

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section describes the research design which was accomplished in this study to answer the formulated research questions:

1. How is learner autonomy practiced by learners in an Islamic boarding school context?
2. What are the challenges encountered by learners to be autonomous in learning?

This section is divided into five major subsections: research design, site and participants, instruments, data collection, and data analysis. Each section is elaborated and presented in the following subsections.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The current study employed a qualitative method with a case study design. Qualitative research is a method for exploring and understanding meaning derived from social or humanitarian issues analyzed from specific themes to general themes as well as interpreting the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2012; Gillham, 2000). Meanwhile, case study research is one that investigates an individual, a group, a large-scale community, or it can be multiple cases such as several schools through different kinds of evidence in-depth and detailed way (Creswell, 2012; Gillham, 2000; Hamied, 2017). Based on these definitions, a qualitative method with a case study design is considered to be suitable in the context of the current research as it attempts to provide detailed information on practices of a group of students in a specific study context is likely to undertake to encourage themselves to become autonomous learners in learning English and challenges students encounter regarding learner autonomy implementation.

Moreover, the study is considered as a case study since it focuses on the exploration of learner autonomy at one of Islamic boarding junior high schools in West Sumatera where certain social issues and educational policy have been spotted. In this case, as a part of the rapid development of urban life, both the teachers and students in this site involve in English learning activities under certain situations and strict regulations such as no gadgets and internet allowed in the school and dorms in addition to religious rules existed in the school, yet the

school has good and qualified English teachers and get used to life changes and innovations through various programs offered by the school. Thus, the students in this school are expected to have their own practices to be autonomous learners and challenges in doing the activities they are likely to undertake must have been arising.

Many researchers are impressed by the fact that one of the unique features of qualitative research design to which case study research design belongs is that the researcher plays a role as one of the data collection instruments of research (Cresswell, 2012; Hamied, 2017). It is noted that to conduct a comprehensive data collection, the researcher collects data by herself, so the condition of the field of study should be well understood and the researcher should adapt to it. In this study context, the researcher herself was the one who collected the data by employing data collection techniques and analyzed the data obtained. This direct involvement enabled the researcher to gain comprehensive understanding on the research context and facilitate nuanced interpretation based on the findings revealed from the engagement with the participants and their experiences.

### **3.2 Research Site and Participants**

The study was conducted at one of Islamic boarding junior high schools in West Sumatera where the participants were selected. An Islamic boarding school is a type of Indonesian Islamic education which aims to carry out formal education and at the same time be able to deepen the knowledge of the Islamic values by encouraging students to participate in daily activities within the school environment and living in a dormitory (Hithah et al, 2019). Islamic boarding school is a social institution of religious education (Farchan & Syarifudin 2005). Some Islamic boarding schools are also well-known for its exceptional language instruction and high caliber of education. Learning foreign languages, particularly English and Arabic, is prioritized in Islamic boarding schools (Nurjaman, 2013).

In this study, the Islamic boarding school refers to a learning environment which implements national curriculum, 2013 Curriculum, and where some different school regulations exist: learning is conducted under, the school is technology restricted, all learning activities are centered in classrooms and dorms,

Islamic values are emphasized, and activities undertaken inside and outside the classroom are monitored by the schools. In this site, students learn through a required textbook and other teacher's supporting materials as the learning sources.

The site was selected for some main reasons. First, in addition to the fact that the school emphasizes on the teaching of Islamic values, the learning process is conducted by implementing the national curriculum, 2013 Curriculum. The Indonesian national curriculum strongly suggests that learning is conducted by having a learner-centered approach (Lengkanawati, 2019) so that students are prepared to face today's industry era. Therefore, any learning context and site, including Islamic boarding schools whose learner autonomy is underexplored and which have strict yet unique regulations such all learning activities are centered in classrooms and dorms, are supposed to make learner autonomy as its priority in learning. Even though English learning in Islamic boarding schools is reported to face huge challenges in terms of limited access to learning media, it does not rule out the possibility that learner autonomy in this context cannot be promoted. With the guidance of teachers, the help of supportive school policy and regulations, and the variety of learners' backgrounds, learner autonomy is expectedly developed even if both teachers and learners are not privileged for some aspects, such as using gadgets and internet inside and outside the classrooms.

