

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the rationales behind the selection of the topic of this study. It contains the background of the study, questions of the study, purposes of the study, significance of the study, clarification of terms, and organization of the paper.

1.1 Background of the study

Over the years, there have been growing interests in the promotion of learner autonomy in English language teaching and learning. Bodies of literature have voiced that learner autonomy contributes to the success of English as a Foreign Language learning (Hsieh & Hsieh, 2019; Rahman & Suharmoko, 2018; Tran, 2020). The success roots from the fact that autonomous learners have capability to take responsibility for their own learning (Holec, 1979) so that they are categorized as efficient learners (Benson, 2013). Being efficient in learning means learners possess intrinsic motivation, awareness, critical thinking, and metacognitive skills which enable them to involve both efficiently and actively in the whole process of learning. As a result, the skills lead them to success in English learning.

Learner autonomy also gives great contributions in preparing students to survive in today's 21st century (Tuan, 2021). Competence needed in this era requires learners to have soft skills including communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creative skills in language learning (Kellem & Halvorsen, 2018) in order to help them cope with the challenges they may face in real life after they finish their schools. Regarding these crucial, student-centered learning is one way to develop those skills since it involves criteria such as depth cognitive and social skills, personal growth, and social maturity. This importance is also strongly encouraged by Indonesia's two national curricula implemented, Emancipated Curriculum and 2013 Curriculum. Emancipated Curriculum strongly suggests that learning is conducted by having a learner-centered approach (Soraya & Lengkanawati, 2022), and 2013 Curriculum implementation encourages

schools and teachers to support students to learn independently and to have an autonomous learner attitude (Lengkanawati, 2019).

However, upon a closer look at English language learning in Indonesia, the actual promotion of learner autonomy does not meet the urge. English classrooms are mostly dominated by teachers. This issue has become a problem since the learning process tends to be teacher-centered. Lengkanawati (2019) revealed that teachers have not well promoted learner autonomy as one of the key objectives in language teaching and learning. Furthermore, it cannot be neglected that learner autonomy still faces a challenge in Indonesian context since the standard norms set in the culture of education emphasize center to teachers. The norms include the principles of total obedience, the unquestioning mind, the concept of elders-know-all, and the beliefs that teachers are always right as well as do no wrong (Dardjowidjojo, 2001). Besides, the culture of students just being recipients is very popular in Indonesia (Ramadhiyah and Lengkanawati, 2019).

Those existing standard norms of teacher-centered culture support students to be passive in learning resulting in students' tendency to rely on teachers' explanations and decisions in learning without voicing their own; thus, they have low academic performance and no goal orientation (Salili et al, 2001). Padmadewi (2016) also explained that the traditional cultures and norms of teacher-centeredness in the learning process leads students to not perceive needs for studying English causing them to be unenthusiastic to take chances in learning. When this occurs, students will have less opportunity to participate in activities that foster deep knowledge mastery, cannot possess cognitive and metacognitive strategies for handling difficult tasks, and have low self-competence and self-esteem (Pintrich and Groot, 1990). As a result, their willingness and resilience become negatively affected and their autonomy development is neglected.

In addition to those cultures, promoting learner autonomy has become a challenge since Indonesia's educational setting involves a big classroom of 25 to 30 students. Big classrooms inhibit teachers' ability in supporting learner autonomy since some problems emerged. Major issues encompass inadequate classroom management, demotivation of both teachers and students, insufficient assessment of individual strengths and weaknesses, challenges in managing

teachers' physical and mental stress, failure to achieve course learning objectives, shortcomings in fostering robust teacher-student relationships, and inadequacy in creating an effective learning environment (Ashraf, 2021). Those factors result in teachers' difficulty in supporting students to have a learner autonomy attitude in learning. Additionally, student-centered learning cannot normally happen in such a learning environment.

The fact that learner autonomy is rarely promoted in language teaching and learning in Indonesia has encouraged scholars to investigate the promotion of learner autonomy with different strategies. Rinekso and Kurniawan (2018) conducted a study aiming at investigating English teachers' perception on the use of ICT to promote learner autonomy. Another study conducted by Yuzulia (2020) aiming at exploring teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy concept and strategies implemented by teachers to promote learner autonomy shows that teachers use technology such as blogs, self-journal, and video conference to promote learner autonomy. In addition, Yosintha and Yuniarti (2021) investigated how learner autonomy is conducted online in Indonesia. Besides, Ningsih and Yusuf (2021) conducted research to reveal teachers' voices regarding learner autonomy principles in online learning context and discuss the practices of learner autonomy-based teaching and practices conducted by teachers in online learning context.

