THE QUEST OF SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING OF ADULT EFL LEARNERS IN INDONESIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

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Abstract: This research is aimed at questing adult EFL learners' self-directed learning performance in an Indonesian University. A case study is purposely employed to probing the learning behavior performed by adult learners when English language learning is taken as the context of this research carried out. Three student teachers are determined to be interviewed to obtain data. The acquired data is analyzed using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). The study discovers that the EFL learners performed various activities presenting their self-directed learning in terms of learning motivation, learning strategy, self-monitoring, and social competence. This research contributes to body knowledge of English language learning at higher education in which a teacher will be able to choose or select appropriate teaching strategies dealing with learners' learning behaviour promoting autonomous learning. The findings also suggest the learners to conduct learning process properly since self-directed learning enables the learners to maximize their both internal and external potentials in order to achieve better English achievement.

Keywords: *Self-directed learning, adult learners, autonomous learning, EFL context*

INTRODUCTION

Language learning atmosphere at higher education shows critical and reflective performances since the learners are adults and the class is able to perform higher learning experiences because the learners have fully self-directed learning. However, Hatcher (1997)

claims that adult learners who are totally self-directed yield full control of their learning activities; however, not all adult learners are totally self-directed. Psychological and social maturity are vital aspects in shaping self-directedness of an adult (Knowles et al., 1998).

Several Studies of self-directed learning (SDL) have been conducted by many researchers for example: (Garrison, 1997; Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Long and Redding, 1991; Knowles, 1975; Brookfield 1985) who put their interest to study SDL as the central notion in the study and practice of adult education. Some findings reveal that SDL has contributed to our understanding of learning by (1) recognizing an important form of adult learning and offering us with insights into the process of learning, (2) stimulating us to describe and discuss the prominent characteristics of adult learners, and (3) intensifying our thinking about formal settings learning (Caffarella, 1993). Meanwhile, Garrison (1997) argues SDL is perceived as an essential process for attaining valuable and meaningful educational results.

The study of self-directed learning (SDL) of adult education becomes always interesting and urgent to put the problem into a research as this research is carried out. What experienced by language learning in higher education level, SDL still lack of attention by teachers. The teachers do not realize that SDL will help learners be encouraged to endure personal responsibility and collaborative control of the cognitive and contextual process in building meaningful and valuable learning output (Garrison, 1997) in which learners take the initiative, with or without the help of others in recognizing their learning needs, framing learning goals, selecting learning resources, using appropriate learning strategies, and assessing learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975). Consequently, the process of instruction seems teachers-centered affecting to low learning performance (behavior). This is against to what we expect when higher education learning context should be fulfilled by meaningful interaction and show high quality of learning performances.

In case of this study, the researchers refer to self-directed learning performed by three high achievers in which English learning circumstances is put into the context. This research will have contribution for English language learning at higher education by which a teacher will be able to choose or select appropriate teaching strategies dealt with learners' learning behavior and learners are suggested to do learning independently that eventually affect to the process of their English learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Adult Learning

Knowles (1968) planned "a new label and a new technology" of adult learning to distinguish it from pre-adult schooling (p. 351). In contrast to pedagogy, andragogy became a rallying point for those who are trying to define the field of adult education.

The five presumptions underlying andragogy describe the adult learner as someone who (1) has an independent self-concept and who can direct his or her own learning, (2) has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning, (3) has learning needs closely related to changing social roles, (4) is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge, and (5) is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors. From these assumptions, Knowles (1980) proposed a program planning model for planning, applying, and assessing educational experiences with adults. For example, with regard to the first presumption that as adults mature, they become more independent and self-directing. In addition, Knowles (1980) recommended that the classroom climate should be one of "adultness," both physically and psychologically. In an "adult" classroom, adults "feel accepted, respected, and supported"; further, there exists "a spirit of mutuality between teachers and students as joint inquirers" (p. 47). Adults are capable of directing, or at least assisting in planning their own learning because they manage other aspects of their lives. However, finally he moved from an andragogy versus pedagogy position to representing them on

a continuum ranging from teacher-directed to student-directed learning. He acknowledged that both approaches are appropriate with children and adults, depending on the situation. For example, an adult who knows little or nothing about a topic will be more dependent on the teacher for direction; at the other extreme, children who are naturally curious and who are "very self-directing in their learning *outside of school*... could also be more self-directed in school" (Knowles, 1984, p. 13). Meanwhile, experience is the adult learner's living textbook and that adult education was, therefore, a continuing process of evaluating experiences (Lindeman, 1926, as cited in Taylor & Kroth, 2009).This emphasis on experience is vital to the concept of andragogy that has grown to define adult education practice in societies (Savicevic 1991; Vooglaid and Marja, 1992).

