

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter provides the background information for choosing the topic of the research. Then, the statement why this research is necessary to carry out is presented. This section continues with the statement of the research problems, research aims, and research questions. Then, the significance of the study and clarification of the terms are outlined. The chapter concludes with an outline of the organization of the dissertation.

1.1. Background of the Research

Over the past few decades, learner autonomy in language learning has attracted the attention of many researchers and scholars. Many research findings have reported the strengths of learner autonomy for language teaching and learning. For instance, Dam (1995); Jiao (2005); and Rao (2005) reported that learner autonomy can make learner active participants in classroom activities. In their studies, Jianfeng et al. (2018); Spratt et al. (2002); Zarei & Zarei (2015) confirmed that learner autonomy boosts learners' motivation. The study conducted by Chan (2001) and Hsu et al. (2019) revealed that learner autonomy enhanced learners' responsibilities for learning and helped learners to become more effective and independent (Benson, 2011; Smith, 2008). Some studies have also been explored to carry out an investigation about the relationship between learner autonomy and language proficiency (Dafei, 2007; Little, 2007; Myartawan et al., 2013; Sakai & Takagi, 2009). Learner autonomy promotes lifelong learning for students (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Egel, 2009; Jiao, 2005; Mynard, 2019). Based on the explanation above, it is believed that learner autonomy promises positive results in language teaching and learning.

Learner autonomy is characterized by student-centered learning. Students do not merely depend on the teacher so that they are actively involved in learning. (Jacobs & Shan, 2015). The teacher as a facilitator helps students to regulate their own learning (Voller, 2014). Teachers should create and maintain a comfortable learning

environment to make students learn independently in order to make them active in learning. So, students do not hesitate to express opinions or ask questions or in class as well as play an active part in discussions. Besides, teachers should teach learning skills to encourage them to study independently, such as finding relevant learning material outside the classroom, selecting relevant material, and using suitable strategies to learn English (Lengkanawati, 2017). To sum up, the learner autonomy is the virtuous idea to enable students to be independent in learning.

Language learners who are able to learn independently may lead to greater proficiency in language use (Dörnyei, 2001). This suggests that autonomous learning is vital provided that students would like to reach the appropriate level of communicative proficiency and become successful language learners. Exactly as stated by Lamb (2002), "Almost certainly, successful students will need a degree of autonomy" (p.38). It can be said that learner autonomy is one of the feasible variables to decide either the success or failure of the process of foreign language acquisition.

Defined simply, in Indonesia, English language proficiency is an essential prerequisite for students to enter university, obtain a bachelor's degree, and apply for jobs (Hadi, 2019). Most Indonesian students still have difficulties communicating well in spoken and written modes (Renandya, 2018). Even though they have learnt English more than ten years from primary school to university, their English language proficiency seems low (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Lamb, 2000; Madya, 2002). In other words, many students are still unable to use English for communication purposes. Unsatisfactory proficiency of students was also revealed by Lamb (2002) where he found that the majority of students in Indonesia acquired a low level of English proficiency when attending the university. It was also discussed by Kirkpatrick (2007) in which he mentioned that since Indonesian students' proficiency at the entry-level into the university is mediocre, teaching English in the classroom focuses greatly on both grammar and translation. Hence, the students generally found that English appears

to be difficult after being tested. They showed various degrees of proficiency particularly for most of those who did not meet the standard (Renandya et al., 2018).

The results of the 2021 English Proficiency Index (EPI) exhibited that Indonesia ranked 80th out of 112 countries in the world. With a score of 466, Indonesia falls under the low proficiency band category (<https://www.ef.com/wwen/epi/>). Based on this rank, Indonesia was considered having low English proficiency level with other countries. Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to the factors contributing on the improvement of English language skills of Indonesian students. Suharmanto (2003) and Lengkanawati (2017) assert that one of the right solutions to improve the quality of Indonesian students is by implementing learner autonomy.

