



English Education Students' Attitude toward Autonomous Learning Amidst the Abundant Online Learning Sources

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Abstrak

Perkembangan teknologi informasi turut menyediakan aneka sumber belajar yang dapat diakses oleh siswa kapanpun dan dimanapun, termasuk untuk belajar bahasa. Hal ini seharusnya memberi manfaat bagi peningkatan kemampuan bahasa. Artikel ini menggali beberapa hal terkait penggunaan sumber belajar daring oleh mahasiswa jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, meliputi tiga rumusan masalah, yaitu: (1) sumber belajar apa saja yang biasa diakses oleh para mahasiswa?; (2) bagaimana peningkatan keterampilan berbahasa Inggris yang mereka rasakan?; dan (3) tantangan apa saja yang mereka temui dalam belajar mandiri secara daring? Penelitian ini menggunakan data kuantitatif dan kualitatif untuk memberikan gambaran yang mendetail. Selanjutnya data dianalisis secara tematik. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa cenderung menggunakan media sosial, Youtube, dan LMS milik universitas untuk belajar mandiri. Kegiatan belajar mandiri yang mereka lakukan diakui meningkatkan kemampuan bahasa Inggris mereka, terutama dalam keterampilan menyimak, berbicara dan penguasaan kosakata. Hal ini dipengaruhi oleh minat mereka terhadap keterampilan tertentu serta sumber belajar yang mereka akses. Beberapa tantangan terkait belajar mandiri secara daring adalah koneksi yang tidak stabil, tidak adanya target belajar yang jelas, dan rendahnya motivasi mahasiswa. Beberapa implikasi dan rekomendasi juga dibahas dalam studi ini.

Kata kunci: belajar daring; belajar mandiri; keterampilan berbahasa Inggris

Abstract

The development of information and communication technology has provided various learning resources that can be accessed by students anytime and anywhere, including for learning languages. This should provide benefits for improving students' language skills. This article explored several things related to the use of online learning resources by students majoring in English Education, including three problem statements, namely: (1) what kind of online learning activities did the students do for autonomous learning purposes?; (2) what kind of improvement did they obtain from autonomous online learning activities?; (3) what were the challenges they found in using online learning sources for autonomous learning activities? This study utilized quantitative and qualitative data to provide detailed description. Furthermore, the data was analyzed thematically. This study revealed that students tended to use social media, Youtube, and university LMS for their autonomous learning. Their reported that their autonomous learning improved their English skills, especially in listening, speaking and vocabulary mastery. It was influenced by their interest in certain skills and the learning resources they accessed. The challenges associated with online autonomous learning were unstable connections, lack of clear learning goals, and low student motivation. Several implications and recommendations are also discussed in this study.

Keywords: independent study, online learning, english skills

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INTRODUCTION

Digital era has provided plenty of learning sources in any fields, including to learn languages. As one of the prominent international languages, English is taught and learned by people all over the world, from early childhood to adulthood, both in formal education and informal ones. The rapid growth of technology has enabled people to learn languages through various types of media, not merely by attending face-to-face classroom meeting. Nowadays, through online and digital media, learning English is as easy as opening your mobile phones. English learners' engagement with this device nowadays could supports their learning activities. It also contributes to give positive effects both psychologically and culturally for them due to its easiness and diverse contents (Sari et al., 2020)

English learning contents are found in many online platforms and they are presented in various modalities, from text-based materials, quizzes, learning video, listening materials, to games or online courses. Those contents assist students to better understand the English learning materials. It will eventually enhance their achievement, creativity, and motivation in English learning. With good achievement and motivation, students show better engagement and more efficient-and-effective learning which lead to learning autonomy, better confidence, and higher critical thinking (Mandasari & Aminatun, 2019).

The availability of online and/or digital learning materials has simultaneously created chances and spaces for students to learn autonomously (Ludwig & Tassinari, 2021). They are able to learn from many learning sources and improve their skill on individual basis and learning objectives. For teachers, it also enables them to combine face-to-face learning and autonomous learning to optimize the learning outcomes.

Learning English becomes more urgent and essential for those who are working with the language every day, including English

education students. These pre-service English teacher students are really in the need of actualizing their English learning on daily basis. Digital learning platforms ease them to find additional knowledge of what they learned in the campus. Moreover, the plenty and diverse learning activities enable them to choose which ones meet their learning preferences and requirements. Further, it also provides many insights for their teaching practices they can implement in the future. The flexibility, variability, and easiness are expected to drive them to improve their knowledge and skills since digital platforms has provided almost anything.

