

# **The Use of Technology in English as a Foreign Language Learning outside the Classroom: an Insight into Learner Autonomy**

**Silih Warni**

University of Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. HAMKA  
silihwarni@uhamka.ac.id

**Tian Abdul Aziz**

University of Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. HAMKA  
tian\_aziz@uhamka.ac.id

**Dimas Febriawan**

University of Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. HAMKA  
jkt.dimas@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

This research was conducted to examine Indonesian students' experiences in using technology in learning English outside the classroom with regards to learner autonomy as an important capacity for students' learning success. The subjects of the study were students of a private Senior High School in South Tangerang. As for the methodology, this research applied quantitative and qualitative design. Quantitative elements include questionnaires as the data collecting method, while qualitative elements used semi structured interviews. In this interview, five students were chosen purposively based on students' responses on the questionnaires. The findings of this study indicate that the use of technology to learn English outside the classroom has encouraged the development of learner autonomy which includes aspects of learning motivation, metacognitive awareness, self-confidence and social skills. This research is expected to help English teachers improve their students' English proficiency with the concern on the development of learner autonomy by using various information and communication technology.

Keywords: Learner Autonomy, ICT, E-Learning

## **Introduction**

Technological developments in the 21st century have an influence on all aspects of human life, one of which is on the aspect of education. In addition to gaining influence from these developments, the world of education should make adjustments to equip students with the necessary skills in the future. Technology provides an opportunity for students to study independently and collaborate with their peers. This is possible because technology encourages students to reflect and analyze where these two capabilities are at the core of developing autonomy (Little, 1996). According to Hattie (2003), students themselves is the biggest factor of

their learning success. Other factors include teacher factor, school factor, family factor, and peers factor.

With the development of information technology and emphasis on the importance of students' independence in solving problems nowadays, teachers should make adjustments and changes to student-centered learning. In this regard, the concept of learner autonomy as the ability to control one's own learning (Holec, 1981) becomes very important. Some research results indicate that learner autonomy is an important factor that gives influence to students' learning success (Yen & Liu, 2009), and a number of research concerning learner autonomy in language learning have been conducted including in the Indonesian context (Kemala, 2014; Lamb, 2004; Lengkawati, 2017; Utami 2007, Warni, 2016). However, to what extent senior high school students demonstrate their capacity of learner autonomy through the use of technology in language learning outside the classroom has not been sufficiently investigated. This research tries to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in that area and is intended to explore students' experiences in learning English using e-learning and examine how the capacity of learner autonomy is demonstrated.

## **Literature Review**

The term learner autonomy in language learning was first raised by Holec (1981) in the western context. According to Holec (1981), autonomous learners are able to define the goals and strategies for knowing and evaluating their own development. In its development various definitions of learner autonomy are advanced by many experts; such as Benson (2001), Dickinson (1996), Little (1991), Palfreyman and Smith (2003), Scharle and Szabo (2000) suggest the definition of focusing on the idea of taking responsibility for its own learning. The definition of learner autonomy by Dickinson (1987) as a situation in which the student is really responsible for all decisions related to his learning, and the execution of such decisions is very relevant in this study because this study examines the concept of learner autonomy in the context of self-study where no intervention from the teacher directly.

Although studies on self-directed learning in developing countries have tended to focus on the conformity of concepts that are perceived as principles of 'Western' pedagogy and practice (Jones, 1995, Sonaiya, 2002), several studies have revealed evidence of student behavior that reflects learner autonomy capacity in a context outside the west (Coleman, 1996; Lamb 2006).

This indicates that the concept of learner autonomy is not only relevant in the western world where this concept emerges, but in a certain form the concept is relevant to all contexts including in Indonesia. More research is needed to examine how Indonesian learners express this capacity so that it can be a reference to meendesain programs that can support them develop this capacity for their learning success.

