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EXPLORING THE FACTORS AND LEVELS OF STUDENTS' AUTONOMY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract
Students' autonomy is important in language learning since students' autonomy is considered one of the elements in successful language learning. This study aimed to explore the students' autonomy levels in language learning by considering the characteristics of autonomous students and the factors that affected students' autonomy. As a mixed-method study, this study combined questionnaires and interviews as the instruments. The sample of this research was 34 students of XII MIPA 1 of SMA Negeri 2 Semarang. The quantitative data regarding students' autonomy levels showed: emerging (0%), beginning (14.12%), intermediate (57.60%), and advanced (28.28%). It indicated that the majority of the students' autonomy level in language learning is considered at the intermediate level. While the mean of quantitative data regarding the factors influencing students' autonomy showed: students' role (21.13%), teacher's role (21.83%), task (16.90%), environment (21.83%), material (18.31%). It indicated that students agreed that students' autonomy was influenced by those supporting factors. The qualitative data revealed that the students' autonomous skills were also supported by several factors, such as students' goals and motivation, teacher and students' bond, learning materials and activities, and a supportive learning environment.

Keywords: factors, levels, students' autonomy

Introduction

English is considered the most widely spoken language in the world. English has been agreed internationally as the official language that is used universally in the field of technology, economics, education, politics, culture, and various other fields. It makes proficiency and mastery of English become a necessity. Unfortunately, the English proficiency of Indonesian people is still considered low. According to the 2021 EPI (English Proficiency Index) data which is the world's largest ranking of countries and regions by English proficiency, Indonesia ranks 80th out of 112 countries in the world and 14th out of 24 countries in Asia. Hence, from 2014 to 2021, Indonesia is constantly facing a downgrade in English proficiency.

Several factors are the reason why English is hard to root in Indonesian society, one of the reasons is the lack of understanding that English is an

important international language. The position of English in Indonesia as a foreign language hugely affects how people especially students perceive English. Thus, this perception leads to the student's motivation in learning English because there is no significant need of using English on the daily basis. The student's lack of motivation and realization in learning English is caused by a mismatch between the instructed activities in the classroom and the student's needs and interests (Marsevani 2021). It can be assumed that there is an imbalance in the process of implementing practical learning and teaching materials.

In the 2013 curriculum, the learning approach used is the Student-Centred Learning (SCL) approach, which is clearly stated in the Permendikbud No. 81A regarding 2013 Curriculum Implementation. The 2013 curriculum is applied to encourage students to be actively involved in the learning process. The basic teaching and learning process based on the 2013 curriculum is autonomous learning (Lengkanawati 2017). The 2013 curriculum changes the old method which was transferring knowledge with the teacher as the main source of information with a new method that promotes students' autonomy. Students' autonomy is essential in language learning. The main concern of English as a foreign language teaching is students' autonomy (Mardjuki 2018). Students' autonomy is believed as one of the key elements in successful language learning where independent, student-centered, and self-managed learning is spotlighted (Amirian and Noughabi 2017). On that account, the success of students in achieving the learning objectives that have been set is very dependent on the students' autonomous skills.

Students' autonomy becomes the main concern in language learning because in preparing for learning students need high motivation and it is directly related to students' autonomy. It is supported by a study conducted by Cirocki, Anam, and Retnaningdyah (2019), who emphasizes that the low motivation of Indonesian students in learning English was firmly associated with students' autonomous skills. it is important to explore the factors and levels of students' autonomy in language learning by conducting a study entitled Exploring the Factors and Levels of Students' Autonomy in Language Learning since it would help teachers to be better at planning the teaching strategy to promote the students become autonomous since students with higher levels of autonomy will be more likely to have better language learning results than those with low levels of autonomy (Tuan, 2021).

