CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces several parts which become the starting point of the present study. It is divided into background of the study, the research questions addressed for the present study, the research purposes, significance of the study, scope of the study, clarification of terms, and organization of the paper.

1.1 Background of the Study

In Indonesian school context, teachers seemed to play dominant role in their teaching. This became a problem which was the learning tended to be teacher-centered (Zulfikar, 2009). To shift the learning, learner autonomy should be promoted. However, Lengkanawati (2016) found that teachers have not well uplifted learner autonomy as one of the key objectives in the teaching and learning. If teachers want their students to have a successful learning, learner autonomy should be more consistently promoted.

Learner autonomy has been one of the concerns in some studies conducted in Indonesia. Some teachers have tried to promote learner autonomy by employing a certain approach, learning, method, ICT, or any other ways in the teaching and learning process. In a bilingual primary school in Bali, Padmadewi (2016) investigated several techniques to promote learner autonomy by encouraging the use of reading log for students, evaluating their reading log, and giving rewards through 'reading rocket system' to make them interested in reading. The study revealed that those techniques could promote learner autonomy. Meanwhile, Yuliani and Lengkanawati (2017) tried to investigate a project-based learning (PBL) to promote learner autonomy in a junior high school in Bandung. By employing a descriptive qualitative, their study revealed that the project (a role play) could encourage students to be autonomous in their learning.

Promoting learner autonomy is not limited in the contexts of primary and secondary education. It is indeed relevant in higher education (Xhafferi, Waldisphül, Erikkson-Hotz, & Xhafferi, 2015). In higher education, learning should be more

learner-centered to encourage students to be autonomous. The Republic of Indonesia's Law No. 12 Year 2012 Article 4 states that one of the functions of higher education is helping students become autonomous. Consequently, learner autonomy is very essential to be promoted in the context of higher education. When it comes to fostering learner autonomy in the classroom, it is the task of the teacher (Aoki, 2008, as cited in Onozawa, 2010). The teacher should advise, give instruction and some helps to their learners. Ardi (2017) tried to employ *Schoology* to promote learner autonomy at an Indonesian university. His study showed that students could learn how to take control their own learning since the application enabled them to learn best according to their pace, time, and place. Considering the studies above, it is believed that learner autonomy is highly important.

In second language education, learner autonomy can be defined as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec, 1981, as cited in Ikonen, 2013, p. 5). From technical perspectives, learner autonomy is seen as the concept emphasizing 'the physical settings of learning' (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012, p. 5), which is when, where, and how learning takes place. From psychological perspectives, learner autonomy is believed as a *capacity* for detachment, critical thinking, decision making, and independent action (Karababa, Eker, & Artık, 2010; Little, 1991). The capacity can be displayed through the way the learner learns and how he or she transfers the knowledge learned to broader contexts. From political perspectives, it focuses on 'issues of power and control of learning' (Benson, 1997, as cited in Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012, p. 5). Meanwhile, sociocultural perspectives emphasize learner autonomy on self-regulation acquired through social interaction and participation (Oxford, 2003). Moreover, how the learners display autonomy can be viewed from these situations: (1) self-instruction, (2) self-direction, (3) self-access learning, and (4) individualized instruction (Dickinson, 1987, as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Following the definitions above, learner autonomy can be defined as a potential which resides within the learner to take control of his/her own learning. It also relates to when, where, how the learning itself takes place.

The notion of learner autonomy has been one of the interests in education as the educational goal (Little, 1991). It got the historical roots from the philosophy

field and imported to the language teaching and learning fields through psychology and educational theory (Benson, 2009, as cited in Gholami, 2016). The idea of autonomy is considered as the western concept which derived from the philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill who claimed the importance of free will as the foundation of working society (Benson, 2011). There should be a careful consideration about the cultural setting in which the learning occurs (Little, 1999). For instance, in African settings, the notion of autonomy is considered unsuitable for employing technology-based approaches to language instruction (Sonaiya, 2002, as cited in Benson, 2006). In a culture which prioritizes groups or communities, people seem to have a tendency to have their identity based on the community they belong to (Neupane, 2010). Following this argument, learner autonomy seems to work in self-oriented culture rather than in collectivist culture (Holliday, 2007, as cited in Neupane, 2010). However, she drew a conclusion that no matter what culture people belong to, they like individual freedom. Therefore, this means that culture does not seem to be a challenge for fostering learner autonomy.