Self-Directed Learning

One of the factors contributing to the successful learning process of adult learners is self-directed learning (Brookfield, 1995). The current research reveals that there is relationship between self-directed learning and technology such as web based and online learning (Hiemstra, 2001, Paige, 2007, Cheng 2007 as cited in Ahmad and Majid, 2010). Self-directed learning is an approach where learners are motivated to assume personal responsibility and collaborative control of the cognitive and contextual process in constructing meaningful and valuable learning outcomes (Garrison, 1997). Knowles (1975) defined self-directed learning as the process in which learners take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in recognizing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, selecting learning resources, employing appropriate learning strategies, and assessing learning outcomes. Self-directed learning is seen as a learning behavior which permits students to carry on learning on their own initiative (Cheng, 2007). Meanwhile, Cranton (2001) perceives self-directed learning as goals, approaches and a learner characteristic that changes with the nature of the learning. Self-directed learning is part and parcel of the psychological and social

development of adulthood (Garrison, 1997; Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 1998, as cited in Terry, 2006). Adults who are fully self-directed take full control of their learning activities. Self-directed learning is process in which learners take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in identifying their learning needs, formulating learning goals, choosing learning resources, employing suitable learning strategies, and assessing learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975)

Three principal ideas are incorporated into the concept of self-directed learning: a self-initiated process of learning that stresses the ability of individuals to plan and manage their own learning, an attribute or characteristic of learners with personal autonomy as its hallmark, and a way of organizing instruction in formal settings that allows for greater learner control (Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991; Caffarella and O'Donnell, 1989; Candy, 1991).

Self-directed learning is humanistic in nature (Hiemstra, 1992; Hiemstra and Sisco, 1990; Knowles, 1975, 1980; Long, 1992; Tough, 1979). Individual and self-development are the focus on which learners are expected to assume primary responsibility for their own learning. The process of learning, which is centered on learner need, is seen as more important than the content; therefore, when educators are involved in the learning process, their most important role is to act as facilitators or guides, as opposed to content experts (Caffarella, 1993). However, Gerstner (1987) proposed that although humanistic philosophy has been the primary guide for much of the work on self-directed learning, at least three other philosophical perspectives have influenced our thinking about self-directed learning: progressivism, behaviorism, and critical theory.

Second Language Learning

A number of theories have been developed to account second language learning or acquisition—Behaviorism, Nativism, Cognitivism, and Sociocultural perspective. Those theories help

language teacher and learners in learning or acquiring languages in such methods or techniques.

A behaviorist approach to second language learning focuses on imitation, practice, encouragement and habit formation. Learning a second language necessarily involves comparison with the learner's first language, but the latter is generally perceived as causing 'interference' in the learning of additional one(s). Meanwhile, the nativist theories argue that language is innate. Cognitive theories of second language acquisition claims learning involves building up the knowledge system or architecture which over time and through practice becomes automatically accessible in reception and production. And sociocultural perspective on second language learning highlights that all learning, including language learning, is based on social interaction.

Obviously, languages classrooms are fundamentally interactive. However, the nature and quality of the interaction varies according to the ways in which it is understood and constructed. Interaction is fundamentally a social process of meaning-making and interpreting, and the educational value of interaction grows out of developing and elaborating interaction as a social process. It is through interaction that learners engage with ideas and concepts and the diverse interpretations and understandings of these held by their interlocutors. In interaction, the participant is both performer and analyzer of what is happening. Educationally purposeful interaction must engage the learner in both roles. Communicative Language Teaching has focused on the idea that classroom interactions should be 'natural', by which it is assumed that they will resemble conversations in a number of ways: unequal participation, the negotiation of meaning, topic nomination and negotiation by more than one speaker, and the right of interlocutors to decide whether to contribute to an interaction or not (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Such studies assume that language instruction is enhanced by certain ways of talking designed to provide students with opportunities for original utterances in the target language, clarifying the meaning of

units of language, and modeling grammatically correct versions of learners' talk.

METHOD

In consideration with the formulation of the problem, "What are the learning behavior reflecting self-directed language learning Performed by EFL learners in higher education?", a case study design is taken as this research carried out in which the researchers want to quest the learning behaviors, showing EFL learners' self-directed learning performances.