This is in line with the Indonesian education system, especially in the implementation of the 2013 curriculum, learner autonomy is demanded to be promoted in teaching and learning process. Learners need to be autonomous in learning to keep up with the continuous change of information, including in learning English as a foreign language. They should change their role from users of the information into creators of knowledge (Schuster et al., 2015). Then, the teacher's role changes as a navigator in teaching and learning (Çakici, 2015). The implementation of the latest curriculum (2013 curriculum) offers new hope in the learning process. The curriculum suggested teachers to shift learning environment from teacher-centered to learner-centered. Previously, teachers transferring knowledge or giving information to students. Today, learners should find information or knowledge by themselves. They can collaborate with their friends from different parts of the world in building knowledge. Consequently, learners need to be more active, autonomous and independent in their language learning.

Learner autonomy has been documented by many researchers as practical variables that identify either the success or failure of the process of foreign language acquisition. Learner autonomy has contribution to language proficiency (Jianfeng et al., 2018; Kiet, 2018; Lengkanawati, 2014; Mistar, 2001; Myartawan et al., 2013; Samaie et al., 2015; Suharmanto, 2003). Furthermore, Little (2007) spells out that

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learner autonomy development and the growth of target language skills are reciprocally supportive and integrated. In other words, the learner autonomy is seen as a means or tool and as an end in learning. To summarize, since learners who are able to take their own initiative, an effort to learn and know how to manage and regulate their own learning, they are guaranteed to achieve good results and success in learning.

Students need to practice autonomous learning if they are to reach an appropriate level of communicative proficiency and become successful language learners. Thus, fostering learner autonomy will be an important effort to help students attain satisfactory results in their English language learning (Lengkanawati, 2017; Iamudom & Tangkiengsirisin, 2020; Öztürk, 2019). Based on the findings of several studies from outside the country, such as Dafei (2007), Nguyen (2008), Ünal et al. (2017), Xia & Zhenghou (2015), Jianfeng, et al. (2018) learner autonomy had improved students' language proficiency. The results also indicate that learner autonomy could predict students' English proficiency. Many of the studies suggest that students should raise their awareness of the significance of learner autonomy and empower them to take more charge of their own learning process to enhance their language proficiencies. In a view of the problems mentioned previously and the great influence of learner autonomy on students' proficiency, learner autonomy is needed to be implemented in the Indonesian settings. Conducting a study in this area will also contribute to fostering the better implementation of the 2013 curriculum that is believed can cultivate learner autonomy.

Despite many empirical studies that have been conducted in terms of learner autonomy in ESL and EFL context by many researchers (Abdel Razeq, 2014; Alrabai, 2017; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019; Kobayashi, 2020; Lin & Reinders, 2019; Sönmez, 2016; Tayjasanant & Suraratdecha, 2016), the topic of learner autonomy is still a new research area in Indonesia. In Indonesian EFL context, learner autonomy has been introduced by some experts and researchers. Majority of the study had focused on investigating teachers' perspective on learner autonomy (Agustina, 2017;

Lengkanawati, 2016, 2017; Melvina & Suherdi, 2019), investigating secondary school students' readiness to develop autonomous learning (Cirocki et al., 2019), investigating pre-services teachers readiness to learn independently (Fauzi et al., 2020), examining non-English major students' beliefs and practices on learner autonomy (Daflizar, 2017), exploring secondary school teachers' and students perception and practices towards autonomous learning (Khotimah et al., 2019; Ramadhiyah & Lengkanawati, 2019), autonomous learning activities (Khulafiyah et al., 2021), learner autonomy and gender (Mardjuki, 2018), learner autonomy and technology (Andina et al., 2020; Melvina et al., 2021), knowing the characteristics of autonomous learners and factors influencing the autonomous learners in learning English (Kemala, 2014; Utami, 2006; Tabiati, 2016), and analyzing senior high schools English teachers' role in promoting learning autonomy (Ja, 2017). However, the theme focusing on learner autonomy of university students is still rare. This gives the present study significant importance as it attempted to fill the gaps in the research.