Principle of language learning

According to Abdulaziz (2016), the purpose of language learning is to provide students with the information and abilities necessary to play certain roles in another language community, to transform them into a performer in the target language (TL), and to provide them with communicative competence. In brief, applied linguists must be ready to utilize any description that their expertise and experience in language education suggest would be valuable, and they must assess descriptions in terms of their practical value. According to TESOL International Association (2017), there are four basic principles of language learning, they are:

1. A language is a tool for communication. For many students, language learning consists mostly of memorization of vocabulary and preparation for an exam without really making English a tool to communicate. Whereas the main

objective of language learning is to learn aspects of language to be able to communicate in the target language.
2. Learning a language includes the mastery of skills and also knowledge. Mastering the aspects of language is enough, students must be able to gain knowledge and apply it to share their ideas.
3. Students have to consider the influence of feelings on language learning. Emotions have such a big role in language learning because it is a long, complicated process and it requires a big amount of effort. It requires a long journey for students to finally understand the cultures of English.
4. Students have a wide range of preferred learning methods. Not all students learn the same way. There are various kinds of learners such as visual learners, auditory learners, kinaesthetic learners, and tactile learners. Students' personalities also play a big role in the learning process.

In the EFL setting where English is not needed daily, students, parents, teachers, and the community all share responsibility for language development. School provides a setting in which students may continue to develop language skills to attain personal, social, and academic goals. In this case, teachers have to be able to motivate students in language learning, help students to build accountability and discipline, and encourage students to take charge of their language learning.

Students' autonomy concept development

The concept of autonomy is not originally from the field of education especially language learning. Rather, it is an imported term from a non-linguistic term from the realm of moral and political philosophy that has been introduced into language learning via psychology and educational theory. In the education field, students' autonomy is one of the concepts that influence language learning. The term students' autonomy was first defined by Holec for the Council of Europe in 1979. Holec (1979) defines students' autonomy as the students' competence to take over their learning. He further explains that students' autonomy is not an inborn skill. However, students' autonomy must be developed naturally or in a systematic way through formal learning. Holec notes that there are five competencies of students' autonomy in language learning. It is the competence to determine the learning goals, define the learning contents, select the used learning methods and techniques, monitor the plan of action, and evaluate the obtained lessons.

The concept of students' autonomy has been defined variously. Little (1991) defines students' autonomy as the ability to detach, reflect, make a decision and take an action independently. Other than that, according to Cotteral (1995) students' autonomy can differ based on the student's ability to take charge of their learning process. The differences can be seen in the ability to set the goals of learning, determine the learning contents and tasks, set a plan to take action in learning, and evaluate the learning process. Littlewood (1996) emphasizes students' autonomy as students' capacity and eagerness to choose independently. Thus, the capacity to choose independently depends on students' motivation and confidence to decide the choices required so that students tend to be less dependent on their teachers.

The concept of autonomy is also described by Benson (2016), who describes autonomy as "a *capacity* - for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action". The student's capacity is related to the ability to manage their language learning progress. Yan (2012) states that autonomy has, unfortunately, been misinterpreted as self-instruction. Benson emphasizes that the concept of students' autonomy enables students to have a sense of freedom in learning that makes learning more enjoyable. Likewise, Kemala (2016) states that the objective of students' autonomy is to encourage students to be less dependent on their teachers. Briefly, these concepts of students' autonomy led to one conclusion, that students' autonomy is the student's ability to be more responsible for their learning process with the actions to achieve the learning objectives.

Students' autonomy in language learning

To foster students' autonomy to be autonomous students, the teacher must reflect on their own beliefs, experiences, and expectation of the teaching/learning environment. In the process of learning, the teacher has a role to maintain the learning environment (Masouleh and Jooneghani 2012). As stated by Horváthová (2016), learning to be autonomous students is a personal, lengthy, and never-ending process. There are several approaches to assisting kids in developing independent learning skills (Çakici, 2015). Learner training encompasses a variety of tactics, including awareness raising, scaffolding, strategy training, greater social engagement, and the encouragement of reflection.

Students' autonomy comes with several characteristics. The characteristics of autonomous students are into three categories (Dang 2012), such as:

1. Initiating, in this category, students can recognize personal learning choices, set learning objectives, plan their studies, and generate learning opportunities.
2. Monitoring is likely to be the longest process of learning where the majority of learning occurs. This category is linked to the student's engagement and maintenance of the learning process, such as selecting suitable strategies, adjusting learning routes, and collaborating with others.
3. Evaluating, this learning process predicts characteristics such as proofreading an assignment and evaluating a piece of writing when it comes to reviewing learning outcomes.