By combining both formal lecture in the campus and autonomous learning, English department students can optimize their potential and skill development. These two learning models if combined together have been reported to stimulate language learner's learning motivation, foster their autonomous learning ability (X. Wang & Zhang, 2022). With little teacher intervention on integrating offline and online learning, learners' autonomy could be well developed (Yang, 2016).

Autonomy refers to someone's ability to be responsible on his/her own learning process through reflection and a self-directed learning process (Chou & ChanLin, 2015). Autonomous learning is believed to be more effective than other approaches in learning process. By learning autonomously, learners manage and take the responsibility of their own progress using any resources available, mainly outside the classroom (Masouleh & Jooneghani, 2012). In recent years, learning autonomy becomes one of the prominent goals in education in general and specifically in language learning (Bajrami, 2015). It is not surprising since language learning cannot be restricted to classroom activities. Students should also be motivated to learn autonomously on daily basis in any context of communication.

Previous studies had diverse findings on English students' behavior toward autonomous English learning using online

learning resources. Ludwig & Tassinari (2021) investigated the foreign language learning autonomy in the emerging trend of online learning. The results of the study reported that learning autonomy was really well-supported by the availability of online learning resources. To achieve it, teachers play a prominent role in promoting students' autonomous learning. It is supported by Binali et al. (2021) who had found that Internet-based online learning flexibility had enabled university students to get involved into diverse learning activities according to their needs. The richness of online learning resources could fulfill personal interests and their learning goals which eventually fostered their motivation and learning autonomy.

Regardless its positive impacts, in other studies, Alhamami (2020) reported that English learners tended to be more eager to attend offline classes compared to doing online learning. It was influenced by the important group of people in the context of this study which affect their learning motivation and engagement. A survey by Xu et al. (2021) showed that students didn't get engaged in English autonomous learning because online learning environment and the multimedia network environment made them uncomfortable. Besides, autonomous online learning was reported to not always simultaneously result in language skills improvements. In line with it, Lee (2019) reported that the quantity of self-directed online learning was not related to vocabulary mastery outcomes. To obtain the expected improvement, students' involvements in various types of online learning activities should cover or combine both meaning-focused and form-focused language learning.

Despite the positive and negative impacts of autonomous online learning, the students' practices need to be explored, especially those who need to improve their English skill continually. The fact that learning activities in the classroom is never be enough to optimize their English skill, as adult learners, they are expected to have motivation

in learning autonomously through available learning resources, and therefore they can always engage in learning practices in any context. This present study tries to investigate how English education students did autonomous learning activity by using online learning sources.

The study is focused on three research questions, namely: (1) what kind of online learning activities did the students do for autonomous learning purposes? ; (2) what kind of improvement did they obtain from autonomous online learning activities? ; (3) what were the challenges they found in using online learning sources for autonomous learning activities?

This study tends to provide insights for both students and teachers about autonomous online learning. Students are supposed to recognize the big opportunities for improving their skills through autonomous online learning activities, while teachers are supposed to provide strategies to foster this practice and match it with the courses' learning goals in general.

METHODS

This study employed a mixed-method of descriptive quantitative research design. It utilized both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Both types of data were employed to obtain more detailed information from the participants. The quantitative data were elaborated descriptively. This study involved 41 female participants and 8 male participants of tertiary level students majoring in English language education at one state Islamic university in Central Java, Indonesia. They voluntarily participated in this study. They were invited to give their responses to a questionnaire regarding their practices on autonomous online learning.

For further investigation, 3 of the 49 participants were invited to join semi-structured interview. They were chosen in respecting their openness in giving detail information about their practices. The semi-structured interview utilized Whatsapp

application. They were asked several questions and then they gave their responses in written form and/or voice notes. The participants were asked to share their practices and they were guided to reflect on the reasons and background experiences that derived their practices. The information from each of the participants in this stage were also used for triangulation purposes. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify common themes, patterns, and ideas from the data which have been collected. Lastly, some conclusions are drawn based on the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, several findings on students’ practices in doing autonomous learning using online learning sources are presented. The findings were discussed and compared to the existing theories and/or the results of previous studies. To support the findings, several commentaries, quotes, and the questionnaire results in forms of figures and tables are also presented.