In previous research, Utami (2007) revealed that autonomous learners have several characteristics such as taking responsibility for their own learning, recognizing needs, setting goals, planning their own learning, finding resources, allocating time, and working together. In the learning process, students are influenced by psychological and sociocultural factors. In another study, Kemala (2014) asserted that independent learners are accustomed to the ability to find the resources or materials they want to study, identify their learning needs and select learning activities. With regard to learning strategies, he explained that independent learners use memory strategies, social strategies, cognitive strategies, and meta-cognitive strategies. He reported that in interviews, it can be concluded that motivation, environment, tasks, teachers, and materials play an important role to make students learn autonomously (Lengkanawati, 2017). The previous studies of learner autonomy in English learning in Indonesia show that this area is already well studied in Indonesia, but how students' autonomy capacities are demonstrated when students use e-learning facilities outside the classroom, especially in the context of senior high schools in Indonesia have not been sufficiently studied.

E-learning is the acquisition and use of science that is distributed and facilitated by electronic media (Behera, 2013). The media used to facilitate e-learning can be through websites, CD-ROMs, applications on computers, applications on mobile devices, and more. Mobile devices commonly used for e-learning can include mobile phones, smartphones (smartphones), personal digital assistants (PDAs), tablet computers and laptop computers. Although e-learning method using ordinary mobile device is categorized as m-learning, but for this research we will use e-learning term which also includes learning method using mobile device media. This is because m-learning is a form of distance learning (d-learning) and electronic learning (e-learning) that already existed (Georgiev, Georgieva, & Smrikarov, 2004)

E-learning is one form of use of information and communication technology (ICT) appropriate to support student autonomy in learning. This is because e-learning gives students the flexibility of space and time, thus providing better management that can be tailored to the

educational needs of each student (Goulao & Menedez, 2015). According to Nielsen (2012), there are several reasons why e-learning can be used as a pedagogical framework for activities that can make the learner able to be more self-directed and more autonomous in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of learning methods. E-learning makes learner autonomy-related activities out of the classroom possible, thus avoiding the time pressure that occurs when teaching in the classroom. Another reasons are that e-learning has added value when compared to doing the same activity using paper (due to access to digital sources, easy access to cooperative learning media with authentic settings, etc.), e-learning provides a better simulation of the working world conditions that students will meet once they enter the workforce when compared to activities in the traditional classroom. In a previous study, online portfolios were implemented to improve students' writing skills. This media is proven to be effective in helping students plan, monitor and evaluate their learning process in an effort to improve their English essay writing skills (Warni, 2016). The potential use of technology to support the development of learner autonomy capacity encourages researchers to examine the use of technology for learning English outside the classroom.

## **Method**

This research applied quantitative and qualitative approach with 42 students of a class in a private senior high school in South Tangerang as the subjects. Quantitative data collecting method include questionnaire adapted from a questionnaire model designed by Figura and jarvis (2007) tailored to the needs of this study. The data generated with this technique is expected to provide clarity (McDonough and McDonough, 2004) and allows for quick and simple answers (Oppenheim, 2001). All students participated in filling in questionnaires which explore how students used technology to learn English outside the classroom. However, the technique allows only limited responses. To overcome this, semi structured interviews were also used in this study. The purposive sampling method was applied to select five students who took part in the in-depth interviews. By considering the information about the participants obtained through the results of the questionnaires, five students were those who actively used technology to learn English and could articulate their experiences and perceptions. Through interviews researchers examined how the use of technology helped students in demonstrating the capacity of autonomy in learning English. The Interviews were semi-structured which allowed students to respond

more freely to specific question topics even though a list of key questions were prepared to keep the focus.

## **Results**

As stated previously, this research involves quantitative data (from questionnaires) and qualitative data (from interviews). The questionnaires obtained information about participants and their experiences related to the use of technology in learning English. The interview provides data on students' perceptions on the use of technology for learning English outside the classroom in relation to the development of students' autonomy capacity in learning English.