Students' autonomy abilities vary from one another depending on the level of self-responsibility. The level of student responsibility can be seen from how dependent they are on the teacher. In short, the lowest level of student autonomy describes students who still need teacher assistance in determining self-regulation. While the highest level of student autonomy describes students who can understand the essence of learning and have a high level of confidence in their skills. There are four levels of students' autonomy levels, such as advanced level, intermediate level, beginning level, and emerging level (Abdelrazeq 2018). In brief, students who have a higher awareness of their role as a student are students who have higher autonomy skills.

Factors influencing students' autonomy

Students' autonomy level is varied from one another. It is because some factors influence students' autonomy. There are three factors influencing autonomous students, such as personal factors, academic factors, and external

factors (Tran and Duong 2020). Kemala (2016) finds that four factors influence students' autonomy, such as:

1. Student's Role

Students have a big role in influencing students' autonomy. Sufficient information, high awareness, and strong abilities in carrying out autonomous learning activities are the results of favorable attitudes regarding autonomous learning capacity. One of the key factors in the favorable outcome was the students' ability to choose their projects and resources, as well as express themselves in class without any psychological restrictions. Among the most crucial factors to consider while fostering students' autonomy is their attitude toward learning.

2. Teachers' Role

According to Kemala, the relationship between students and teachers is essential. It is because a good relationship between students and teachers will make the students feel at ease and secure in the classroom. Other than that, teachers have the responsibility of the whole process of learning to stimulate students' autonomy. Helping students to be autonomous students is essential thing in language teaching and learning.

3. Task

Kemala emphasizes that task encourages students to learn independently or collaboratively. Collaborative learning is a method of teaching and learning in which a group of students collaborates to solve a problem, accomplish a task, or produce a product. In addition to such activities, children are encouraged, if not compelled, to accept responsibility for their actions.

4. Environment

Environment influences students' autonomy. The first is social aspects, it represents parents, siblings, relatives, classmates, and teachers. It means that autonomous students do not merely learn by themselves without any influence. It becomes the reason to assist students to learn with the usage of a variety of alternative learning settings. Students can work and engage in pairs or larger groups, as well as encounter new situations that are not influenced by teacher-centered, non-collaborative classrooms when this is supported. The second is situational aspects, it represents the source of materials that students use to learn. It can be materials in the form of soft files, printed, or even visuals such as video, film, etc.

5. Material

Kemala reports that students' enthusiasm for learning depends on the learning materials. Students' autonomy cannot be separated from the factors that influence their development. These are the factors that cause differences in the level of students' autonomy. In short, the development of students' autonomy is influenced by various interrelated aspects.

Method

This study used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. According to Creswell (2014), The sequential explanatory strategy is a research strategy in which quantitative data is collected and analyzed first, then qualitative data is collected and analyzed. Pardede (2019) emphasizes that the implementation of this design strives to provide the necessary information for a better understanding of the study topic. It starts with quantitative data collecting and then moves on to qualitative data collection to explain or elaborate on the quantitative results achieved before. The sample of this study focused on the two classes of twelfth graders of SMA Negeri 2 Semarang which were XII MIPA 1 as the sample class and one non-sample class to measure the validity and the reliability of the instruments which was XII MIPA 7. The study was conducted on 34 students of XII MIPA 1. The data collection of the study was 30 items questionnaire and 8 items of a semi-structured interview. The structure of the processes for a sequential study report is quantitative data gathering and quantitative data analysis, then qualitative data collection and analysis. The writer then remarked on how the qualitative findings served to expound on or extend the quantitative findings in the study's conclusions or interpretation phase. The process of analyzing data was adapted from Creswell (2014), such as data transformation, exploring outliers, instrument development, and examining multiple levels.

Findings and Discussion

This section consists of the findings and discussion related to the question of the study, which was about the levels of students' autonomy in language learning and factors influencing autonomous skills. There are two sub-chapters, such as (1) Characteristics of autonomous students in language learning and (2) Factors influencing students' autonomy.

