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LEARNER AUTONOMY DESIRABILITY AND FEASIBILITY IN INDONESIAN EFL CLASSROOMS: UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' VOICES

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Abstract
For its promises in helping learners to develop their language proficiency, independent learning skill, thinking skill, and collaborative skill, numerous research and practices have been conducted regarding the promotion of Learning Autonomy (LA) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. However, the majority of research focuses only on the teachers' viewpoint. This paper aims to reveal the students' voices towards LA, especially its' desirability and feasibility in the context of EFL classroom in Indonesia. This case study was carried out in a private university in Subang. 44 students were purposively selected as the participants. The data were collected through distributing questionnaires and conducting interviews. It is revealed that most of participants perceive LA as both desirable and feasible. However, they still find that it is not easy to develop their LA without adequate support from their teachers. It can be concluded that the students are willing to develop their LA. It is suggested that there should be more teacher training regarding the promotion of LA in the Indonesian EFL context.

Keywords: *learner autonomy, desirability, feasibility, EFL classrooms, university students*

INTRODUCTION

Although teachers are no longer the only knower in the 21st century classrooms and numerous attempts have been performed to enhance students' independent learning skill in the English as a Foreign Language (hereafter EFL) education setting, it seems that Indonesian students are still dependent to their teachers (Lengkanawati,2016). This phenomenon can be found in each level of Indonesian education from primary until tertiary. Most of the Indonesian students have not already been familiar with the practice of controlling their own learning. It causes many Indonesian classrooms still tend to be teacher-centered, including EFL classrooms.

It is inevitable that current EFL classrooms need more student-initiated activities in order to achieve the teaching-learning objectives along with developing

their independent learning skill. Moreover, in the current age, when teacher is not the only knowledge resource, learner autonomy (henceforth LA) has become the common education goal thorough the globe (Benson, 2006). In the field of language learning, it is believed that LA development is correlated with the learners' language proficiency development. Furthermore, the advanced level of LA will end with the realization of their life-long learning (Little, 1991). More than the last three decades, since Holec (1981) published his paper under the title *Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning*, numerous efforts have been executed to promote LA for students to develop, including conducting research related with LA in the language classrooms. However, a huge number of those research studies focus on revealing teachers' perspectives and practices.

Understanding teachers' perspectives and beliefs about LA is undeniably critical in the effort of developing students' LA since teacher autonomy is prerequisite for learner autonomy. A bunch of research has been conducted to gain insight about what teachers believe and have done to develop their students' LA. Several of those research studies were carried out by Brog & Al-Busaidi (2012) in Oman, Alibakhshi (2015) in Iran, Shahsavari (2014) also in Iran, and Lengkanawati (2016) in Indonesia. Generally, they conclude that teachers have positive perspectives toward the promotion of LA in their classroom. However, according to Alibakhshi, teachers' perspectives upon LA desirability is less positive than their perspectives upon LA feasibility. It is possibly because of their fear of losing their autonomy. It is quite different from what have been uncovered by Lengkanawati and Borg & Al-Busaidi. They find that teachers' belief about desirability of LA is more positive than their belief upon LA feasibility. It is possibly because of the teachers see there are too many barriers for them to develop their students' LA. There are a lot of research, actually, that have been performed in order to investigate students' viewpoint about LA, especially about its' desirability and feasibility.

Farahi (2015) lists several research studies conducted to investigate students' view point towards LA. He mentions that at least, there are five research that have been carried out to question students' perspectives upon LA. Among those research studies, none of them specifically asks about the LA desirability and feasibility of LA to students. The identical trend can also be found in the Asian context (see Bernard & Li, 2016). In the special issue of CamTESOL publication, there are only a few numbers of research conducted to study the Asian teachers' beliefs and practices towards the promotion of LA in EFL classrooms. The students' voices are still rarely exposed in order to gain the complete comprehension upon the development of students' LA, although it is very crucial to also listen to them as the ones who are expected to possess the learning capacity named LA.

Taking into account the abovementioned discussion, the present study is intended to uncover the university students' voices towards the desirability and feasibility of LA in the EFL classrooms. Furthermore, it also is aimed at investigating the students' beliefs towards LA. However, this study is limited in its allotted time, employed data collection techniques, and the number of participants. In addition, the researcher's bias possibly exists as he teaches in the university where the research takes place.

This study addresses two research questions that are:

1 What are the students' viewpoints on the desirability of being involved in making classroom decisions and mastering the necessary abilities to learn autonomously? and

2 How do the students perceive the feasibility of making classroom decisions collaboratively with teacher and possessing autonomous learning abilities?

