

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the broad idea of the study. The discussion coverage in this chapter includes the background information for choosing the current topic of the study, the research questions, the purpose of the study, the scope of the study, the significance of the study, definition of key terms, and the organizational paper.

1.1 Background of the Study

The changes in political, social, and pedagogical areas have caused a shift of focus in language curriculums and language pedagogies in many countries including Indonesia (Richards, 2002; Nguyen, 2010; Yildirim 2013; Marhaeni, 2015; Lengkanawati, 2017). The shift of focus itself is signalled by the increasing inclusion of learner autonomy (Lamb, 2000). Researchers indicate that traditionally learner autonomy does not tend to be explicitly expressed as a curriculum objective (Yildirim 2013; Marhaeni, 2015; Lengkanawati, 2017). It is indicated, however, that when learner autonomy is hidden or not explicitly stated as curriculum objectives, then it can make learner autonomy tends to be left far behind (Nguyen, 2010; Zhang & Sheepo, 2013; Marhaeni, 2015; Lengkanawati, 2017).

Nowadays, however, many curricula, including the newest Curriculum of 2013 in Indonesia, have begun to list attitudinal aspects including the constructions of learner autonomy as one of its core competencies (Ministry of Education, regulation number 65 & 66, 2013). Thus, the inclusion of learner autonomy in the curriculum indicates that the demands of inserting and developing learner autonomy in every teaching and learning practice have risen. Consequently, this changing of trend in education also signals that educational researchers and practitioners are ought to place their major attention on finding suitable environments and/or learning models in which the constructions of learner autonomy can be

developed (Uztosun, 2011; Tavallali & Marzban, 2015; Lengkanawati, 2017).

Essentially, the inclusion of learner autonomy in the curriculum means that, firstly, language learners should no longer be viewed as passive recipients of knowledge and information, instead, they are expected to show greater involvement in learning by planning, monitoring, and evaluating the achievement of knowledge and information that they learn (Little, 1991; Benson, 2007). Secondly, this means that language learners should have a greater awareness regarding the process and product of learning by continuously reflecting themselves upon the learning process (Lamb, 2000). Lastly, the insertion of learner autonomy in the curriculum means that language learners should be the ones who use target language more intensively both in and out of classroom environments since the degree of autonomy of the language learners will depend on what they can do with the language itself (Little, 2009).

The inclusion of learner autonomy in the curriculum in Indonesian context is not without reasons (Marhaeni, 2015; Lengkanawati, 2017). In this case, it is clarified that the aspects of learner autonomy such as active involvement, reflection, and constant use of target language, are required as they have great potentials to lead the learners to get number of benefits (Little, 1991; Littlewood, 1996; Lamb, 2000). Little (1991) and Littlewood (1996), for instance, agree that students who are autonomous would not only be effective language learners in their immediate contexts but also in longer terms and not only in their subject areas but also in other aspects of their lives. Additionally, Lamb (2000), states that the possession of the aspects or constructions of learner autonomy would lead the students to acquire active, adaptable and critical qualities of learning and living.

Although the above descriptions have indicated the rationale and importance of the inclusion of learner autonomy in foreign language learning, yet it is stated that shaping and directing the learners to develop learner autonomy and its aspects can be very challenging (Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCinto, & Turner, 2004; Yatsibas & Cepik, 2015). The

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challenge is proven by the fact that majority of the learners still have a great deal of difficulties to show progress and achievement in the area of language skills, especially in reading (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2008; Balcikanci, 2010; Zhang & Sheepo, 2013).

As indicated previously, the challenge of showing progress in foreign language learning especially in reading is typically resulted from the lack of learner autonomy. In this case, the language learners are proven not to be able to carry active involvement, reflection, and target language use in reading (Chan, 2001; Arlene, 2010). In other words, the language learners still tend not to be able to plan, monitor, evaluate, and reflect on their own reading (Zhan & Sheepo, 2013). Meanwhile, it is acknowledged that reading is a complex mental activity that requires constant involvement and proper target language use of the learners. Thus, when learners cannot carry active involvement, reflection, and constant target language use in reading, then it may hinder the process of achieving effective reading or learning outcome (Schramm, 2008).

Furthermore, it is also indicated that if learners are left to display low degree of autonomy in their reading then it may finally lead the process of reading itself becoming less personal and less engaging (Chou & Lin, 2015). Consequently, when reading is perceived as becoming less personal and less engaging then it is predicted that the results of reading will be less and less satisfactory both for the learners and the teachers (Benson, 2007). Littlewood (1999), however, argues that such problems can actually be solved by facilitating the learner with supportive, systematic, and purposive learning models and/or approaches. In other words, it is indicated that finding learning models that can support the constructions of learner autonomy is required (Littlewood, 1999; Cotteral, 2008, p. 118; Rubin, 2008 p. 8).