Furthermore, without disparaging the school's system and strict regulations in terms of Islamic values, unlike most other Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia which still allow students to use gadgets and internet outside the classroom, this study site is unique in that it is technology-restricted both inside and outside the classroom. This became the researcher's considerations since technology can help the promotion of learner autonomy better (Richards, 2014; Healey, 2002). Nonetheless, since learner autonomy in the school cannot be judged just by referring to technological tools and services the school offers, exploring student practices of learner autonomy in the school is worth-doing in order to reveal aspects supporting students to be autonomous in learning as well as investigate the challenges which may hinder the practices. Additionally, unlike most other schools where students come from rather similar backgrounds due to the zoning system, students in Islamic boarding schools vary in terms of their

backgrounds. The students mostly come from other regions and live together in one dorm. Thus, their practices of autonomy as well as challenges they encounter to be autonomous in learning are also expected to vary.

The participants of this study were five students of a superior class in grade eight. The five students were high achieving students in the class selected based on their English competence levels. The decision for the participant selection was made based on their English teacher's judgment on their English knowledge and performance. Additionally, the teacher's holistic evaluation of those students was also the basis for the participant selection. Bodies of literature have mentioned that learner autonomy gives positive impact on students' learning and it contributes to students' success in learning English as their foreign language (Hsieh and Hsieh, 2019; Tran, 2020; Rahman and Suharmoko, 2018). This point of departure underlies why this study involves only high achievers in English learning. In order to see whether learner autonomy works in an English learning environment and in order to be in line with the theory of learner autonomy and successful English learning, those five high achieving students expectedly create the best study results, which later can be the source for the school's policy makers to create environments supporting students to be autonomous learners.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

In collecting the data, this study employed different data collection techniques to seek rich data from various sources and to ensure the credibility as well as to reduce the weakness of each technique of the data collection (Alwasilah, 2012; Creswell, 2012; Hamied, 2017; Yin, 2003; 2012). Three data collecting techniques were employed: questionnaires, observations, and interviews. The three instruments were used to explore students' practices and challenges of doing autonomous activities. The questionnaires served as the basic source to obtain students' initial voices on the learner autonomy practices and challenges, continued with the observations to explore how those voices are implemented. Lastly, there were interviews to confirm and strengthen the results obtained from the two previous instruments.

**Table 3. 1 Data Collection**

No	Techniques	Activities	Expected Results
1	Questionnaires	Administering questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Practices of autonomous activities undertaken by students</li> <li>● Challenges students face in undertaking autonomous activities</li> </ul>
2	Observations	Observing students' English learning in the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Explorations on students' practices of doing autonomous activities</li> <li>● Notes on the perceived challenges students may encounter</li> </ul>
3	Interviews	Conducting conversational interviews	Confirmation and triangulation of learner autonomy practices the students are likely to undertake and the challenges of doing autonomous activities

From the table above, it can be seen that the exploration of each technique is focused on exploring both learner autonomy practices undertaken by the learners and the challenges the learners face in doing so. These two main points of research were covered in each instrument. More specifically, the last technique, interviews, serves as a triangulation tool which confirms and strengthens the data obtained from the questionnaires and observation. The items for each technique were adapted from Joshi (2011) regarding learners' autonomy practices and Little (2007) regarding the challenges in practicing autonomous behaviors. Further description of each instrument is discussed below.