### **Results of Quantitative Data from Questionnaires**

Quantitative data was obtained from the results of the questionnaires filled in by 42 students which consists of 15 male students and 27 female students. The first section contains general questions covering age, class, how long they have studied English and their perceptions of their ability to communicate in English. The second part explores students' learning activities outside the classroom using technology media. The purpose of the third part is to investigate what learning strategies the students are doing. Of all the students, most of them (73.9%) had an English learning experience of more than 11 years, some even up to 17 years old. The rest had varied English learning experiences, from 10 years (9.5%), 9 years (2.4%), 8 years (2.4%), 7 years (9.5%) and 6 years (2.4%). The majority of students stated that the use of technology in learning English is very useful (47.6%), and the rest stated that it is useful. The students' experiences in using technology in learning English outside the class include the following aspects:

### **Applying the Strategy of planning, monitoring and evaluation of learning**

From the experience of students using technology, most of them sometimes plan how they will learn English using 59.5% technology media), while others state never ((9.5%), often (238%), and always (7.1% ) Of the students who planned the study, 54% often planned how long they would study, and even 11.9% were always planning how long they were studying. Other times and never planning a percentage of 16.7%, 54% and 16.7% . When using technology to learn

English, although most students understand their learning goals, there are also those who never (4.8%) understand their learning objectives.

### **The use of various techniques to learn English listening**

Listening skills is one of the skills students develop through the use of technology, as stated by 76.2% of students. Most of students (76%) paid close attention to keywords that help them understand the meaning of the phrases they are listening to. Only 2.4% did not listen to keywords in the phrase. Many students tried to understand English phrases when listening through the computer by playing them over and over again (76.2%).

In addition to learning to listen via computer, TV with all its programs (talk shows, games and others) is a very popular listening learning media among students. This media is utilized by most of them (80%). Watching images in TV shows is one way students do to help them understand the message. More students still rely more on Indonesian sub-titles than trying to understand the expression on TV shows with the help of English sub-titles. Some students (45.3%) watched English-language programs with computer media more than once; using English sub-titles while watching the first time and with Indonesian sub-titles for the second time.

Text is a form of English communication that students learn through the utilization of IT media (computers, smartphones). Techniques and frequency of text utilization by students vary. Reading text is the most common technique by many students (31%) compared to other techniques. Generally they (30%) read English text on their mobile phone screen more than once. Most students often check the meaning of words they do not understand using google translate. Although only occasionally, most students write new words or phrases they find on the internet and review their memories of new words they get from the internet.

### **Learning collaboratively**

The utilization of e-learning, although only occasionally for most students, has facilitated them to cooperate with friends or collaboratively learn in various ways; discussing, asking friends when encountering difficulties, sending emails, asking friends to correct errors when performing live chat with a feature in their mobile phone.

### **Results of Qualitative Data from Interviews**

Data collection through interviews yields more in-depth information about students' perceptions on the use of technology in English learning. Interview questions were prepared with reference to the concept of learner autonomy which became the focus area of this study. The interview transcriptions were then analyzed and resulted in the following findings.

### **Students' Intensity In Using ICT For English Learning**

The results of the interviews reveal that all students have easy access to use the internet via mobile phone that they always carry everywhere. They use computers for at least two hours a day for various purposes; communicating with friends, reading the latest news, and searching information related to school subjects. Of the five interview respondents, three of them stated that they rarely use the internet to browse information on the website. With regards to the use of technology to support learning English, the five respondents stated that they had used the mobile phone to learn English, either intentionally or not. English learning happens by accident when they play games that contain a lot of English vocabulary in both written and conversational form. Two out of five respondents specifically took the time to learn English with a mobile phone. Television is a medium other than mobile phone that can be accessed easily by students. They revealed that television became part of their daily lives with varying intensity and frequency in each student.

### **English Materials Students Learn by Using the Internet**

Students read news or English articles from the website and chat via applications in their mobile phone. One of the students has an interest in English since she was in junior high school and wanted to continue her studies at a college majoring in English. This student has a WA group with members of her junior high schoolmates who have the same intention to continue to practice English in their communications. In addition to gaming and WA apps not specifically designed for learning English, one student also stated that he has also opened several websites designed specifically for learning English. He uses many grammar exercises available on the website.

As stated earlier, English language learning, especially vocabulary and pronunciation skills occur by accident when they play games and watch English programs where they are presented with many English vocabulary in both writing and conversation.