In terms of the study dealing with the connection between learner autonomy and language proficiency, there are many studies conducted outside the country (Dafei, 2007; Nguyen, 2008; Sakai, 2009; Mohamadpour, 2013; Xia & Zhenghou, 2015; Ünal et al., 2017; Alrabai, 2017; Jianfeng et al., 2018; Ezzi, 2018; Kiet, 2019; Malik et al., 2021). However, to date, there are very few studies in Indonesia that attempt to research the relationship of learner autonomy and students' English proficiency (Myartawan et al., 2013 and Lengkanawati, 2014). The majority of the research revealed that learners' autonomy and the English proficiency are positively correlated and most previous studied adopted correlation or multiple correlation regression analysis for identifying the relationships. So far, very little research has been done on adopting the second generation multivariate data analysis method.

Based on the explanation above, a study on the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency in the Indonesian EFL setting is becoming a pressing need. Benson (2001) and Dafei (2007) also stated that the literature on learner

autonomy, especially on the relationship between learner autonomy and language proficiency, still lacks empirical support. Accordingly, the present study has the purpose to explore the learner autonomy of EFL Indonesian university students. Specifically, this research investigates Indonesian undergraduate EFL students' learner autonomy regarding four aspects of learner autonomy (technical, psychological, political, and sociocultural), the relationships between learner autonomy and language proficiency, and the ways of the learners in learning English autonomously.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Globalization has made English a globally prominent language. In this era of globalization, English is an important factor for success in every aspect, such as academics and achieving academic degrees from overseas universities (Diem & Abdullah, 2020), communication (Jenkins, 2006), careers, or business (McKay, 2012). It is also mainly used for international publications (Graddol, 2000; Kirkpatrick, 2009; Phillipson, 2003; Schrock, 2009), sharing information on the internet (Crystal, 2003), and employee requirements for employment and economic well-being (Coleman, 2011). Thus, Indonesian students' English skills should meet international standards. However, Indonesian EFL learners seem to find it difficult to achieve a high level of proficiency. It, of course, becomes an obstacle when they contend in the global world. The implementation of learner autonomy is believed to be one of the right completion to improve student's English proficiency (Dörnyei, 2001; Lamb, 2002; Lengkanawati, 2016; Suharmanto, 2003).

Today, learner autonomy has become the main goal in EFL teaching and learning and considered can improve students' English skills and helping students' future career benefits from being autonomous learners. By having autonomous learning ability, students can anticipate the challenge of their future. Besides, they realize that learning is a life-long process where students need an ability to adapt and keep learning to follow the changes of society (Weinstein & Acee, 2018). As echoed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim, Indonesian students must be

technologically literate, creative, highly motivated, independent, and innovative in facing the challenges of globalization. Therefore, the Indonesian government much paid attention to the focus of language teaching in the 21st century, which has begun to play an important role in helping language learners to become more active, creative, and independent in their learning. They have started to highlight the importance of developing students' learner autonomy in order to fulfill the needs of social development and globalization (Agustina, 2017; Bajrami; 2015). Then, promoting learner autonomy has become a prominent agenda. In 2013 curriculum teachers are demanded to advance learner autonomy in their teaching practices and turn teacher-centered into learner-centered learning. Students learn independently and do not rely on the teacher so that they are actively involved in learning. Learner autonomy directs learners to be more independent in the process of teaching and learning. It is also effective in reducing teacher-centered learning environments. By implementing learner autonomy, students can take responsibility for their own learning and lead them to become successful language learners.

1.3. Research Questions

The research questions are listed below:

1. To what degree are the undergraduate EFL learners autonomous?
2. How do undergraduate EFL learners learn autonomously viewed from four aspects of learner autonomy?
3. What is the influence of learner autonomy on English Proficiency?

1.4. Aims of the Research

The present study examines learner autonomy in the Indonesian context and its relationships with English proficiency. It will study the four aspects of learner autonomy demonstrated by Indonesian university students majoring in English. Specifically, the study will investigate the level of autonomy that they exhibit while learning English as a foreign language, explore how they learn English autonomously in terms of four aspects of learner autonomy: technical, psychological, political-

philosophical, and socio-cultural autonomy (Benson, 1997; Oxford, 2003), and examine the influence of the four aspects of learner autonomy on students' language proficiency.