The Kinds of Online Learning Activities the Students Did for Autonomous Learning Purposes

The students participated in this study had confirmed that they all have mobile phone and internet access which means that they have adequate facilities for online learning activities. With the facilities, the majority of the students spent more than 3 hours a day on online activities.

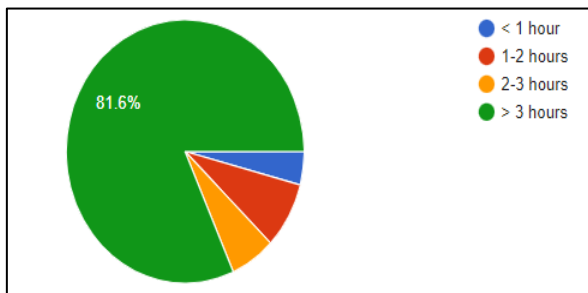


Figure 1. The Length of Online Activities in a day

Meanwhile, their learning purposes time-spent was more varied. During their online time, the several major activities the students did as presented in the table 1. Accessing social media, Youtube videos, and learning management system of the campus became their main activities. Meanwhile, other activities such as playing games, online shopping, blogging, and doing business obtained less interest.

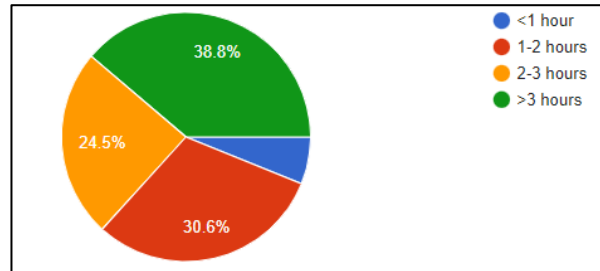


Figure 2. The Length of Online Activities for Learning purposes

Table 1. Major online activities done by the students

Online activities	Qty
Accessing social media	89.8%
Accessing official campus learning platform	77.6%
Watching Youtube videos	77.6%
Accessing online learning sources	49%
Watching movie	46.9%
Reading online novels	46.9%
Reading online popular articles	44.9%
Reading online news	36.7%
Joining seminar or workshop on ELT	34.7%

What interesting from this fact is that nowadays learning sources are available in so many ways, not only through the official websites of certain institution. Students these days are possible to learn from anywhere on social media such as Twitter, Instagram, Tiktok, or other platforms since there are many educational contents. In social media there are many accounts whose contents are about language learning.

“I used my Instagram and Tiktok account. I learned randomly since the contents used to appear in my

search. I follow @hotplaymusic. I like it because it provided British and American English content delivered using music, so it is interesting and not boring.” (Yumna, interview)

“Instagram reels seem helpful for me. There are short videos from native speakers that enrich my vocabularies. Also, there are some contents on tips and simple explanation about English both from native speakers or Indonesian. It seems simple but very helpful” (Zulni, interview)

Reading English articles and captions as well as finding the meaning of words in online dictionary were also helpful to enable them learn new things. This kind of reading activity can be considered as extensive reading in which students enjoy the reading without any pressure.

Making social media as a media in language learning has become a new trend since the era of internet and social media (Bařöz, 2016). Students prefer to use social media for several purposes such as enriching vocabulary and make friends or networks with native speakers or foreigners (Malik & Asnur, 2019). Therefore, teacher training programs could consider involving some components employing social media as a means of enhancing interaction and communication among learners.

Youtube also became a huge source of online learning as reflected in the following statement.

“I prefer Youtube since I can watch and listen to the explanation of the speakers. I also like to read the comments from the viewers and I also learn from it.” (Nia, interview)

Listening to the English songs and watching English movies became other choices of learning activities which helped improve their English. Both are available on Youtube and

other similar platforms. Learning English from YouTube or other video-based platforms enable students to seek various learning resources as well as to find attractions of English learning. Besides, it also promotes cultural knowledge and understanding from the interactions of the viewers as well as from the learning content since the content creators are from various countries and cultural backgrounds. Youtube and similar platforms are more flexible to access in any time and place. It enables English learners to have interactive communication through its features, so it is considered as more interesting than formal classroom learning (Wang & Chen, 2020). Meanwhile, learning management system from the university seemed to be a compulsory learning sources the students should access for fulfilling their course requirements.