### 3.3.1 Questionnaires

This study was started by utilizing questionnaire items to five high-achieving students in a superior class in order to gain and reveal their initial voices on practices and challenges of doing autonomous activities. Furthermore, the questionnaire results from the five participants served as a basis for observing and interviewing them. The questionnaires were adapted from Joshi (2011) and

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*A CASE OF AN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL CONTEXT IN WEST SUMATERA*

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Little (2007). They were selected because the items fit the study aims to answer research question 1 and 2 in addition to the fact that it has been used by previous researchers such as Rushidi & Rexhepi (2015) and Sari (2019). In order to get a better understanding of the questionnaire, it was distributed in Indonesian language.

The questionnaire consists of three sections. The first part focuses on knowing students' perception about their own roles and teachers' roles in learning English, and the second part is aimed to figure out activities students are likely to undertake to be autonomous. Lastly, the last part consists of challenges the students might face to be autonomous in learning. The items in the questionnaire are presented in the table below.

**Table 3. 2 Items of the Questionnaire**

<b>Categorizes</b>	<b>Number of Questions</b>
<b>Learner Perception</b>	
Learner perception of their own role	1 - 5
Learner perception of the teacher role	6 – 11
<b>Autonomous Activities</b>	
Learner awareness	1 – 3
Self-efforts	4 – 13
Self-esteem	14
Use of reference materials	15 – 16
Motivation	17
Use of technology	18
<b>Challenges of Learner Autonomy</b>	
Challenges concerning the school	19-22
Challenges concerning the teacher	23-27
Challenges concerning the students themselves	28-33
Challenges Concerning the learning culture	34-39

As can be seen in the table, the part focused on knowing students' perception about their own roles and teachers' roles in learning English has 12 items, and students were asked to select among four options provided (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree). Furthermore, the next part aiming to figure out activities students are likely to undertake to be autonomous has 18 items belonging to categories of learners' awareness, self-efforts, self-esteem, use of reference materials, motivation, and use of technology, and students were asked to choose among five provided responses (never, rarely, often, and always). Lastly, the last part consisting of challenges the students might face to be autonomous in learning are divided into challenges concerning the school (four items), challenges concerning the teacher (five items), challenges concerning the student themselves (five items), and challenges concerning the learning culture (five items).

### **3.3.2 Observations**

Classroom observation was employed to develop a deeper understanding of students' practices in doing autonomous activities in the classroom. In addition, it was aimed to see how students' responses in the questionnaire are practiced in the classroom at the research site. According to Gay et al (2009), observation emphasizes on participants living in their natural environment. In this study, the observation was focused on seeing how students undertake autonomous activities inside the classroom by employing three meetings of classroom observations.

The classroom observation was focused on students' observable behaviors by using Joshi's (2011) framework of autonomous practices implemented by students consisting of learners' awareness, self-efforts, self-esteem, and motivation. However, since some points in Joshi's theory cannot be directly observed, the missing points were explored through interviews after the whole class observation was conducted. Similarly, challenges students may face in being autonomous could not be directly observed in their practices, yet note taking while doing the observation was the solution the researcher undertook in order to highlight possible and perceived challenges reflected from how the students

practice autonomous activities in the classroom, to keep maintaining the validity, and to ease the data analysis as well as data interpretation.

Non-participant observation was used in this study. The researcher was not involved in the activity, yet she remained observing and note taking during the activity (Kumar, 2015). To check and recheck the data from the classroom observation possible and to get highlight and better understanding on the activity observed, an observation guide was used. It consists of 14 items (*see appendix 3*) which mainly focus on student practices in doing autonomous activities, yet, to repeat, perceived challenges reflected from their practices were also noticed and written down in the observation notes. It was then confirmed in the third instrument, interviews.

### **3.3.3 Interviews**

In order to triangulate the data from the two previous instruments, the five students were interviewed. The semi-structured interviews aimed at strengthening, confirming, and more exploring students' practices and challenges of doing autonomous activities. The interviews also aimed at gathering inaccessible data in the previous two instruments. The questions in the interviews were developed from Joshi (2011) regarding student practices in doing autonomous activity and Little (2007) regarding the challenges students face in doing the activities. Interviews, as explained by Creswell (2012), give participants more freedom in providing information, and they allow researchers to control the flow of questions and answers. In addition to seeing how students are likely to undertake activities which help them to be autonomous, interviews were also meant to identify challenges they encounter. As expected, in-depth data were obtained to answer the first and second research question.