Those results of study reports indicate that learner autonomy practice may differ depending on the situation, context, and culture of learning. Practices of learner autonomy in online learning may be different to those in offline one. In addition, practices of autonomy may be supported by technology in which not all schools are privileged. Furthermore, learning also takes place in various backgrounds and cultures where its practices may also be different. The one similarity among those different learning contexts is that the requirement to promote learner autonomy is an urge since the schools implement Indonesia national curricula which emphasize on the support of learner-centered approach, in addition to positive impacts learner autonomy results in learning as discussed above.

Islamic boarding schools, where students' educational activities are primarily confined to those provided within the school premises and dormitories, are no exception. A study from Aisyah et al (2020) aiming at exploring learners' degree of autonomy at one Islamic Boarding School in Kuningan City voiced that learners are capable of setting their own learning goals, yet they cannot monitor and evaluate their learning process. Some constraints that challenge learners to be autonomous in learning are noticed. Similarly, Fatmawati and Wirza (2022) investigated the adoption of autonomous language learning behaviors among bilingual students. The study revealed that students implemented the behaviors of autonomous language learners, yet they also face a dilemma in determining reasons to learn, lack of motivation, and need for others in learning.

Studies from Umar (2021) and Rahayu (2015) also pictured some challenges that English language learning in Islamic boarding schools face. Umar (2021) analyzed the challenges students face in learning English and figured out that students' sense of being forced, low mastery of the basic concepts or intakes, less endorsement from their environment, and having less chance to practice serve as sources of difficulties for students to learn. These factors contribute to students' low motivation and reluctance to embrace autonomy. Similarly, in another study conducted by Rahayu (2015), it has been determined that students' insufficient grasp of language skills, including vocabulary mastery, grammatical patterns, and correct pronunciation, is influenced by environmental factors that do not facilitate regular practice in everyday language communication. Consequently, students experience psychological challenges such as fear and diminished motivation.

Findings of the previously discussed studies shed the light that the behavior of autonomous learners is not easily possessed in Islamic boarding school context. It is a complete process where learners need to be involved in the whole agenda of learning through a learner-centered approach in order to reduce the potential constraints. Even though each study reports certain challenges regarding learner autonomy promotion in Islamic Boarding Schools, notwithstanding, a glimpse of autonomous practices is still implemented by students (Aisyah et al, 2020; Fatmawati and Wirza, 2022). This means that learner autonomy promotion is possible to increase in the sites. This idea serves as a

fundamental reason which interests the researcher to conduct a study on learner autonomy in an Islamic boarding school which has been rarely explored. Without disparaging the sites' strict policy on learning rules, students' Islamic agenda, and limited technology use, learner autonomy in this context is noteworthy due to the presence of English programs within the school and the employment of qualified teachers with relevant educational backgrounds. Therefore, there is potential for the development of autonomy practice. In addition, students in Islamic boarding schools live in dormitories where independent living and learning is encouraged. By fostering their attitude towards learner autonomy, it is expected that autonomous behaviors can be cultivated and developed among them.

In line with those previously mentioned studied (Aisyah et al, 2020; Rahayu, 2015; and Umar, 2021) who found and explained that students in Islamic boarding school tend to be low autonomous, the researcher finds the urge to conduct more studies in this context and site since there have been limited studies on the topic in this learning context. Even though Fatmawati and Wirza's (2022) have already covered learners' autonomy practices and challenges in Islamic Boarding schools, yet the authors acknowledged that the study was undertaken in a time-constrained, remote, and unavoidable setting, like the Covid pandemic; as a result, there was insufficient data.

Due to those limitations, the fact that this research focuses on more detailed autonomous activities that the learners undertake in the adequate learning time and situation highlights why this research is worth doing; this research focuses on more detailed autonomous activities the learners do. Other than covering three main activities: planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning like those in Fatmawati and Wirza (2022), more detailed attitude is explored in this study through Joshi's (2011) framework: learners' perceptions on their teacher's roles and their own roles in learning English, learners' self-awareness, self-effort, self-esteem, and motivation which are depicted through learners' voices on their experiences and observable behaviors. In addition to those practices, while previous studies sought learner autonomy challenges in big picture rooted from student practices, this study explores challenges students face in doing

autonomous activities seen from thorough dimensions: school, teacher, students themselves, and learning culture (Little, 2007).

