Exploring Students' Independent Learning and Teachers' Support in EFL Classrooms: A Constructivist Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify student's perception about independent learning and activities and also how their teachers encourage independent learning during English class. The research used qualitative method to obtain student's perception. The source of data is 20 students from SMA Brigjend Katamso 1 Medan which Student's perception and experience are the data. Open and close ended questionnaire are used as instruments to collect the data. The close-ended responses are analyzed using simple descriptive statistics (such as percentages), whereas the open-ended responses are categorized into themes to capture the underlying meanings and insights.

The results indicate that while students actively engage in independent learning activities, teacher support and encouragement for such independent learning in the classroom is still limited

INTRODUCTION

Independent learning has become an essential aspect of modern education, where students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning process. This topic is particularly interesting because students who are able to learn independently tend to

develop critical thinking, self-motivation, and a lifelong learning mindset. Understanding how students perceive independent learning, as well as the role of teachers in facilitating it, is crucial in creating a more student-centered classroom.

However, there remains a gap between the ideal concept of independent learning and the reality in classroom practices. Ideally, independent learning is best supported when teachers apply constructivist approaches, as proposed by Piaget (1970). These approaches assume that learning is an internal and active process influenced by the learner. When students engage in activities such as projects or presentations based on their own interests, they are more likely to retain knowledge because they actively process the information. In contrast, in many classrooms today, teachers still rely on traditional methods assigning tasks and providing right-or-wrong corrections without giving students the opportunity to explore, reflect, or engage with the material in meaningful ways. This limits the development of students' independence in learning.

In the context of English language learning, the definitions and perspectives of independent learning are in line with a study by Maesevani (2021), who emphasized that learners have a good chance to acquire English autonomously. She revealed that one of the key benefits of learning independently in an English class is the opportunity for learners to monitor and evaluate their own learning. These two components monitoring and evaluation are essential for achieving progress in the target language. Moreover, independent learning allows learners to work on different tasks at their own pace, offering flexibility in choosing both the input and output of language information. Being aware of one's own learning styles and employing appropriate learning strategies are also essential factors that contribute to more effective language acquisition.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze students' perceptions of independent learning in the context of English language learning, including the types of activities they engage in to foster such learning. Additionally, the study seeks to explore how students perceive their teachers' role in supporting independent learning in English classrooms, as these perceptions can serve as a foundation for teachers to help students achieve greater learning autonomy.

1 Independent Learning: Definition and Characteristics

Independent learning, often referred to as self-directed learning (SDL), is a pedagogical approach where learners take initiative in planning, implementing, and evaluating their own learning (Charokar, 2022). This concept transforms the traditional teacher-centered classroom into a more student-centered environment, where learners are encouraged to take control of their educational process. Ahmadzadeh and Zabardast (2014) further emphasize that independent learning involves the ability of learners to set their own objectives, determine content, choose learning methods or techniques, and monitor as well as evaluate their learning outcomes. In this view, students become active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge. According to Holec (1981), independent learning is characterized by the ability of learners to manage their own learning without external guidance or interference. This concept underscores a shift from traditional teacher-centered education to a learner-centered approach, where the students are equipped with the skills necessary to navigate their educational journeys independently.

The constructivist theory proposed by Piaget (1970) supports the idea of independent learning by suggesting that learning is an internal, active process where the learner constructs meaning through experiences. Constructivist approaches promote engagement in tasks that require students to apply critical thinking, problem-solving, and reflection. For instance, students are more likely to retain information and develop deeper understanding when they create a project or deliver a presentation on a topic they select themselves, rather than listening passively to a lecture. This approach reflects the core principle of independent learning engaging learners in meaningful, self-initiated activities.

In the context of English language learning, independent learning has specific benefits. According to Maesevani (2021), when learners engage in autonomous activities such as monitoring and evaluating their learning, they gain better insight into their strengths and areas for improvement. Independent learning enables students to work on different tasks at different paces, allowing personalized input and output of language use. Moreover, awareness of one's own learning styles and preferences contributes to the

effective acquisition of a second or foreign language by encouraging students to select suitable strategies for language development.