Characteristics of autonomous students in language learning

According to Dang (2012), there are three characteristics of autonomous students, such as: initiating, monitoring, and evaluating. In line with the previous statement, Abdelrazeq (2018) classifies students' autonomy into 4 levels, such as: advanced, intermediate, beginning, and emerging. The following table is the conclusion data.

Table 1. Students' autonomy levels percentages

Aspects	Emerging	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced
Initiating	0%	12.35%	54.12%	33.53%
Monitoring	0%	9.41%	60.59%	30.00%
Evaluating	0%	20.59%	58.09%	21.32%
Mean Score	0%	14.12%	57.60%	28.28%

The table above is the total percentage of students' autonomy levels. The percentage level is calculated by finding the mean value. The table serves as a reference for discussion. The following is the discussion of the results.

Initiating

In the initiating learning stage, the result showed that there were no students who were at the emerging level, there were 12.35 % of the students at the beginning level, 54.12% of the students at an intermediate level, and 33.53% of the students at an advanced level. It showed that the majority of the students were often had been able to set a long-term goal for their language learning, make study plans, take the initiative to use other sources of learning, learn independently and motivate themselves to learn. It was reinforced by the interviewees' statements:

[1st Interviewee*: To get many other opportunities, from job opportunities to learning opportunities. Now, more and more companies or schools are demanding their students be proficient in English to get better human resources and be able to compete globally, and I want to participate*.]

[2nd Interviewee: *Practicing conversation skills in English. English is an international language, and by mastering English I can expand my relationship wider. In addition, with my goal to continue my education abroad, I will use English as my daily language.*]

The respondents, it indicated that students were goal-oriented and highly motivated in learning since they had clear intentions in learning English and they had the desire to learn on their own. Other than that, the majority of the students were also often able to control their emotions while learning English. From the results above, it could be concluded that the majority of twelfth graders' autonomous skills of initiating learning based on the classification by Abdelrazeq were considered at the intermediate level.

Monitoring

In the monitoring learning stage, the result showed that there were no students who were at the emerging level, there were 9.41% of the students at the beginning level, 60.59% of the students at an intermediate level, and 30.00% of the students at an advanced level. From the results above, it could be concluded that most of the students often monitored their language learning. Most of the students were active during the learning process, they had their method of language learning, understood their preferences in how to learn English effectively, acknowledged their weaknesses and tried to improve them, and understood the objective of learning. It was reinforced by the interviewees' statements:

[1st Interviewee: *I usually read books or practice book about the material that will be explained tomorrow. I always study every night whether there is an assignment or not.*]

[2nd Interviewee: *I always study for tomorrow. I Do a lot of exercises such as listening, reading, writing, and speaking. I also joined a tutoring institution.*]

From the statement from the interview, it could be indicated that students prepared for language learning by setting time to learn independently. They

prepared for their language learning by practicing and reading the materials before it was explained by the teacher. It was their strategy so that they could be ready before the learning activities in the classroom. From the results above, it could be concluded that the majority of twelfth graders' autonomous skills of monitoring learning based on the classification by Abdelrazeq were considered at the intermediate level.

Evaluating

In the evaluating learning stage, the result showed that there were no students who were at the emerging level, there were 20.59% of the students at the beginning level, 58.09% of the students at an intermediate level, and 21.32% of the students at an advanced level. The results above showed that the majority of the students often evaluated and reflected on their language learning. Most of the students were also aware of the development of their language learning. It was also proven by the statements of the interviewees:

[1st Interviewee: *Yes, I feel that in general, I improved significantly. Starting from understanding grammar, and writing, to speaking level.*]

[2nd Interviewee: *During high school, there are some improvements but they are not very significant.*]

It indicated that they acknowledged their weaknesses and reflect upon how much they had learned from the materials. From the results above, it could be concluded that the majority of twelfth graders' autonomous skills of evaluating learning based on the classification by Abdelrazeq were considered at the intermediate level.

From the discussion of the results of the analysis of the study, it could be concluded that the majority of the twelfth graders in SMA Negeri 2 Semarang had good autonomous skills. From the existing data, it showed that: there were 0% of students at the emerging level, 14.12% of students at the beginning level, 57.60% of the students at the Intermediate level, and 28.28% of the students at an advanced level. It could be concluded that the majority of students' autonomy levels in language learning of twelfth graders in SMA Negeri 2 Semarang are considered at the intermediate level.