The participants are two males and one female of the fourth and sixth semester students of English Education Department of a university in Indonesia who have shown their English achievement (GPA above 3.80) and perceived as self-directed learners performing their high motivation and adequate psychological and social maturity in English language learning.

Interview is taken as the method to collect data revealing self-directed learning performance performed by the English language learners. Unstructured interview is employed and intimate or warm atmosphere is created to make the interviewees feel comfort and give sufficient data needed. Kothari (2004) explained that the unstructured interview refers to a flexible approach enabling interviewers to freely ask in gathering information from the respondents.

Data acquired from interview were analyzed using Thematic Analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) proposing the steps of doing thematic analysis: (1) familiarizing with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, (6) producing the report.

FINDINGS

To know self-directed learning on language learning of the EFL learners in higher education, which is the focus of the study, interview was conducted to collect the data in order to answer the

questions of this study. Using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), then, the acquired data in terms of learning behaviors or activities reflecting self-directed learning is analyzed to see the fixed pattern showing consistent data. The findings of this study; learning motivation, learning strategy, self-monitoring, and social competence, are elaborated as follows.

Learning Motivation

Learners who are self-directed are those who have good learning motivation both extrinsically and intrinsically. Their self-directed learning describing their learning motivation can be found as expressed by the respondents.

> *I am motivated in learning English not only because of interesting, but it is my passion. (R1); My motivation comes from my interest in learning English and learning encouragement. (R2); I'm challenged to learn new thing…It is because I have a high curiosity on something. (R3)*

From the excerpts, they obviously show their action of learning since English attracts their interest and the learning experiences build encouragement, even though from certain cases learning English is very challenging which make them learn seriously and never give up when they have problem during the process. In order words, their interest and curiosity has become the reasons and batteries by which they are pushed to do action.

The external factors in terms of learning environment, peers, and parents' influences also stimulate and motivate them to perform their learning efforts. The factors become the battery encouraging them to maximize their potential power to achieve the better achievement and build their confidence. The following data indicate or describe the role of the factors on their learning.

> *Thing that motivates me is when I was in fourth grade. My teacher asked me to join an English Competition. Surprisingly, I won. Since that time, I thought that maybe English is my field. That's why I am motivated in learning English until now. (R1); Besides, it also comes from outside factor, such as my parents want me to be an English*

teacher. (R2); If there is someone better than me in academic, I'm challenged to be one step forward. (R3)

Learning Strategy

Besides having high learning motivation, self-directed learners are able to use appropriate learning strategies in their language learning. They employ techniques or media both traditionally and technologically.

The following data depict that the respondents use English articles in their reading learning and mostly do discussion with peers in order to understand the English materials.

I get my ability in reading because I like looking up and reading articles in English (R1); My learning strategy is searching, reading, learning, and sharing. I really love learning from what I search and read, and I am a persistent one, except when I stuck but this is rare (R2); I love sharing with others. For me, it is good to sharpen my memory and mind set so that I understand more of what I've learned. Sharing also can provide critical thinking in answering questions from my sharing friends (R3).

The respondents also show their efforts on their English learning by using appropriate strategy in terms of learning media and technology to support their English skills. The R1 claims that application works effectively for vocabulary development and social media enhances his learning experiences.

I add my vocabulary now with various methods other than writing vocabulary lists, one of which uses flashcards-based applications that use the Spaced Repetition System (SRS) or memorize vocabulary with the time interval set by the application. I hone my writing skills by using social media to interact with English language students around the world. I am improving the ability to speak and listen in parallel, namely by practicing by calling English language students from outside the country using one of the social media (R1).

The other respondent even claims that internet becomes the solution when he has learning difficulties.

Finding material related to learning on the internet can also help me overcome learning difficulties (R2).

Self-Monitoring

Self-directed learners are identical to independent learners who are responsible for themselves. They have the ability to monitor themselves and to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. They are also able to associate knowledge with their experience.

R1 performs his effort of doing self-monitoring using certain method by which he can monitor his learning progress.

> *Lately, in monitoring my learning outcomes, I use the KWL method. Before I use KWL, I did not have the same idea how to monitor my learning outcomes. In the end, at that time, I found a reference on how to monitor my learning outcomes through the KWL system. So, every day, my principles are what the results and progress that I have got, what I want to achieve, and what I still need to improve in the future (R1).*

R2 uses reflective journal to evaluate his learning progress and sets the further objectives and efforts for better achievement in the future.