### **3.4 Data Collection Procedures**

In this study, there were some phases conducted in order to collect the research data. First phase was conducted to find out students' initial voices on their practices in doing autonomous activities and challenges they may encounter in doing the activities at an Islamic boarding school in West Sumatera. Twenty-five students in a class of grade eight were distributed questionnaires in which

Sri Novianti, 2024

***EFL LEARNERS' AUTONOMY PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES:***

***A CASE OF AN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL CONTEXT IN WEST SUMATERA***

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they put answers in the form of a checklist, yet only five high achieving students whose questionnaire results were considered. To avoid social issues in filling in the questionnaires, it is considered important to distribute the questionnaires to all students in the class. Furthermore, the students were asked to choose one among four options provided. In answering the questionnaires, the students were allowed to directly ask any vague items to the researcher.

In the second phase, the five participants who previously responded to the questionnaire were observed through classroom observations. Classroom observations conducted were focused on seeing how the participants undertake autonomous activities in the classroom. In addition, perceived challenges reflected from the participants' practices were also noted to be explored in the third phase through interviews.

The third phase was done by interviewing the five participants. It focused on more exploring the participants' practices of doing autonomous activities and the challenges they encountered so that the data obtained in the two previous phases were confirmed and strengthened. Moreover, the interviews were audio-taped in order to make transcription possible so that any misunderstanding in the data interpretation can be avoided.

### **3.5 Establishing Rapport**

Before collecting the data in the research site, the researcher established rapport with the participants and all the school's members. One important key to obtaining qualified information of the data collected is by developing rapport with the research subject (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Regarding this importance, permission from the school and the teachers was initially asked by submitting a permission letter issued by the researcher's study program. In addition, students' willingness to participate in this research was also asked.

### **3.6 Establishing Reliability and Validity**

Establishing reliability in both qualitative and quantitative research is crucial in order to make a study valid. Reliability is a technical word referring to the consistency in the process of collecting and analyzing data in research, while a research's validity can be determined by looking at its truth description,

Sri Novianti, 2024

*EFL LEARNERS' AUTONOMY PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES:*

*A CASE OF AN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL CONTEXT IN WEST SUMATERA*

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conclusion, interpretation, and other report components (Alwasilah, 2002). In this study, in order to make the research reliable and valid, different data collection techniques (questionnaires, observations, and interviews) were employed so that any bias and subjective points of view can be avoided. The data obtained from the questionnaires and observations were triangulated by the data gained from the interviews.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

To answer the formulated research questions, the data analysis process was organized manually, without using any research software, based on the instruments used. Below is the explanation of how the results of data collection technique were analyzed.

#### **3.7.1 Questionnaires**

The data obtained in the questionnaires were firstly analyzed before obtaining data from observations and interviews. As stated previously, data from the questionnaire was about students' practices of doing autonomous activities and the challenges students encounter in doing the activities at one Islamic boarding school in West Sumatera. The questionnaire data were analyzed by looking at students' initial voices regarding their tendency in doing autonomous activities and the challenges they encounter. Since this research is a qualitative case study, thus, the questionnaire data were not analyzed by using scale and score. Instead, the data were used as inputs giving the researcher insights on participants' initial and general evaluation on their perception of teachers' roles and their own roles in learning English, autonomous activities they are likely to undertake, and challenges they encounter in order to be autonomous in learning English. Their tendencies were then noted and highlighted by referring to each point of Joshi's (2011) practices of autonomous activities and Little's (2007) challenges in doing autonomous activities. These two points were then more explored through classroom observations and interviews with the students.

