning situation, and 3: can control the psychology of learning

1) Juna's autonomy level

Junna has advanced in English; it was proved by the interaction with teachers in the classroom. He is the leader of the student organization in the university means that he has

self-esteem that was influenced in his way of learning. When he was asked about himself, he directly answered, "I am more into the observer kind of student. I just like to observe things. However, he did not plan any materials before studying in the classroom "So, to be honest, no plan or let us say that until today. I have never exact or certain plan about how I will study about the vocabulary or when I will study about English because beside of this observer kind of percent I tend to be 'implosive' kind of student." When I ask to him about the condition that makes him comfortable in English, he said: ".....when I am listening to some favorite songs and when I am playing some interesting quiz and when I am in my mood to learn."

Juna calls himself an observer because he always chose what the topic, he wanted to talk about is. He knew what he wanted to learn about the topic and why he wanted to learn. He will join in the conversation with the exciting topic for him. It means that he could control over learning content. For instance, when in the classroom, the teacher gave a clue about the topic that would be discussed at the time, he responds to the teacher actively."

2) Anna's autonomy level

Anna is a very independent student, and she has high motivation that affects her learning English vocabulary in the classroom. When she was asked about herself, her eyes were straight to the researcher's eyes, and she answered "I think I am a highly motivated student especially in learning English and getting experiences in using English" then when asked about the importance of the learning vocabulary, she said "Yes, it is. Because it is the first thing that we should have to understand the meaning of English words in our language, to be able to speak, and to write so that we can express our thought in English". When she asked about the motivation to learn English, she said, "My motivation is to be able to talk to people from foreign countries; I thought it is interesting. Then I thought I should know more words and be able to speak well."

Anna was so enthusiastic to take in part in Mrs. Kinan's class. She thought that Mrs. Kinan always brought the new thing into the class for the learning process, for instance, games and the exciting topic. Thus, its motivated Anna to plan their possible material that will deliver by Mrs. Kinan that has given a clue in the last meeting. It can be identified that Anna has a great deal to control her learning behavior that was explained by Benson (2001). However, she said that she will accept all the content that was given by Mrs. Kinan even though she has less interest in the content and it makes her bored for just a little bit of time.

3) Arnold's level autonomy

Arnold is classified as the student with a moderate autonomy level because she only met the two of the three controls over learning. When he asked about the best condition that makes him comfortable in learning English, he said, "Actually I do not know in what condition I feel comfortable learning English. As far as my mood is good, I think it was a good condition" then when he asked about how he can arrange his mood to learn vocabulary, he did not have any idea about that. However, he takes a great deal in the

learning over behavior because when he asked about the planning before learning and the resources he was used to assisting his learning, he said "I know that learning English is my obligation because this is my choice to take part as a student of English department. So, I want to do my best, for example, I make a plan before joining the classroom by reading a coursebook or try to find out the next topic by a search engine, let us say it Google. Moreover, yeah, besides the coursebook, Google is my resource to learn English exactly to add my vocabulary." Since he planned before joining the course, sometimes, he negotiated the content with the teacher. 'at least, the content will be my little bit motivation to join the course' he said.

4) Elisa's autonomy level

Elisa is the student who was identified as the moderate autonomy level because he meets all the capacity to take control of the learning process. When she asked to talk about herself, she answered, "I think I like the other students in this major. However, I am a type of student that is enthusiastic about the challenge. For example, my teacher challenged me with a new game like Mrs. Kinan did in our speaking class...." It is evidence that Elisa is well-known as the most active student in her class. When I asked her about what they want to really learn and why she wants to learn it, she replied "as long as the knowledge needs me to make my life easier, I want to learn it. Moreover, English that is the international language and the language which I fall in love with because whenever and wherever I see and hear someone speaking in English fluently, I think it is so cool. So, I want to learn English so that I can speak fluently like them and also it cannot be denied that our life now uses English. So, English is important, right?"