It is expected that the answers for those two questions will serve as the additional literature for researchers who are willing to investigate the students' perspectives towards LA in the Indonesian EFL context. Moreover, it is assumed that the teachers can gain benefits from understanding students' voices about desirability and feasibility of LA for the purpose of classroom teaching learning activities. Lastly, it is also essential to be aware that the findings of this study can be used by teacher educators to convince teachers, especially Indonesian EFL teachers, to start promoting LA to their students.

In defining LA, Holec (1981) is still the most cited expert. He says that LA is the capacity to take charge of one's own learning. It means that LA is the ability that is preserved by the students to control or to take responsibility for their learning process. It includes determining the learning objectives, selecting learning materials and tasks, deciding learning methods, and performing learning evaluation and assessment (Little, 1991; Benson, 2006). However, to gain the more comprehensive definition of LA, it is critical to also consider other experts' definitions. Dickinson (1987) mentions that LA is not an approach or method of teaching; it is a mode of learning. Further he explains that it is the responsibility on every decision about learning. In the meantime, Little (1991) states that LA is "a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action."

There are four criteria of LA that can be used to recognize the level of one's LA proposed by Dickinson (1987) namely self-instruction, self-direction, self-access, and individualized learning. Self-instruction occurs when the students perform their learning process without direct intervention from teacher. Meanwhile, self-direction refers to the situation when students take responsibility for their own learning activity. Self-access is the condition where students voluntarily and responsibly access other knowledge or material resources rather than depend only on their teachers. Individualized learning is happening when students, in achieving, the same objectives, perform different approaches and procedures in their learning process.

For LA is the capacity, and not particular method of technique, a lot of strategies can be used to promote and develop students' LA. There are several learning strategies that can be used to promote LA in the EFL classroom. Several of them are project-based learning, dialogic learning, problem-based learning, portfolios, and collaborative learning (Yuliani & Lengkanawati, 2017). Little (1995) mentions the first step should be taken to develop learners' LA is negotiate with the learners from the very first day of learning activity so that they can decide their own objective and create the syllabus together. It means, in order to promote LA, learners' voice is very crucial to be heard and taken into consideration.

LA should be developed gradually (Nunan, 1997). Furthermore, Nunan (2003) proposes nine steps to be performed in order to develop LA in an EFL classroom. Those nine steps are (1) make learning objectives as clear as possible for learners, (2) allow them to decide their own objectives, (3) encourage them to practice their new langauge outside classroom, (4) increase their metacognition on their learning process, (5) help them identify their own unique learning stragies and styles, (6) give them choices to choose, (7) allow them to produce their own task, (8) give them opportunity teach their peers, and (9) encourage then to become researchers.

METHOD

This descriptive qualitative study had been executed at a university in Subang in 2018. It was carried out by employing open-ended as well as close-ended questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires were given to 44 English Education Study Program students consisting of sixteen participants from the first semester, seventeen participants from the third semester, and eleven of them from the fifth semester; whereas the interviews, conducted after administering questionnaires, were given to the six of them. It is expected that those participants from various semesters with various proficiency levels, knowledge and experiences represent different voices about LA desirability and feasibility. The following table displays the information

about the participants of closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires.

Table 1. *Participants of questionnaires*

Semester	First	Third	Fifth	Total
Number of participants	16	17	11	44

The close-ended questionnaire was adopted from the desirability and feasibility questionnaire developed by Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012). This questionnaire was actually developed by them as one of the numerous instruments in researching teachers' perspectives and practices upon the promotion of LA. However, in present study, the questionnaire was employed to expose the students' voices in order to put them under the spotlight. The open-ended one, which consists of five questions, was intended to obtain the clearer views of students towards their responses on close-ended questionnaire. In the meantime, the interviews, semi-structured ones, were conducted once to uncover the participants' voices about their basic understanding of LA along with their difficulties to perform their LA and their strategies to overcome those barriers.

The collected data were then qualitatively analyzed in order to meet the research objectives. The close-ended questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to find the tendency as well as the frequency to answer whether the participants perceive LA desirability and feasibility negatively or positively. In the meantime, the open-ended questionnaire data were compared with the data of close-ended questionnaire to minimize the possibility of invalid data occurrence. Meanwhile for the interview data, the analysis was carried out by transcribing and thematically categorizing to find out the obstacles the students face and the strategies the students use to handle those obstacles.

LA Desirability

The close-ended questionnaire data demonstrate that generally the participants perceive LA desirability both about the students' involvement and the ability that should possessed by the students positively as can be seen in the following table.