This study revealed that students prefer to practice their autonomous learning as something which just flow without certain targets or time allotment. The claimed that their activities on social media and other online activities, including listening to the music, watching movies, playing games did support their language proficiency improvement. Although in these ways, the improvement itself cannot be measured precisely but rather personally and it is characterized by the absence of learning target and evaluation.

Learning motivation determined the choice of the kinds of online learning. Learning motivation can be triggered by both internal and external factors. From the questionnaire, both intrinsic and extrinsic factors existed. The most determining factors were the willingness to improve English skills and the need of refreshment through online games, music, and movies which both could be considered as intrinsic factors. Meanwhile, the determining extrinsic factor was the need of finding and collecting references for completing lecture task or project. These factors influenced their choice of online learning activities.

The indirect learning through popular videos, music or movies are triggered by intrinsic motivation which occur continually, but with the absence of certain target and roadmap. Extrinsic learning materials coming from lecture task or requirement drove the students' behavior of autonomous learning in relatively short terms but with clear target and timeline.

At another point, students haven't explored many different forms of learning resources. For example, there are many websites that provide free courses with certain materials gradually arranged from which students can measure their progress. There are also websites with many grammar quiz and practice and essay writing guidance. Those kinds of websites are plenty available for any other language knowledge and skills. However, the students were unfamiliar with these kinds of learning sources.

English Knowledge and Skills Improvement from Online Learning Activities

Through autonomous online learning, all the students reported improvement of their English knowledge and skills. They reported improvements in many linguistic aspects: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, speaking skill, listening skill, reading skill, and writing skill. Among those knowledge and skills, listening skill was reported as the most developed, followed by vocabulary enrichment which eventually resulted in the productive speaking skill.

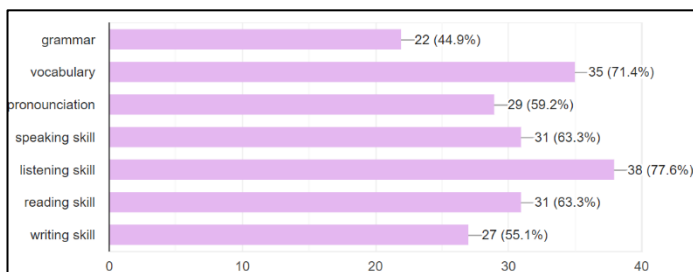


Figure 4. Linguistic aspects which were improved through autonomous learning using online learning media

They reported that their reading skills improve simultaneously when they read English news, follow foreign artists account, and read online novels/ stories. Listen to podcast platform or songs with or without subtitles also improved their skills in listening and vocabulary mastery. Meanwhile, Youtube tended to be the key platform from where they improved their speaking skill. Writing skill was so much improved from proofreading platform such as Grammarly. To sum up, the kinds of language skills improvements were influenced by the students' preference in accessing online learning resources.

“I like speaking so I usually look for speaking contents, like learning about accents and pronunciation. After I watch a content then I pay attention on the pronunciation and I practice it. My vocabulary also automatically improved.”
(Yumna, interview)

This findings confirm many previous studies which reported that the kind of autonomous online learning improved the students' skills, mainly communication skills and productive vocabulary knowledge (Lee, 2020). Learning English by watching videos could help learners enhance their English skills, particularly in speaking and listening skills (Hendriwanto et al., 2021).

To achieve such kind of improvement through autonomous online learning, students need not only quantity of accessing online learning resources. The quality of the contents they access also become a determining factor in helping them improve their skill.

The Challenges in Utilizing Online Learning Sources for Autonomous Learning

Over the autonomous learning the students' experience, they reported several problems, namely inadequate internet connection, unclear target of autonomous learning, and unwillingness to learn from online learning sources.

The first challenges tended to occur since the different geographical condition of the students' residential place. During their activities in the campus and around the city, internet connection wasn't a problem. However, the university students came from different regions and when they came back to their villages, internet connection sometimes wasn't really good.

The second challenge was unclear target of their autonomous learning other than fulfilling the course assignments. The findings showed that the students tended to do specific-target autonomous learning when they are asked or instructed to do so by the lecturer. Other than that, they tended to randomly learned without specific goals.