1.5. Significance of the Research

The results of this study are expected to provide some significance. First, this research will provide English teachers, curriculum designers, and institutions with quantitative-qualitative data on learner autonomy in Indonesia so that it can offer some suggestions for formulating future interventions in developing learner autonomy and improving students' English skills, such as curriculum design, learning activities, and learner training.

Second, this research will provide an understanding of the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency. So far, several studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency in the context of ESL and EFL. However, very little research has been conducted in the Indonesian context. Therefore, the present study is the next research that will systematically investigate the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency in the Indonesian context. As such, this study fills the gap in the areas of learner autonomy and English language learning.

Third, most previous studies investigating the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency have analyzed the data by correlation and multiple regression. So far, very little research has been done on adopting the second-generation multivariate data analysis method, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This present study will adopt a Partial Least Square- Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Adopting this method makes a distinctive contribution to the field and offers alternative approaches to correlational research.

In addition, this study is expected to enrich the literature on learner autonomy in the Indonesian and Asian contexts. Furthermore, the findings of this study are also expected to be applied not only in the Indonesian context but also in other contexts that have similar characteristics.

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1.6. Clarification of Terms

To the extent of this research, some terms used in this research are clarified below.

1.6.1 Learner autonomy

Benson (1997) states that learner autonomy is a 'multi-dimensional' concept. It is defined as the capacity to control every aspect of learning including learning management, cognitive process, and learning content.

Learner autonomy in this study refers to the self-perception of autonomy, level, and practice by the EFL undergraduate students. Students' level of learner autonomy is assessed based on the four aspects of learner autonomy, namely technical, psychological, political-philosophical, and sociocultural autonomy, and obtained from questionnaire and semi-structured interview. Students' practice of learner autonomy in English language learning is also observed based on these four aspects of learner autonomy. Then, learner autonomy in this study also refers to the aspects or dimensions that could best predict English language proficiency. Learner autonomy works as the independent variable. Specifically, the four aspects of learner autonomy are called exogenous variables.

To be specifically, technical autonomy in this study emphasizes as the learners' ability to use cognitive and metacognitive strategies, such as setting goals, planning, reflecting, monitoring, and evaluating the learning process. It also emphasize the learners' ability to take control of their learning when the learners need to perform independent learning. The psychological aspect concern intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, metacognitive and affective sub-dimension. The political-philosophical aspect of autonomy refers to the freedom to learn, group autonomy, which views the teacher as an authority, and individual autonomy, which signifies one's ability to control one's own learning. The sociocultural autonomy in this study is related to learners' learning view of learning with or from teachers and /or other learners and in different cultures.

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1.6.1 Degree of Learner Autonomy

Degree of learner autonomy in this research is defined as the level of learners' autonomous behavior. In this study, the degree of learner autonomy is measured by using Measuring Instruments for Language Learner Autonomy (MILLA) adapted from Murase (2015).

1.6.3 English Language Proficiency

English Language Proficiency is the ability of students to use the English language to make and communicate meaning in spoken and written contexts. In this study, English language proficiency is an endogenous or dependent variable influenced by learner autonomy (exogenous or independent variable). Students' English proficiency is measured by scores of language skills subjects, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing for academic purposes.

1.6.4 Autonomous learning

Autonomous learning is a learner-centered approach to foreign language learning that develops learners' ability to take control of their own learning (Benson, 2013). Autonomous learning in this study refers to how undergraduate EFL students learn English autonomously viewed from four aspects of learner autonomy, obtained from classroom observation.

1.7. Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is presented in five chapters. Chapter I provides the background of the research, statement of the problem, aim of the research, significance of the research, clarification of terms, and organization of the dissertation. Chapter II summarizes the concepts of learner autonomy, perspective of learner autonomy, main features of learner autonomy, misconceptions about learner autonomy, levels of autonomy, importance of learner autonomy in higher education, learner autonomy in

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Indonesia, and the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency. Chapter III outlines the research design and methodology of the study. Then it discusses specifically the research site and participants, data collection and data analysis techniques. Chapter IV presents the results of the research and discussion of the findings. Chapter V involves the research conclusion and suggestions for further research.