1.2 Research Questions

Grounded in the aforementioned rationales, this study addresses two research questions as follows:

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?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Referring to the research questions proposed above, this study will be conducted to:

1. find out practices of learner autonomy implemented by students in an Islamic boarding school context; and
2. identify the challenges encountered by learners in implementing autonomous learning.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The research is limited to exploring learner autonomy of students in eighth grade in an Islamic boarding school in West Sumatera. The site is selected due to some reasons. Firstly, the school implements one of Indonesia national curriculum, *Kurikulum 2013*, where learner autonomy is strongly suggested to be promoted in the whole learning process through learner centeredness. Secondly, different from other schools who also implement the same curricula, learning in an Islamic boarding school has some uniqueness: this research site relies on strict regulations where students live at the dorm and they are not privileged in using technology in learning. While technology is reported to have positive impacts on learner autonomy promotion (Lan, 2018), learner autonomy in technology-restricted schools is interesting to dig into. Thirdly, 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,

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their practices of autonomy as well as challenges they encounter to be autonomous in learning are also expected to vary.

The study focuses on students' practices and challenges in carrying out activities which support the development of learner autonomy. They will be figured out through Joshi's (2011) framework: learners' perceptions on their teacher's roles and their own roles in learning English, learners' self-awareness, self-effort, self-esteem, and motivation. Regarding the challenges students face in doing autonomous activities, they will be seen from four dimensional aspects (Little, 2007): school, teacher, student, and learning culture constraints.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Theoretically, the findings of this study are expected to meet the expectation that students in this site will have many practices on learner autonomy and can deal with obstacles in learning. Thus, students will have responsibilities for their own learning. *Practically*, the results of this study are expected to be used as a reflection for teachers and school's policy makers to consider promoting learner autonomy to help students to be independent in learning. *Professionally*, the result of this study is expected to be useful and helpful for the educational stakeholders, especially English teachers in Indonesia to encourage the promotion of learner autonomy, to guide students during their learning process, and to take actions regarding challenges students face in the implementation of learner autonomy.

1.6 Clarification of Terms

The fundamental operational terms in this study will be defined to prevent misunderstanding and misconception.

Learner autonomy : means the capacity to take responsibility for one's own learning, and learners are able to make decisions and controls in every stage of their learning process by applying self-management strategies of learning (Holec, 1979; Little, 1991). In this study, learner autonomy refers to learner ability

and willingness in undertaking activities which support them to be autonomous in learning depicted from their own perspectives, experiences, observable behaviors, and attitudes towards learning English.

Practices of autonomy

: are activities undertaken by learners inside and outside the classroom which can promote their autonomy in learning English (Joshi, 2011). In this study, learners' practices of autonomy are also investigated by adapting Joshi's (2011) framework of autonomous activities. It includes the aspects of learners' perceptions about teachers' and their own roles, learners' awareness, learners' self-efforts, learners' self-esteem, and learners' motivation in learning English. Most learner practices are reflected through their attitudes in the classroom, yet supporting activities learners undertake outside of the class do not go unnoticed.

Challenges of learner autonomy

: refers to constraints learners encounter in doing activities which can promote their autonomy. Little (2007) explained that there are some sources which can be constraints in promoting and developing learner autonomy. The constraints are from the school, teacher, student, and learning culture. In this study, challenges meant are constraints students face in doing autonomous activities both inside and outside the classroom. The challenges are

also seen from the four sources described by Little (2007), which illustrate how students are constrained from achieving autonomy in learning English due to factors originating from the school, teachers, learning environment, and the students themselves.

1.7 Organization of the Paper

This part shows a brief explanation of each point the chapter explains in this study.

Chapter 1 Introduction discusses background of the study, followed by research questions, objectives of the study, scope of the study, significance of study, clarification of key terms, and organization of the paper.

Chapter 2 Literature Review covers the theoretical foundation of the study and cites relevant theories as well as the examples which serve as the basis for research investigation. In addition, this part presents previous related studies which support the investigation of the research.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology provides a detailed elaboration on how the study was conducted, including the research design employed, the research site where the study took place, the participants involved, the methods used for data collection, the procedures implemented during the research, and the steps undertaken in data analysis.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion presents the results of the study and discusses their relation to existing theories and studies.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Recommendations emphasizes on the finding overview consisting of some conclusions and suggestions for education stakeholders and future researchers.