Table 2. *The percentage of participants' responses for LA desirability*

Learners are involved in decisions about:	Undesirable	Slightly Desirable	Quite Desirable	Very Desirable
The objectives of a course	6.82%	22.73%	43.18%	27.27%
The materials used	0.00%	34.09%	22.73%	43.18%
The kinds of tasks and activities they do	0.00%	22.73%	47.73%	27.27%
The topics discussed	2.27%	20.45%	36.36%	40.91%
How learning is assessed	4.55%	15.91%	31.82%	20.45%
The teaching methods used	0.00%	15.91%	31.82%	52.27%
Classroom management	2.27%	15.91%	45.45%	38.64%
Learners have the ability to:	Undesirable	Slightly desirable	Quite Desirable	Very Desirable
Identify their own needs	4.55%	15.91%	34.09%	40.91%
Identify their own strengths	2.27%	15.91%	36.36%	40.91%
Identify their own weaknesses	2.27%	15.91%	47.73%	29.55%
Monitor their progress	0.00%	22.73%	31.82%	38.64%
Evaluate their own learning	2.27%	11.36%	34.09%	47.73%

Learn co-operatively	0.00%	20.45%	45.45%	29.55%
Learn independently	4.55%	29.55%	40.91%	20.45%

According to Table 2, it can be seen that students' responses toward their involvement in decision making for their learning are positive as for each statement, more than half of them see it as quite desirable and very desirable. Moreover, especially for the elements of deciding materials used, the tasks they do, and the teaching method used, none of them views undesirable. Being compared with the perspectives from teachers, it is slightly identical that the teachers also see the students' involvement as desirable (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Lengkanawati, 2015).

When it comes to the ability in order to control the learning process, the participants' responses are also positive. Quite desirable and very desirable are still the dominant responses the students give. It can be said that they are willing to have the necessary abilities to take control of their learning process. However, based on the data gained in interviews, they still do not know to master particular abilities particularly monitor their learning progress and evaluate their learning.

LA Feasibility

Different from LA desirability, towards LA feasibility, Students' responses are less positive. It echoes what have been discovered by Lengkanawati (2005) and Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012) about the teachers' perspectives upon LA desirability and feasibility. In other words, students' perspectives and teachers' perspectives about LA feasibility are alike. The upcoming table exposes the summary of teachers' responses towards feasibility of being involved in making learning decision and mastering the necessary abilities related with LA.

Table 3. The percentage of participants' responses for LA feasibility

Learners are involved in decisions about:	**Unfeasible**	**Slightly Feasible**	**Quite Feasible**	**Very Feasible**
The objectives of a course	2.27%	38.64%	38.64%	20.45%
The materials used	6.82%	27.27%	43.18%	20.45%
The kinds of tasks and activities they do	2.27%	22.73%	59.09%	13.64%
The topics discussed	4.55%	15.91%	45.45%	34.09%
How learning is assessed	0.00%	34.09%	47.73%	15.91%
The teaching methods used	4.55%	25.00%	36.36%	34.09%
Classroom management	6.82%	25.00%	38.64%	31.82%
Learners have the ability to:	**Unfeasible**	**Slightly Feasible**	**Quite Feasible**	**Very Feasible**
Identify their own needs	2.27%	29.55%	47.73%	18.18%
Identify their own strengths	0.00%	25.00%	54.55%	20.45%
Identify their own weaknesses	2.27%	29.55%	45.45%	22.73%
Monitor their progress	2.27%	36.36%	36.36%	25.00%
Evaluate their own learning	0.00%	15.91%	52.27%	31.82%
Learn co-operatively	2.27%	34.09%	43.18%	20.45%
Learn independently	2.27%	29.55%	40.91%	25.00%

Taking into account the information contained in Table 3, it can be seen that generally the participants still see LA as feasible. However, it is not more positive than their responses towards the LA desirability. It can be seen from the number of negative and positive responses are almost equal. Negative responses consist of unfeasible and slightly feasible, whereas the positive responses consist of

quite feasible and very feasible. However, none of the student sees involving student in deciding how learning is assessed as unfeasible. Students also give identical responses for the necessity of mastering the ability to identify their own strengths to evaluate their own learning. They view both abilities as feasible with different degrees. On the contrary, from the open-ended questionnaire it is revealed that students perceive that it is not easy to perform self-evaluation for the do not know the way yet.

CONCLUSION

Taking into account the previous data display and discussion, it can be concluded that generally students perceive LA both their involvement in making classroom decision and the necessity of particular abilities as desirable and feasible. Several obstacles in developing LA are also revealed by the participants namely lack of students' motivation and the incapable teachers. Therefore, it is recommended that there should be training for teachers to be autonomous so that they can promote and help students develop their LA.

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