### 3.7.2 Observations

Data from observations were taken in the form of non-participant observation and notes were taken during the observations. The data analysis process from classroom observations was conducted in several steps. Firstly, the notes taken during the classroom observations were checked and highlighted based on Joshi's (2011) themes of practices of autonomous activities and Little's (2007) challenges in doing autonomous activities in order to identify autonomous activities the students are likely to undertake. Secondly, autonomous activities captured in students' attitudes were coded and categorized using an adaptation of Joshi's framework of autonomous activities: learners' self-awareness, self-efforts, self-esteem, use of reference materials, and motivation in learning English. In fact, since not all aspects proposed by Joshi are observable, the coding and categorization process were focused items belonging to learners' self-efforts in the learning process. The other non-observable attitudes were covered in the interviews. Thirdly, challenges students encounter may not be explicitly invisible in the classroom, yet perceived challenges reflected from their attitudes, highlighted in the observation notes, were categorized based on Little's (2007) idea on learner autonomy constraints: constraints from school, teacher, learners themselves, and learning culture.

In the process of coding and categorizing the data, autonomous activities found in students' practices and perceived challenges the students may face were categorized as presented in the table below.

**Table 3. 3 Categorize of Observation Data**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Details of Activities</b>	<b>Perceived challenges</b> (school/ teacher/ students/ learning culture)
Autonomous Activities	Self-awareness		
	Self-efforts		
	Self-esteem		
	Motivation		

In the table above, the sections highlighted are the two main points studied

in this research. The first point, autonomous activities the students undertook,

Sri Novianti, 2024

*EFL LEARNERS' AUTONOMY PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES:*

*A CASE OF AN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL CONTEXT IN WEST SUMATERA*

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focuses on seeing things that can be observed in the classroom. The second point, perceived challenges, highlights the challenges the students may face in doing autonomous activities seen from four aspects: challenges concerning the school, teacher, students themselves, and learning culture. Even though the constraints students faced were not clearly seen in the observation, yet thorough responses regarding the perceived challenges were further investigated and revealed in the interviews.

### **3.7.3 Interviews**

The third data analyzed were the data obtained from the interviews. The data obtained from the interviews were intended to strengthen and confirm the data obtained from the questionnaires and observations, as well as to explore aspects of autonomous activities which are invisible in the classroom observations such as students' self-awareness, self-esteem, and motivation in learning English. In addition, challenges the students face in doing autonomous activities were more explored and clarified through the interview data.

In analyzing the interview data, first it was transcribed. Then, the researcher read the overall data in order to get the general sense of the information contained which allows the researcher to draw ideas, consider the data organization, and decide whether more data are needed (Cresswell, 2008). After that, the process of data analysis was begun by following three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Huberman & Miles, 1994).

In the first stage, data reduction, the researcher filtered the interview data and simplified them into the research focus in order to notice important and unimportant data. The irrelevant one was omitted and was not taken into account so that the clear picture of practices of autonomy implemented by students through autonomous activities and the challenges they face in doing the activities can be highlighted. The next stage was displaying the data. The presentation of data can take in some forms such as texts, charts, graphs, flowcharts, and tables (Alwasilah, 2002). In this study, the interview data were presented as texts and narratives to facilitate qualitative understanding.

The last stage was conclusion drawing. The conclusion was made by referring to the two research questions: (1) how learner autonomy is practiced by students in a technology restricted environment; and (2) what challenges the students encounter in order to be autonomous in learning English. The description of answers of the first research question is based on categories of autonomous activities proposed by Joshi (2011): students' self-awareness, self-efforts, self-esteem, and motivation in learning English. Meanwhile, the explanation for the second research question's responses is referred to Little (2007) about aspects of challenges that may hinder the implementation of learner autonomy attitudes. Lastly, to maintain confidentiality and respect the data of participants who participated in this study, the names mentioned in the findings and discussions are replaced with pseudonyms.