Readiness for Learner Autonomy:
An Investigation into Beliefs and Practices of Indonesian
Tertiary EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

Learner autonomy has long been recognised as an imperative in second/foreign language learning. Despite the huge body of research on the benefits of learner autonomy and the interventions aimed at promoting it, little attention has been given to students’ readiness for accepting responsibility in their learning, which is a prerequisite for developing learner autonomy. Moreover, the concept of learner autonomy has been the subject of debate: some suggest that it is a Western concept, while some research in the Asian context shows that autonomy is an appropriate educational goal in Asian settings too. To extend this debate, the current study sought to investigate beliefs about, and readiness for, learner autonomy among Indonesian university students by scrutinising their perceptions of their teachers’ and their own responsibilities in English learning, their decision-making abilities, out-of-class autonomous English learning activities, and the reasons behind the held beliefs and practices.

The study employed a mixed methods explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In the quantitative phase, questionnaires were completed by 402 first year undergraduate students in four higher educational institutions in a province in Indonesia. In the qualitative phase, interviews were conducted with 30 of the students purposefully selected based on the results of the quantitative phase. The quantitative data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The data obtained through interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The questionnaire results revealed that the students deemed the teacher to be the one in charge of their learning despite their positive perceptions of their decision-making abilities. This could be a result of the teaching and learning style in the Indonesian context in which teacher-centred pedagogy has long been common practice (Azra, 2002; Bjork, 2005; Buchori, 2001; Darmaningtyas, 2004; Siegel, 1986). The results also showed that although the students engaged in a number of out-of-class English learning activities, many of the activities were more receptive than productive in nature. The interviews echoed the questionnaire results, and interviewed students claimed that they were not autonomous in their learning behaviour. Among the reasons offered for not exercising autonomous learning were: lack of capacity to learn autonomously, difficulties in learning English, lack of interest in English, time shortage, and learning resource shortage.
Spearman’s rank correlation analyses indicated the presence of positive relationships between students’ perceptions of their responsibilities and their decision-making abilities, between their perceptions of responsibilities and their out-of-class learning activities, and between their decision-making abilities and their out-of-class learning activities. The study did not identify any significant differences between males and females in their perceptions of their own responsibilities, decision-making abilities, or out-of-class learning activities. Also, no significant difference was found between the students of an English major and those of non-English majors in their perceptions of their decision-making abilities. However, there were significant differences between these groups in their perceptions of their responsibilities and out-of-class learning activities. This suggests that the students of the English major tended to accept more responsibility and engage more in English learning activities outside the class than those of non-English majors.

The results from the qualitative phase suggested that the students lacked understanding of the concept of learner autonomy: most of the interviewed students viewed learner autonomy as isolated independent learning which is entirely free from any intervention from the teacher. The results also revealed students’ willingness to develop learner autonomy and a recognition of its benefits. Among the mentioned benefits were: a compensation for time and resource scarcity, broadening students’ knowledge, and more effective and personalised learning. The study also identified a number of hindering and supporting factors related to the development of learner autonomy. The hindering factors were extrinsic in nature, such as the environment, time, and resources, while the supporting factors were more intrinsic such as the students’ willingness to succeed, the broadening of students’ knowledge and pleasing their parents. There was a general consensus among the students that the teacher plays an important role in the development of their autonomy. These results suggest that, despite the constraints in developing learner autonomy, the Indonesian students held positive attitudes towards it, which is consistent with other research on Asian students (e.g. Aoki & Smith, 1999; Joshi, 2011). Some significant practical implications for teachers, learners, curriculum designers, and institutions of higher education in the Indonesian context are discussed in this thesis.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BSNP – Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan [National Education Standards Board]
CALL – Computer-Assisted Language Learning
CI – Confidence Interval
CMC – Computer-Mediated Communication
CRAPEL – Centre de Recherches et d’Applications en Langues
DVD – Digital Versatile Disc
EFL – English as a Foreign Language
ELT – English Language Teaching
ESP – English for Specific Purposes
HREC – Human Research Ethics Committee
KTSP – Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (the school-based curriculum)
RQ – Research question
TOEIC – Test of English for International Communication
VCD – Video Compact Disc