### **The Use of Technology and Learner Autonomy**

Learner autonomy, as discussed in the theoretical review, is a complex capacity involving many components. The qualitative data obtained from the interview results were analyzed with regards to learner autonomy components suggested by different experts (Benson, 2011; Lamb, 2006; Dickison, 1996). The result of data analysis shows that the utilization of ICT especially e-learning contribute to learner autonomy capacity in the following components:

#### **Increasing Students' Interest in English Learning (Learning Motivation)**

The students' desire to learn English came partly because of their interest in the facilities or features of their mobile phones. When students play games or when they happily work on their gadgets, the learning process takes place without any burden. The process of learning English occurs without them knowing because the elements of English are integrated with their passion to play the gadget. This is shown in the following extracts of a student's interview,

I love playing games. All the games I play in English ... Little by little I understand the meaning of the words in the game. The language setting in my phone is in English, and every day I use it (Student A).

The above statement shows that the gadget becomes an "entrance" for students to learn English. They might not have learned the vocabulary that is in the game if they did not have an interest in the game. This aspect of attraction becomes important in relation to the motivation that drives students to learn.

#### **Enhancing Metacognitive Awareness**

The interview results show that students are aware of what areas of English skills they improve when performing various activities with their gadgets. For example when they have a WA group and are committed to communicating with English, they feel their communication skills are



improving. They can also identify what difficulties they face when they communicate certain ideas or things. A student expressed this during the interview,

I have Group WA with my junior friends. We both want to learn English. But I often have difficulty expressing something because of the limitations of the vocabulary (Student E).

Students' awareness that their ability to speak English increases is also evident from their response to some interview questions. For example, after playing games that use English, their understanding of the vocabulary used in the game increases. The students' responses show that their ability to identify their own strengths and weaknesses is formed through learning activities using e-learning media.

### **Enhancing Self Confidence and Social Skills**

Students' awareness of the increasing ability of English-speaking fosters their sense of confidence in their abilities. One student stated that his ability to understand English conversations increased with his frequent visits to TV shows in English. Another student revealed that her habit of engaging in English with her friends through the WA application made her more confident when communicating with English. The use of online chatting media such as WA and FB has also raised awareness of the importance of support from others in learning to communicate in English, as stated by one of the students in the interview,

I feel very helped by the WA group of my junior high school friends. Until now we are still actively chatting in English. My friends encouraged each other (Student C).

The media of information and communication technology (ICT) has facilitated students in developing this capacity.

### **Discussion**

This study was conducted to explore students' experiences in utilizing technology to support learning English outside the classroom and examine how students demonstrated the capacity of learner autonomy, a capacity that many studies have proven to be important for students' learning success. Various aspects of students' experiences in the use of technology to learn English have been presented in the previous section. Technology especially mobile phone with

internet connection has become part of students' every day life. In relation to the benefits of technology in learning English, students also realize that technology is very useful. Knowledge of the benefits of technology in learning English does not necessarily make them maximally use this medium to learn English. As stated in the findings of this study, few students specifically plan to learn English using the technology they have. In relation to student autonomy capacity, the findings of this study indicate that the use of technology in English learning has facilitated students in developing their autonomy in learning. Motivation to learn is one aspect of student autonomy that is driven by the existence of technology. Students' interest in English learning activities arises because they love the features in their gadgets that allow them to learn. This reinforces previous studies which revealed that the use of blogs has increased the interest of students to learn to write in English (Warni, 2016). When engaging in English chatting activities with friends in the WA group, students can identify their particular weaknesses in the vocabulary. Awareness of the limitations of English vocabulary mastery and awareness of the importance of improving vocabulary mastery to support their ability to communicate, mobilize them to find out and learn the vocabulary they meet or need but they do not yet know. This awareness known as metacognitive awareness is an important aspect of learner autonomy which is revealed in this study. Other components of learner autonomy found in this study are students' confidence and social skills. In relation to the cultural context, the findings of this study reinforce what was previously proposed by Coleman (1996) and Lamb (2006), that the capacity of learner autonomy is not only relevant to the context of the Western world.