2 Students' Perceptions in Language Learning Contexts

Students' perceptions of independent learning play a critical role in shaping their engagement and motivation. Benson (2019) highlights that these perceptions are influenced by previous learning experiences, confidence levels, and students' understanding of the benefits of autonomy. Learners who perceive independence positively are more inclined to take initiative and persist through challenges. Stevens and Cho (2021) found that students who view independent learning as empowering are more likely to participate in self-initiated academic activities, such as self-study, conducting online research, and collaborating with peers. These students tend to be proactive in seeking knowledge and improving their skills outside of classroom instruction. Additionally, students with higher confidence levels often engage in self-assessment and explore learning resources beyond the curriculum, indicating a strong connection between positive perceptions and autonomous behavior. Therefore, analyzing students' perceptions provides educators with a clearer picture of how learners understand, approach, and value independent learning. This information is essential for shaping classroom practices that align with learners' needs and promote sustainable autonomy.

3 The Role of Teachers in Facilitating Independent Learning

The teacher's role is pivotal in fostering independent learning. Gardner (2011) asserts that teachers should function not only as knowledge providers but also as guides, facilitators, and counselors who help students take responsibility for their learning. This includes assisting learners in setting goals, planning their study paths, monitoring their progress, and evaluating outcomes. Kumaravadivelu (2005) further explains that learners cannot become independent in isolation; they require guidance and collaboration with their teachers. The journey to autonomy involves a gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student, facilitated through scaffolding and supportive interventions.

Current research also supports the evolving role of teachers in autonomous learning environments. Ooi and Tan (2021) report that successful facilitation of independent

learning requires teachers to provide accessible resources, constructive feedback, and emotional encouragement to foster students' self-regulation. Yen and Wong (2020) emphasize that when teachers offer choices in classroom activities and create supportive learning atmospheres, students are more likely to exhibit autonomous behaviors and self-driven engagement.

METHOD

This studi used a qualitative method proposed by Mack, N. (2005). Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations. The data in this research are students' perceptions and experiences regarding independent learning in English class. The source of data is students from SMA Brigjend Katamso 1 Medan. To obtain the data, researcher used open and close ended questionnaire through Google form. Open-ended questions would be analyze to explore participants' perspectives in more depth and close-ended questionnaire will be analyze in simple descriptive statistics (such as percentage).

RESULTS

The data was collected through an essay question and a structured questionnaire. The essay question asked students to define what independent learning means based on their personal understanding. In addition, the questionnaire consisted of 1 open-ended question about defintion of independent learning and 20 close-ended question and student's activities in improving independent learning skills. And also teacher's role to encourage it during english class. These items are categorized into three main areas: planning, implementing, and evaluating. The respondents were 20 students from SMA Brigjend Katamso 1 Medan who are currently enrolled in English classes. The questionnaire items are presented in the table below.

No	Questions	Options	Percentage
1.	Selain tugas dan pekerjaan dari kelas, saya membuat rencana belajar bahasa Inggris saya sendiri	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	-
		B. Tidak Setuju	5
		C. Setuju	
		D. Sangat setuju	95

No.	Pernyataan	Pilihan	Jumlah
			-
2.	Saya menetapkan tujuan belajar saya sendiri sesuai dengan situasi dan kondisi pribadi saya	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	-
		B. Tidak Setuju	5
		C. Setuju	85
		D. Sangat setuju	10
3.	Saya menyesuaikan rencana belajar saya jika diperlukan	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	-
		B. Tidak Setuju	10
		C. Setuju	75
		D. Sangat setuju	15
4.	Saya membuat jadwal waktu untuk belajar bahasa inggris	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	-
		B. Tidak Setuju	35
		C. Setuju	60
		D. Sangat setuju	5
5.	Saya memanfaatkan waktu luang saya dengan baik untuk belajar bahasa inggris	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	-
		B. Tidak Setuju	25
		C. Setuju	60
		D. Sangat setuju	15
6.	Saya menggunakan strategi tertentu ketika melatih kemampuan mendengarkan (listening), berbicara (speaking), membaca (reading) dan menulis (writing) dalam bahasa Inggris.	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	5
		B. Tidak Setuju	5
		C. Setuju	60
		D. Sangat setuju	30
7.	Saya berlatih bahasa inggris di luar kegiatan kursus/kelas, seperti: merekam suara saya sendiri, berbicara dengan orang lain dalam bahasa inggris	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	-
		B. Tidak Setuju	50
		C. Setuju	40
		D. Sangat setuju	10
8.	Saya mengubah pendekatan belajar saya ketika saya merasa pendekatan tersebut kurang sesuai.	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	
		B. Tidak Setuju	10
		C. Setuju	80
		D. Sangat setuju)	10
9.	Saya menyadari apakah pendekatan belajar saya cocok untuk diri saya atau	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	

	tidak	B. Tidak Setuju	5
		C. Setuju	85
		D. Sangat setuju	10
10.	Saya mengevaluasi pendekatan belajar saya untuk menemukan masalah atau kesulitan dalam belajar say	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	-
		B. Tidak Setuju	5
		C. Setuju	90
		D. Sangat setuju	5