Elisa is enrolled in Mrs. Kinan class, and she was highly motivated to learn vocabulary in the classroom. She met almost all the control over learning. He can control upon learning behavior in the classroom by making a plan before joining the class, and she also had many resources to assist her in learning English vocabulary like the movies in English and songs in English too, and she also read the news and articles through the search engine. However, she never negotiated the content of the course. 'just follow it. It will be easier for me without negotiating the course. because I think it depends upon the institution'.

5) Lisa's autonomy level

Lisa was a very shy person in the classroom. When she asked about the importance in learning English, she said: "in my opinion that English is, but I do not know how to learn the English language so fast exactly in this speaking class." Then when she asked about the conditions that make her feel comfortable and assist her in learning language, "I do not know in what condition I can learn English very well. In every condition I think I can assist as long as we have great motivation to learn English". Then, when she asked about what she wanted to learn and the reason he answered "because I am an English student so I want to learn English very well right?" and when she asked about the method that she preferred to learn English exactly in the speaking she said "because of the speaking is need more

vocabularies, I think the teacher should give us the obligation to memorize the vocabularies"

Lisa is less active in speaking, which is the lecture Mrs. Kinan. She did not want to be pointed to practice speaking in front of her friends. She also chose to teach with his friends, exactly the student who was sitting next to her to practice speaking. She also gave less response to the classroom, and she would do the task if it is asked only. Then, it suggests that Lisa's autonomy level is low.

After discussing the students' autonomy level in English learning, the next section is concerned with examining teachers' behaviors toward supporting learner autonomy for the purpose of vocabulary development:

4. *To what extent do teachers promote learner autonomy for vocabulary development in the university English Language Classroom?*

The main subject of the classes under observation was speaking. Data were collected from the speaking class, which was taught by Mrs. Kinan. She was a supporter of a student center classroom which means the classroom activities and events were limitless and sometimes he brainstorms the student to raise their questions, and the student was expected to deliver the question to the classroom, and the other student might answer the question. Mrs. Kinan and her student:

Mrs. Kinan: Ok. Student, I have a picture here, do you know what the picture is?

Student: it is a Borobudur temple

Mrs. Kinan: that is right. So, our topic is related to this picture. Anyone can guess what the topic is we are going to talk about?

Student : the seven wonders of the world

Mrs. Kinan : oke, it is almost right. Are there any other ideas?

Student : tourism place?

Mrs. Kinan : yeah, it is almost right. Let us try again. Anyone else guess our topic today?

Student : history or ancient thing

From the example of interaction done in the Mrs. Kinan class, it can be defined that the environment of the class advocated learner autonomy. She started the lesson by showing the related picture to get the student's attention. She encouraged her students to participate, even if they were not sure of the answers, and she also appreciated all the students' inputs. During the interview, Mrs. Kinan was asked about some of the instructional strategies that she found effective, and she said, "I promote self-learning, group activities, classification maps, games, and self-evaluation. She believed in the students' ability that must be improved in the classroom or outside. Moreover, she gave the students a chance to use a native language (Indonesia) to scaffold the meaning of some difficult English Vocabulary. The class is in the discussion class. The students divided into two groups: pro and contra group of a topic. The student was engaged in the open discussion while the teacher had little feedback to stimulate students' thinking by giving them notes to build up their

understanding. Mrs. Kikan did not act as the knowledge-giver in the classroom, but instead, she tried to give information to help them construct their knowledge of the discussion. Moreover, at the end of the class session, the teacher supports self-reflection to the teacher by means of feedback from the other group.

Based on the transcription of interviews with Mrs. Kikan and classroom observations, it would be concluded that Mrs. Kikan reaches out the objective of the study because she encourages students to be active in her classroom and create a supportive environment to make the students involved actively. She tried to stimulate students' self-critical, self-inquiry, and independent in making meaning.