## **Conclusion**

This study aims to examine students' experiences in utilizing technology to learn English outside the classroom and examine their implications for their autonomy capacity in learning. Various technology tools such as television, laptop, and mobile phone with internet connection have become part of students' daily life. All students realize that technology is very useful in helping them learn English, but it does not necessarily make them maximally use this medium to learn English. As stated in the findings of this study, few students specifically plan to learn English using the technology they have. This study also reveals that the use of technology in English learning has been a driving force in the development of their autonomy in learning, which includes several components; learning motivation, metacognitive awareness, self-confidence and

social skills. The findings of this study suggest that students need to have more literacy on the benefits of technology and how to maximize its use to enhance their English learning.

## References

- Behera, S. K. (2013, July). E- and M-Learning: A Comparative Study. *International Journal on New Trends in Education and Their Implications*, 4(3), 65-78.
- Benson, P. (2001). Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning. (1st Ed.). Longman, Harlow.
- Benson, P. (2011). Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning. (2nd Ed.). Longman, Harlow
- Coleman, H. (1996) Shadow puppets and language lessons: Interpreting classroom behaviour in its cultural context. In H. Coleman (ed.) *Society and the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dickinson, L., 1987. *Self-instruction in Language Learning*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Dickinson, L. (1995). Autonomy and motivation a literature review. *System*, 23(2), 165-174.
- Figura, K., & Jarvis, H. (2007). Computer-based materials: A study of learner autonomy and strategies. *System*, 35(4), 448-468.
- Georgiev, T., Georgieva, E., & Smrikarov, A. (2004). M-Learning - a New Stage of E-Learning. *International Conference on Computer Systems and Technologies, IV(28)*, 1-5.
- Goulao, M. d., & Menedez, R. C. (2015). Learner autonomy and self-regulation in eLearning. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 174, 1900-1907.
- Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Jiao, L.-J. (2005). Promoting EFL Learner Autonomy. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 2(5), 27-30.
- Jones, J.F. (1995) Self-access and culture: Retreating from autonomy. *ELT Journal* 49 (3), 228–234.
- Kemala, Z. (2014). *An analysis of autonomous learning strategies used by senior high school students* (Unpublished master thesis). Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia Bandung, Indonesia.
- Lamb, T. (2005). Listening to our Learners' Voices: Pupils' Constructions of Language Learning in an Urban School. PhD Thesis, University of Nottingham.

- Lengkanawati, N.S. (2014). *Making EFL learners autonomous: Can language learning strategies help?* A paper presented at 2014 ALAK
- Lengkanawati, N. S. (2017). Learner autonomy in the Indonesian EFL settings. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 6(2), 222-231.
- Little, D. (1991). *Learner autonomy: Definitions, issues and problems*. Authentik Language Learning Resources Limited.
- McDonough, K. (2004). Learner-learner interaction during pair and small group activities in a Thai EFL context. *System*, 32(2), 207-224.
- Nielsen, H. L. (2012). *E-learning and the dilemma of learner autonomy: A case study of first*
- O'malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. Cambridge University Press
- Oxford, R.L. (1990) *Language Learning Strategies: What every Teacher should Know*. Rowley, MA.: Newbury House.
- Palfreyman, D., Smith, R. (Eds.), 2003. *Learner Autonomy Across Cultures*. Language Education Perspectives. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Scharle, A., Szabo, A., 2000. *Learner Autonomy*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Sonaiya, R. (2002) *Autonomous language learning in Africa: A mismatch of cultural assumptions*. *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 15 (2), 106–116.
- Utami, R. (2007). *The effects of autonomous learners to improve their English* (Unpublished master thesis). Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia.
- Warni, S. (2016). *Implementation of Online portfolios in an Indonesian EFL Writing Class* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Sheffield).
- Yen, C.-J., & Liu, S. (2009). Learner Autonomy as a Predictor of Course Success and Final Grades in Community College Online Courses. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 41(3), 347–367. <https://doi.org/10.2190/EC.41.3.e>