"I am not a specifically active online learner. I only intentionally learn from some resources when there are tasks from my lecturers. Other than that, I learn randomly through what I find on my Instagram." (Zulni, interview)

The questionnaire also showed quite a huge number of online learning resources which mostly sources from the lecturers' recommendation. The second source of information was from the students themselves, but actually it represented the contents, not the learning platforms or certain websites. It shows the high dependency of university students on the lecturers' instructions to do autonomous learning. It was confirmed from the result of the questionnaire. It confirms the previous findings that instructor or teachers' guidance in choosing and utilizing online and/or digital learning sources could help the students build their learning autonomy (Torrida et al., 2020).

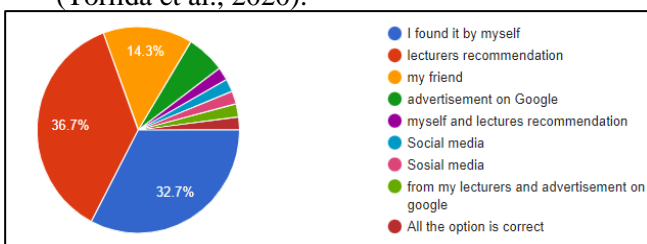


Figure 5. The source of information about online learning resources

Teachers' role in promoting the students' awareness and setting the learning approaches to obtain the objectives of autonomous learning is believed as the most important aspect (Orawiwatnakul & Wichadee, 2017). Besides, establishing learning environment which trigger the students to learn autonomously also becomes a determining factor. Therefore, there should be shared responsibilities between teachers and students. It is important to respond the students' ideas, share the decisions making about the learning activities and learning goal so that students will be in charge for their own autonomous learning progress. It contributes in increasing student motivation and their success (Masouleh & Jooneghani, 2012). Therefore communication between the teachers and the students are very essential in helping the students determine their goals (Fandiño & Velandia, 2020).

The last challenge is the lack of motivation or unwillingness to learn autonomously through online learning resources. The use of online learning resources are hugely influenced by several factors, namely the type of motivation each students has and the quality contents from which the students learn (Fandiño et al., 2019). Motivation is essential for pre-service language teachers' development, because they can achieve more skills and explore many things regarding their field of study if they are motivated well (Yagcioglu, 2015). The problem is that not all students are aware of their responsibility as an English teacher to be, then they feel okay just by learning in the classroom. A previous study reported that this kind of behavior was influenced by past educational experiences which put the responsibility of the successful learning on teachers (Razeq, 2014).

With a good motivation and mutual communication with the instructors or teachers, students' autonomous learning would eventually easier. Another important aspect is maintaining the students' motivation since it

can be up and down. A previous study has reported that in spite of the increase of students' willingness to be fluent in English, their engagement and efforts in language learning process decreased over the semester (Cheng & Lee, 2018). It can be influenced by several factors such as busy campus schedules, part time working, or other priorities. Still in the same report, continuous guidance and peer support contributed to students' persistence to keep engaged in the learning process.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that students prefer using social media, video-based platform such as Youtube, and university learning management systems as the sources of their autonomous learning. Social media provides more interesting and entertaining contents from which the students could improve their skills. They reported that almost all skills are developed, but further investigation found speaking as the most dominant one which was well supported by improved listening skill and vocabulary mastery. Another thing, the developed skills were influenced by their preference of learning source. As one of the prominent goals of learning, autonomous learning especially using online learning resources found several challenges faced by the students. It was caused by unequal quality of internet connection that caused sometimes the students couldn't learn well through online learning. Unclear target of autonomous online learning also become the challenge that the students tended to learn random materials and their progress couldn't be measured precisely. For this reason, teachers support and mutual communication among students and teachers helped them set the learning target and maintain their motivations in doing autonomous online learning.

This study implies the need of teacher supports in fostering students' autonomous learning behavior and maintain the students' motivation. In addition, the growth of social media and other similar platform has provided

students with huge sources or learning, and therefore, combining in-class learning and online activities including through social media seems to be a good idea to improve students' achievements.

This study has some limitations. First, this study took a general case of autonomous learning. Further study may focus on students' learning behavior through specific platforms or learning media. Second, this study took case of university students, while other groups of learners may perform differently. Further study may take other contexts of learners group.

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