Factors influencing students' autonomy

Kemala (2016) argues that autonomous students' characters are influenced by 5 factors students' role, the teacher's role, the task, the environment, and the material. Based on the result of the study, the autonomous skills of the twelfth-grade students in SMA Negeri 2 Semarang were influenced by those factors. The following table is a table of the number of students who agreed and strongly agreed with the questionnaire statement regarding influencing students' autonomy.

Table 2. Factors influencing students' autonomy percentages

Statement	Student's Role	Teacher's Role	Task	Environment	Material
1	28	34	27	34	28
2	31	32	25	29	20
3	33	27	22	32	31
4	-	-	25	-	-
Mean Score	30	31	24	31	26
Percentage	21.13%	21.83%	16.90%	21.83%	18.31%

The table above is the total percentage of factors influencing students' autonomy. The total percentage is taken from the answers of students who agree with the statements regarding the factors influencing students' autonomy. The percentage is calculated by finding the mean value. The table serves as a reference for discussion. The following is the discussion of the results.

Students' role

The description of the results showed that on average 30 students had high self-efficacy, they agreed that they were good students and able to finish the assignment from the teacher. Ahmad et al. (2013) state that students with high self-efficacy tend to be able to reach a higher goal of learning, they are also believed to be able to solve learning problems. This showed the students' ability to manage their learning process independently. Other than that, the interview revealed that students also took part in the learning process:

[1st Interviewee: *When it comes to whether the teacher gives choice in how the learning of the material will be done, then the answer is yes.*]

The respondent showed that students usually had an opportunity to take part in language learning. In this case, students had the freedom to choose how the learning of the material will be done. Furthermore, the table total percentage of factors influencing students' autonomy showed that at least the role of students affected students' autonomy as much as 21.13% of the total percentage of influencing factors. In conclusion, students' positive attitudes towards English and self-efficacy in language learning affected students' autonomous skills.

Teacher's role

The description of the results showed that teachers hold a very significant role in developing students' autonomy skills. The data revealed that on average 34 students agreed that teacher was the main source of learning because many of them were still worried that they cannot understand a learning topic if it is not taught by the teacher. The interviewees stated that:

[1st Interviewee: *Personally, I feel that classroom learning is the most important thing. How the teacher and student interact and the clear explanation is enough to make me understand the material.*]

[2nd Interviewee: *Yes, I feel appreciated every time there is feedback from the teacher whether it is compliments or suggestions for me.*]

It showed that the interviewees believed that the most important thing in the language learning process was the student and teacher interaction and method used during the learning process. Other than that, there was a statement that feedback from the teacher was also as important. The feedback gave students a sense of appreciation which made students feel appreciated. As stated by Selvaraj et al., (2021), giving feedback is important because it may influence students' perceptions of the teachers' intentions and drive students to strive to be better. This dynamic between teacher and students would create a healthy learning environment which could strengthen the bond between teacher and students. The table total percentage of factors influencing students' autonomy showed that at least the role of teacher affected students' autonomy as much as 21.83% of the total percentage of influencing factors. In short, Teachers' pedagogic abilities are as important as their ability to build good and healthy relationships with students.

Task

From the descriptions of the results, it showed that on average 27 students agreed that the task influenced the language learning process since it could encourage or force them to learn more. Most of the students liked a project when they can work together with their classmates because they could learn from each other. It was reinforced by the interviewees' statement:

[1st Interviewee: *I don't think assignments are the main point of learning that can make students easily and proficient in the material. Personally, I feel that classroom learning is the most important thing. How the teacher and student interact and the clear explanation are enough to make me understand the material. However, I also believe that assignments are still needed, but again they are not the most important.*]

[2nd Interviewee: *In my opinion, the assignment is only given to students who do not fully understand the material.*]

From the interview, we could understand that students tend to believe that a task is not an essential thing in the learning process if the goal of the learning had been reached. They agreed that tasks were beneficial for students who did not fully understand the material. Hence, Kemala (2016) notes that tasks will have a significant impact to develop autonomous skills since interesting and challenging tasks will stimulate students' learning. The table total percentage of factors influencing students' autonomy showed that at least the task affected students' autonomy as much as 16.90% of the total percentage of influencing factors. Given these points, tasks are considered beneficial to stimulate student learning.