In line with Littlewood (1999), researchers (Ankan & Bakla, 2011; Rao, 2012; Khoosfa & Khosrayanib, 2014) have proposed and tested different learning models that are claimed to be able to facilitate and nurture learner autonomy. Among the different learning models proposed,

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portfolio is indicated to be the appropriate one as it is not only able to foster the development of the learners' language skills but also learner autonomy (Büyükdumana & Şirina, 2010). The potential of portfolio in developing many competencies including learner autonomy has also been noticed in the Indonesia context as portfolio is advocated as one of the alternatives of pedagogical models recommended by the recent curriculum (Peraturan Menteri Kebudayaan dan Pendidikan RI, 2013, regulation number 65 and 66).

Additionally, along with the increase in the popularity of the portfolio and learner autonomy in foreign language learning, there are a number of studies which are focused on investigating the beneficial impact of the portfolio on the development language skills and learner autonomy (Atai & Nikuinezhad, 2006; Paesani, 2006; Wang & Liao, 2008; Yildirim, 2013; Marhaeni, 2015). In this case, it is revealed the studies generally give similar indication, that is, they support the aforementioned predictions regarding the mutual benefits and relations among the portfolio, language skills, and learner autonomy.

The first studies have proven the potential of portfolio to enhancing the development of students' language skills and certain aspects of learner autonomy (Paesani, 2006; Wang & Liao, 2008; Marhaeni, 2015). Wang and Liao (2008) investigated the application of learning portfolio as an assessment tool for university students in the technological field. They revealed that the learning portfolio gave a statistically significant impact to the improvement of students' communication skills and to the development of students' involvement in writing. Panesani (2006) and Marhaeni (2015) found a significant improvement on students' writing developments and reflection strategies once they were exposed to the use of portfolio. Although these studies have depicted the potential benefits of the portfolio in developing learner autonomy and students' language skills such as writing (Wang & Liao, 2008) and speaking skills (Loan & Tin, 2016), yet, still there seems to be less attention given to the development of learner autonomy in reading skill.

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In addition, other groups of researchers had investigated the extent to which portfolio can be used to foster learner autonomy and its aspects (Atai & Nikuinezhad, 2006; Yildirim, 2013). Atai and Nikuinezhad (2006), for instance, revealed that the portfolio was proven to be able to foster learner autonomy, especially in terms learners' awareness of their metacognitive strategies during learning. Similarly, Yildirim (2013) also investigated the use of portfolio to foster two aspects of learner autonomy namely students awareness and willingness to take responsibilities in learning. In this matter, portfolio was proven to be able to lead the students to move from dependence towards autonomy in learning.

Although some of these studies have recognized the thread between language portfolio and learner autonomy (Paesani, 2006; Wang & Liao, 2008; Marhaeni, 2015) and that they also have investigated the application of portfolio to foster several aspects of learner autonomy in the actual teaching and learning practices (Atai & Nikuinezhad, 2006; Yildirim, 2013), yet again, these studies still left one major gap. That gap is in a form of lack of information on the use of reading portfolio on fostering learner autonomy and its three interrelated aspects (learner involvement, reflection and target language use) in reading especially in the Indonesian context. Therefore, in recognition to the gap unfilled by the existing literature then this issue is considered to be worth investigated. It also is expected that by investigating this issue then this research study may offer valuable insights and/or ideas to those who are tempted to develop learner autonomy by the use of reading portfolio so that hopefully the quality of foreign language teaching and learning can be enhanced.

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1.2 Research Questions

The research questions assist the researcher to focus on investigating the questions which then need to be answered (Creswell, 2012; Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). Therefore, the research questions of the present study are as follow:

1. What is the profile of learner autonomy of the tenth graders of a vocational high school?
2. Does reading portfolio give significant impact on the development of learner autonomy?
3. What are the students' responses on the use of reading portfolio in developing learner autonomy?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

In regard to the research questions above, there is one main purpose of the study that is to find out the use of reading portfolio in developing learner autonomy. This main purpose is then broken down as follow:

1. To find out the profile of learner autonomy of the tenth graders of a vocational high school.
2. To find out the impact of the reading portfolio in developing learner autonomy.
3. To find out the students' responses regarding the use of portfolio in developing learner autonomy.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study is limited to investigate learner autonomy and the use of reading portfolio in developing learner autonomy in vocational high school level. The reason for using reading portfolio as a means of developing learner autonomy is due to the assumption that reading portfolio can assist students to carry active involvement, reflection, and target language use more in reading practice (Little, 1991; Little & Perclova,

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2001) so that as the result the degree of learner autonomy itself can be enhanced (Little, 2009).

In addition, the study is also limited only to investigate the impact of reading portfolio for developing learner autonomy. It is expected that the result of the study may shed a light on the application of reading portfolio in vocational high school level. However, it is stated that the impact of reading portfolio in developing learner autonomy may not be able to be revealed unless the profile of initial autonomy development of the students is firstly gained. Thus, inventory test was administered to the population of the research so that the reading portfolio could be properly implemented and that the impact of its implementation could be revealed.