Interestingly, learner autonomy has received more attention for studies in the fields of language teaching and learning in last two decades (Ertürk, 2016). At least, three scopes have been covered such as implementation, belief, and perception. The first scope encompasses the implementation of ways to promote learner autonomy. Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCinto, and Turner (2014) proposed three ways of considering practices which may support student decision and ownership. The study suggests the teacher's role is to support cognitive autonomy (e.g. giving opportunities to students to self-evaluate their own learning). However, the fact that there was a suggestion to support cognitive autonomy, Ma and Gao (2010) tried to promote autonomy by involving the students in developing process syllabus. The study revealed that there was a shift in decision making in which the students play the power to make decision and try to be responsible for their own learning indicated with high motivation.

In view of the above studies, some gaps are still identified. Two of them are beliefs and perceptions. The first gap about beliefs was then addressed by some researchers. Xu (2009) investigated Chinese non-English postgraduates' beliefs

about learner autonomy. The study revealed that most of the students had no clear idea about learner autonomy even though they were in postgraduate level. The study then suggested that there should be efforts made to promote the importance of learner autonomy in higher education and contribute to their understanding of learner autonomy.

Meanwhile, Joshi (2011) tried to find out the autonomous activities undertaken by Master's level students majoring in English education program at one of universities in Kathmandu, Nepal. The study revealed that both students and teachers had positive views towards autonomous learning. However, a study by Nguyen (2014) found that teachers in Vietnamese higher education context were lack of understanding of learner autonomy. Thus, the key characteristics of autonomous learning were not manifest in their classrooms.

Considering students' and teachers' beliefs of learner autonomy, Xhafferi, Waldisphül, Erikkson-Hotz, and Xhafferi (2015) compared the beliefs in two universities (Macedonia and Switzerland). Their study found that psychological outlooks of learner autonomy (e.g. monitoring and reflecting on learning) were viewed as the most essential in autonomous learning. They suggested that teachers should take responsibility for supporting their learners to become more autonomous. Correspondingly, the teachers should be aware of their roles in promoting learner autonomy and teach their students about learning how to learn.

The second gap about perception was then addressed by Rushidi and Rushidi-Rexhepi (2015), and Farahi (2015). Rushidi and Rushidi-Rexhepi (2015) investigated the students' and teachers' views towards autonomous learning. Their study revealed that students perceived their roles as an essential part in learning. They also showed good results in perceiving autonomous activities they undertook to become autonomous. They showed their awareness in their learning, their self-effort, broader autonomous activities, self-esteem, use of reference materials, motivation, and use of technology in learning. Similarly, the professors had positive attitudes towards learner autonomy.

In North Cyprus, Farahi (2015) identified the teachers' and students' perceptions of learner autonomy in an English Education program. The study

revealed that students should be involved in decision making for their learning and they have potential to become autonomous. The teachers suggested that there should be a need to revise the ELT curriculum, redesign the course, and allow their students to select their topics for assignments or projects, and teach them how to learn in order to promote learner autonomy.

In Vietnam, Anh (2018) investigated the students' perceptions of learner autonomy in a higher education. By conducting a narrative interview, the study revealed that most of the students had positive voices on learner autonomy and its function at a higher education context. Meanwhile, in Indonesian EFL settings, Lengkanawati (2016) identified the teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy and its implementation in EFL settings. By employing a descriptive analytical approach design, she revealed that the teachers perceived learner autonomy in four perspectives: technical, psychological, political, and sociocultural. The learner autonomy workshops given to the participants were proved to have contribution to the teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy.

Looked from the previous studies about perceptions of learner autonomy, they were focused on investigating the perceptions of EFL students. Considering today's context in the terms of perceptions, some gaps remain in the surface. It is important to investigate what learner autonomy means to General English learners or non-English major students since they study English to improve their English skills for everyday communication, different from English major students who study English for a specific purpose (e.g. academic purpose). It was assumed that they would have different ways in perceiving learner autonomy. Farahi (2015) believed that it is essential to understand the perceptions of both teachers and their students because perceptions influence their actions. Perceptions could play a significant role in language learning and contribute to language learning behaviour and motivation (Cotteral, 1995). The present study was then conducted to investigate the non-English major students' and their teachers' perceptions as well. The perceptions included the autonomous activities undertaken by the students to support their autonomy and the efforts made by the teachers to promote autonomy

in their teaching. Thus, there was a need to delve into perceptions since it could contribute to students' and teachers' practices.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the explanation above, the research questions were proposed as follows.