DISCUSSION

There are some purposes of this study; the first is to address students' level autonomy in the vocabulary development, teacher's effort to foster free vocabulary learning among the university students, application of learner autonomy inside and the university's EFL classrooms and possible benefit of developing vocabulary knowledge. This section presents the description from the finding which has been developed from an in-depth analysis of the interviews and classroom observation notes and, as a result, traces some characteristic of learner autonomy.

Referring to the first question, the result from this study reveals how the five student's autonomy level is influenced by the teacher's teaching strategy in the classroom as well as their practice outside of the English classes. Although the students are naturally autonomous, it cannot be denied that the teacher's efforts in encouraging student autonomy are influenced in the fostering autonomous learning in the classroom, especially with the social context.

This study provides a profile of autonomous language learners' characteristics:

- 1) They are self-designed and self-assessed in the learning English vocabulary, as characterized by Juna, Arnold, Elisa, and Anna
- 2) They are highly self-motivated and have self-esteem in learning English vocabulary as characterized by Juna, Anna and Elisa
- 3) They can maximize the use of the other resources in learning English vocabulary as characterized by Lisa, Anna, and Arnold
- 4) They understand and able to rearrange the condition that assists them in learning as characterized by Juna, Anna, and Elisa

Those students' characteristics are based on Benson's (2011) capacity to control over learning as the definition of the autonomous learning, theoretical principle of the constructivism related to autonomous learning, and students' autonomy level. Students' involvement in the learning activity in the classroom shows that they are exploring and constructing new ideas and notions. They also can control their behavior over learning, their psychological aspect in the learning activity and their freedom to choose what they want to learn and their reason for learning the subject, related to control learning content. However, we must be concerned that the socio-cultural context might have the influence of the students' autonomy, which means the students was independent in one aspect and dependent on another one. Furthermore, based upon the interview

with five students that were, most of their student's autonomy levels are moderate. as Benson (2010) stated that it is almost impossible to expect the students to be able to control every conceivable aspect of their learning, and if they do not, they regard themselves as non-autonomous learners.

Based on the second research question, the students maximize their learning vocabulary, and they become highly motivated students in participating in the classroom activity when the concept or the autonomous learning is introduced to them and the teachers are actually aware of the benefit in applying autonomous learning in their activity in the classroom. However, she only knew that the teaching and learning activity that encouraged students to be more active is the most effective strategy to develop their vocabularies exactly in speaking class. Dickinson (1993), as cited in Almusharraf (2018), argued that achievement in academic learning could be reached if the students have self-regulation in their learning. In addition, the teacher was fully aware of the benefits of fostering learner autonomy, and she applied that approach inside and outside of her classroom. The data confirm findings from the literature (Hu and Zang, 2017; Kristmanson; 2013; Li, 2015; Schuster, 2012) that when learners are given to the opportunity to conceive their own educational and social goals, they will not only develop their vocabulary knowledge but also utilized it meaningfully in real-life events. This finding also aligns with Almushraf's (2018) conclusion that better teaching practice will improve learner autonomy.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the students have the variation in the autonomy level because of their controlling in their behavior over learning, psychological aspect in the learning and content over learning. Then, although the students are naturally autonomous in the learning process, the teachers could foster their level autonomy through the teaching strategy in the classroom. In this case, is the student-center approach, that encourages the student to be more active in the learning activity in the classroom. Thus, it is essential for educators to implement instructional strategies that are more inclusive and encourage all students to participate in the classroom activities. There are several reasons to emphasize the significance of learner autonomy. First, the result has revealed that autonomous learning leads to a higher motivation to learn a language. Second, studies have shown that the teacher implementation of autonomous learning strategies supports development of EFL learners' English proficiency. Thus, English teachers ought to prioritize the deployment of autonomous learning approaches that advance students' learning development. Because of the limitations in this study, for instance, only one strategy that was observed and the description of students' capacity to take control over learning, the next research may compare two teaching strategies that affect learner's autonomy level in the multiple site case studies.

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