In addition, to get more detail information about the implementation of reading portfolio to enhance or foster learner autonomy then interview was given to the students (Creswell, 2012; Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). The interview was given to the students who received classroom intervention in a form of implementation of reading portfolio. The interview was aimed to explore and elaborate more regarding how the students experienced the use of portfolio in their reading practice and how they responded the beneficial impact as well as barrier of the use of reading portfolio.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of the present study can be viewed from three different lenses namely theoretical, practical and professional lenses (Creswell, 2012, p. 66). Each of the significance of the present research will be described as follow.

Firstly, from the theoretical lens, the present study is expected to enrich and add to our understanding and to empirical report regarding learner autonomy and the use of reading portfolio in fostering learner autonomy in EFL context. In addition, the study is also expected to show the extent to which reading portfolio can develop each of the aspects of learner autonomy, namely; learner involvement, reflection and target

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language use (Little, 1991; Little, 1995; Little, 2009) in reading practice. It is expected that the process of studying theory through classroom interventions as shown in this present study will contribute to the refinement of the theoretical construct and effort of the promotion and development of learner autonomy in language reading.

Secondly, from the practical lens, the study is expected to help English language teachers as professional educational practitioners and inform schools or universities as educational institutions regarding the fruitful potential of reading portfolio in language learning especially reading. To be more precise, it is hoped that the result of the study may raise their awareness regarding the possibility of promoting and fostering not only the development of learner language skill but also the development of learner autonomy through the use of reading portfolio.

Finally, from the professional lens, the present study is expected to be able to encourage educational practitioners to develop and possibly extend the use of portfolio to enhance learner autonomy not only in reading practice but also in other language skills as well so that as the result a particularly significant development of learner autonomy as mandated by the curriculum can be achieved.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

This part elaborates the key terms that are frequently used in this study. The elaboration is aimed for giving definition in order to avoid misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the content of the study. The definitions of terms will be explained as follow.

1.6.1 Reading Portfolio

In this proposed research study reading portfolio is defined as a purposeful collection of the learners work that exhibits the “learners’ efforts, growth, and achievements” in reading skills (Paulson, Paulson & Meyer, 1991) which in turns it also enables to show the development of learner autonomy (Little, 1991; Little, 1995; Little 2009). Accordingly, in order to exhibit the intended goals, the reading portfolio itself consists of:

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1.6.1.1 Inventory Reading Task

Inventory reading task refers to a set of self-selected samples or artifacts of the learners' work in reading. The self-selected sample in inventory task is aimed to illustrate the learners' accomplishment of the standard and educational goal which are specifically arranged for them as stipulated in the curriculum that is used (Paulson, et.al, 1991).

1.6.1.2 Cover Letter and Reflection Log:

Cover letter refers to written justifications that the learners made regarding the selections of the samples work in inventory tasks (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996, Kose, 2008). Additionally, reflection log refers to the activity in which the learners judge their own work and reflect on their strategy of completing the assignments/works given to them (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996).

1.6.1.3 Showcase:

Showcase is an activity that the learners conduct in order to inform publicly to their peers and their teachers regarding their work in inventory reading tasks (Kose, 2008).

The above components of reading portfolio are selected and arranged in order to create an environment where students can gradually involve and reflect upon their own reading growth.

1.6.2 Learner Autonomy

The definition of learner autonomy in this study follows the idea of Little (1991; 1995; 2009). In this research study, learner autonomy is defined as learners' capability to take responsibilities and make decisions concerning aspects of their learning. Capability here encapsulates three major aspects of learner autonomy, namely learner involvement, reflection, and target language use (Little, 1991; Little, 1995). Learners' active involvement refers to learners' ability for planning, monitoring and evaluating the process of learning activities (Little, 1991). Target language use refers to learners' knowledge and attempt on using target language during reading practice (Little, 2009). Lastly, reflection reflects the

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psychological construct of the learners for when they make critical reflection over their learning as Little (1991) states that learners who are autonomous in their learning are those who are able to employ their capability “for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action” (p. 4).

1.7 Organization of the Paper

This study is reported in five chapters. The chapters are as follow:

Chapter I Introduction: It provides the research background, research questions, aims and significance of the study, and organization of the paper.

Chapter II Theoretical Foundation: This chapter cites some related theories and their examples as the basis of the research’s investigation. It also presents some relevant previous studies which are used to support the investigation of the research.

Chapter III Methodology: This chapter discusses a detail research methodology. Accordingly, this chapter consists of research questions, research designs, research setting, population, and samples, teaching procedures, data collection instrument, data collection procedures data analysis.

Chapter IV Findings and Discussion: This chapter discusses the results and the findings of this study and its analysis.

Chapter V Conclusion and Recommendations: This chapter presents the conclusion of the study and some suggestions for the English teachers, the institution, and also the future researchers who may be interested in this research area.

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