> *I can evaluate my learning outcomes through self-reflection, whether the learning outcomes that I have passed are comparable to the learning process. From the reflection, I can see what my strengths and weaknesses are. Although I think there are, indeed, more weaknesses than my strengths. After knowing the weakness, I can decide what to improve for the future (R2).*

R3 uses peer's assessment and test result by which she can monitor her weaknesses and strengths and identify what is still needed to be improved and maintained.

> *Usually for skills, I ask my friends about my weaknesses and strengths so that in the future I know what must be improved and maintained. For knowledge, I usually see from the results of the test, if it is not satisfactory, I usually relearn material that I have not fully mastered (R3).*

Social Competence

Self-directed learners are able to perform high social interaction. They are able to establish good social relations for further learning and to use environment as source of learning in which culture can be learned and language proficiency can be improved.

All respondents argue that social relation builds and develops their English and knowledge of the world. R1 claims that his

language proficiency and culture of the target language can be developed through overseas communication.

> *I can communicate with other people using English without thinking of errors in grammar, pronunciation and etc. I not only learn English with the same people, but can interact with many people from various countries. In addition, I learned to know how their country culture, food, tourist destinations, etc. (R1). I find it difficult to express my thoughts in English orally and maybe that is because I am still lack in practicing and listening, but I can say that my writing skill is better than speaking when I do communication with people around the world (R2). My abilities in English may be good; I can communicate with other people using English orally and in writing (R3).*

DISCUSSION

The learners' motivation towards English becomes important for successful learning. Intrinsic motivation in terms of their belief on English, interesting and challenging classroom and external motivation such as peers, learning environment, and parents provide self-directed learners' battery which energize them actively in their English language learning. Behavior can be motivated for intrinsic purpose since the motivation supports the learners to have direction, intensity and tenacity (Kanfer et al., 2008) on their learning process and to participate in the task (Patall, Cooper & Robinson, 2008). Meanwhile, an enjoyable or interesting task makes individuals (or language learners) get engaged for longer period and persistent (Deci, 1972) during the learning process. Thus, learning motivation is influenced by personal, social, cultural and contextual factors. (Dornyei, 2001).

In case of planning and learning strategy as performed by the EFL learners of this study has proved that independent learners are able to use appropriate strategies in order to achieve the learning objectives. An ability to use strategy by their own indicates that self-directed learners are independent and responsible to themselves (Cheng and Lee, 2018). Through the findings of this study, it can be explained that the use of technology is the alternative way employed by the learners to improve their English and build affection by which they become more critical, open minded, and independent

(Supriyono, 2018) since the participants use virtual world in their
English learning anytime and anywhere (Godwin-Jones, 2016). The
other studies (Hiemstra, 2001; Paige, 2007; Cheng, 2007) found that
there is relationship between self-directed learning and technology
such as web based and online learning.

Self-monitoring becomes the competence of independent
learners in which they should consciously monitor their learning
progress. Kilduff and Day (1994) discover that individuals who are
able to do self-monitoring generally more successful in their works.
Through the findings of this study, it can be discovered that reflective
journal, peer's assessment, also test result benefits in providing
information about their knowledge or skill progress. Further, Kim
(2013) admitted reflective journal can enhance the goals of self-
directed learners by encouraging them to reflect critically on the
learning experience process and deeper engagement with a topic.
Moreover, self-assessment and peer assessment were employed to
encourage students' active control and involvement with their own
learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) and learners frequently use
tests as a means of assessing their current learning (Kornell & Son,
2009).

The findings also show that ability to interact with overseas
peers builds their English proficiency and knowledge of culture and
how culture affects their learning. Culture has an important role in
adult learning (Brookfield, 1995) and has the capacity to influence
learners' learning styles (Manikutty et al., 2007). In short, culture can
figure adult learners' self-directed learning development (Rogers,
2002).

CONCLUSION

The findings discover that the EFL learners performed various
activities presenting their self-directed learning in terms of learning
motivation, learning strategy, self-monitoring, and social competence.
Thus, learning activities for adults tend to activities that encourage
the emergence of self-learning awareness, in the sense of how

learning is carried out can increase learning motivation, be able to design and implement it well, be able to assess their own abilities, and be able to communicate or cooperate with other people. As recommendations, educators or teachers must be able to see the potential possessed by students, and direct the potential in constructive learning activities both inside and outside the classroom. Students must be guided and trained to have personal abilities such as confidence, responsibility, creativity, and independence through innovative and productive learning processes. In addition, the learners must conduct learning process properly in order to achieve better English achievement.

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