Environment

The descriptions of the results showed that the environment had an important role to encourage students' autonomy skills. On average 31 students

had a good perception of English since they like to watch or read or listen something in English. It was reinforced by the interviewees' statements:

[1st Interviewee: *No, I don't. I learn English now independently apart from classroom learning. However, I quite often come across foreigners on the internet and speak English.*]

[2nd Interviewee: *Yes, I do. My study group is also not only made up of people from the same area so I can get new ways of learning.*]

From the interview, we could understand that students could learn to improve their language proficiency through anything. The 2nd interviewee mentioned that by having a study group she could gain a lot of ways in learning. Senjahari et al., (2021) emphasize that language learners would benefit from an accommodating learning environment in terms of motivation, and attaining the best skills and abilities. In conclusion, the scope of students' language learning was not limited to the classroom. The table total percentage of factors influencing students' autonomy showed that at least the environment affected students' autonomy as much as 21.83% of the total percentage of influencing factors. Nevertheless, autonomous students could find learning resources anywhere and with anyone.

Material

The description of the results showed that on average 26 students felt enthusiastic about learning English, which meant that they enjoyed that process of language learning and they had a sense of curiosity toward English materials. From the interview, we could indicate that motivation for language learning was related to the material. It was reinforced by the statement of the interviewee:

[1st Interviewee: *I like materials that comprehensively cover grammar. However, if asked to specify, I like the material about songs because the learning process is fun. Other than learning theory/material, we also practice singing, making songs, and playing musical instruments so that these things make us not easily bored.*]

From the interview, we could indicate that motivation for language learning was related to the material. An interviewee said that it was fun to learn the material about songs because she found the learning activities fun. It could be said that a learning strategy with diverse and creative learning activities was key so that learning was engaging for students. In line with the previous statement, Gaol & Sitepu (2020) state that the capacity of a teacher to understand current learning conditions, such as learning objectives, student characteristics, learning resource limits, and area of study features, is critical to the effectiveness of a teacher adopting a learning strategy. The table total percentage of factors influencing students' autonomy showed that at least the task affected students' autonomy as much as 18.31% of the total percentage of influencing factors. In short, students would tend to have high motivation to learn a subject if they are interested in the material.

Based on the discussion above it could be concluded that the factors above affected students' autonomy skills. It could be concluded that the twelfth graders in SMA Negeri 2 Semarang at the intermediate level autonomy because students had a good perception of English and also had high motivation in language learning since most of them, had clear intentions in learning English. Other than that, it could be indicated that teachers always provided feedback so that they could monitor the learning process as well as their learning outcomes. Another thing that affected students' autonomy skills was the varied learning environment.

Conclusion

It could be accomplished that students' autonomous skills are influenced by supporting factors from within and also outside the students. The students' autonomy levels percentages showed that: there were 0% of students at the emerging level, 14.12% of students at the beginning level, 57.60% of the students at the Intermediate level, and 28.28% of the students at the advanced level. In the classification, the autonomy levels of the majority of the twelfth graders at SMA Negeri 2 Semarang in the academic year of 2022/2023 were at the intermediate level. Other than that, the quantitative data regarding factors that influenced students' autonomy showed: the students' role (21.13%), teacher's role (21.83%), task (16.90%), environment (21.83%), material (18.31%). It indicated that students agreed that students' autonomy was influenced by those supporting factors. The qualitative data also explained that students' autonomy skills were also supported by several supporting factors, such as students' goals and motivation, teacher and students' bond, learning materials and activities, and a supportive learning environment. The data revealed that students' autonomy is indeed influenced by supporting factors. It can be concluded that the students' autonomy level of most of the twelfth graders of SMA Negeri 2 Semarang in the academic year of 2022/2023 was at the intermediate level, which was influenced by supporting factors such as students' goals and motivation, teacher-student bond, learning materials and activities, and a supportive learning environment.

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