1. What are non-English major students' perceptions of learner autonomy in English language learning?
2. What activities are non-English major students likely to do to encourage themselves to become autonomous in learning English?
3. What are English teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy in English language learning?
4. What efforts do English teachers usually make to encourage their students to become autonomous?

1.3 Research Purposes

Following the research questions addressed above, the present study was attempted to identify the perceptions of learner autonomy in English language learning perceived by non-English major students and their English teachers. Moreover, it was aimed at finding out the activities which the students usually undertake to encourage themselves to become autonomous in learning English. Furthermore, it identified the efforts which the English teachers usually make to help their students become autonomous in learning English.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The present study might serve to contribute to the scope of perceptions of learner autonomy in language learning in higher education level which were expressed by English teachers and their non-English major students. Furthermore, it might be helpful for those who are interested in conducting the similar study in the future.

1.5   Scope of the Study

The study was focused on exploring the perceptions of learner autonomy in English language learning in higher education level. The perceptions of learner autonomy were perceived by non-English major students who have taken English I and II courses at one of the private universities in Bandung. Moreover, it tried to find out what autonomous activities they undertake in order to encourage themselves to become autonomous learners. It was also focused on identifying the English teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy and their efforts in helping their students become autonomous learners in English language learning.

1.6   Clarification of Terms

1. *Learner autonomy*: the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec, 1981, as cited in Ikonen, 2013, p. 5).

2. *Learner autonomy in this study refers to* the perceptions of learner autonomy perceived by non-English major students and their English teachers (to answer the Research Questions number 1 and 3), the activities which the students undertake to encourage themselves to become autonomous in learning English (to answer the Research Question number 2), and the efforts which the English teachers usually make to help their students become autonomous in learning English (to answer the Research Question number 4).

3. *Perceptions* have an important role in second language learning for the reason that they may influence second language learners' behaviour and motivation (Cotteral, 1995). Moreover, "in promoting learner autonomy, it is essential to understand the perceptions of both teachers and students because perceptions influence their actions" (Farahi, 2015, p. 24). Taking this into account, the present study was focused on finding out the perceptions of learner autonomy (technical, political, psychological, and sociocultural) in English language learning expressed by non-English major students and their English teachers. It also identified the activities

they are likely to undertake to encourage themselves to become autonomous learners. Furthermore, it was aimed at finding out the efforts which the English teachers usually make to help their learners become autonomous learners in English language learning.

4. *Activities* in the present study are limited to the activities, undertaken by the students to encourage themselves to become autonomous, obtained from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, not the activities observed.

5. *Efforts* in the present study also refer to the efforts made by the teachers in helping their students become autonomous in learning English. The efforts they make were obtained from an open-ended questionnaire and their elaboration of the efforts in the interview sessions, not from the efforts observed in classrooms.

1.7 Organization of the Paper

This part shows a brief explanation of the points of each chapter of the present study.

- Chapter I Introduction includes background of the study, research questions, research purposes, significance of the study, scope of the study, clarification of terms, and organization of the paper.

- Chapter II Literature Review covers a brief history of learner autonomy, perceptions of learner autonomy (technical, psychological, political, and sociocultural perspectives), promoting autonomy (the teacher's roles and the learner's roles), criteria of learner autonomy, issues and problems in the implementation of learner autonomy, previous studies, and concluding remarks.

- Chapter III Methodology covers research design, research site and participants, data collection techniques (instrumentations and procedures), data analysis, ethics, and concluding remarks.

- Chapter IV Findings and Discussion covers the results of the analysis of the study gained from the data (both questionnaires and interviews carried out to the participants). It discusses the findings to answer the

research questions proposed. Moreover, it presents the concluding remarks of the chapter.

- Chapter V Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations covers the summary of the study conducted and some implications, and suggestions for future studies.