Defining Independent Learning based on Students' perception

The first part of the data analysis focuses on the students' personal understanding of independent learning. This was explored through an open-ended essay question asking each student to describe what independent learning means to them. There are 14 students who have delivered their opinion about that.

A dominant theme was autonomy, reflecting students' understanding of learning without relying on others. Many students defined independent learning as a process of acquiring knowledge without external guidance, such as teachers or peers. This aligns with Holec's (1981) foundational view that independent learning is characterized by the learner's ability to take charge of their own learning process. For instance, students mentioned that independent learning is "*learning without the help of another person*", "*…. independently without the help of others*" "*…his own initiative without relying entirely on the mentor*" These responses highlight the shift from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered engagement.

Another theme was self-responsibility, which is central to autonomous learning theory. Students frequently used terms such as "*…Individuals have full control over their own learning process*" "responsible for their own learning," and "*responsibility and also without any pressure.*" These align with the concept of learner autonomy described by Little and Dam (1998), where students take initiative and develop strategies that support their individual learning paths.

The theme of initiative and consistency also emerged, suggesting that students associate independent learning with personal motivation and repeated effort. Statements such as "*initiative without any coercion from others and is done repeatedly (consistently)*" indicate an internal drive to learn, independent of external compulsion. This reflects Benson's (2001) assertion that independent language learners engage in self-motivated practices outside of formal classroom settings.

In addition, several students referred to goal-setting and self-evaluation, key aspects of self-regulated learning. Responses emphasized planning, monitoring, and assessing one's own learning progress skills essential for language mastery. For example, students mentioned "*to evaluate our personal learning abilities*" and *"planning, implementation and evaluation."* These findings are consistent with the idea that independent learners personalize their education based on their strengths, weaknesses, and goals (Little & Dam, 1998).

Finally, some students emphasized that independent learning takes place beyond the classroom, involving self-access to resources and learning in informal contexts. Statements like *"learning independently outside of school hours"* demonstrate their recognition that learning is a continuous, self-directed process not limited to structured environments. In conclusion, the student responses reveal a nuanced understanding of independent learning, aligning closely with established theoretical perspectives. The data reflects students' recognition of autonomy, responsibility, motivation, resourcefulness, and reflective learning as integral to their independent learning experiences. These findings support the view that empowering students to manage their own learning is essential for developing both language proficiency and lifelong learning skills.

Students' perception for enhancing independent learning on English lesson

This part is data analysis explores students' perceptions of how they enhance their independent learning in English. This was investigated through a questionnaire consisting of 10 items, which aimed to gather insights into the specific actions and strategies

students apply when learning English independently. The data analysis technique uses the percentage formula proposed by Sugiyono (2013):

$P(\%) = f/N \times 100$

$ = f/20 \times 100$

$ = -$

Note : f : student's frequent score

N: the number of student

P: Percentage

No	Questions	Options	Percentage
1.	Guru memberi kami kebebasan untuk memilih materi atau topik pembelajaran.	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	35
		B. Tidak Setuju	40
		C. Setuju	15
		D. Sangat setuju	10
2.	Guru mendorong kami menetapkan tujuan belajar pribadi dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris.	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	30
		B. Tidak Setuju	45
		C. Setuju	15
		D. Sangat setuju	10
3.	Guru membimbing kami mengevaluasi kemajuan belajar bahasa Inggris secara teratur.	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	35
		B. Tidak Setuju	45
		C. Setuju	10
		D. Sangat setuju)	5
4.	Guru membantu merencanakan strategi belajar bahasa Inggris secara mandiri.	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	35
		B. Tidak Setuju	45
		C. Setuju	10
		D. Sangat setuju	10
5.	Guru memberikan instruksi dan berharap kami menyelesaikan tugas bahasa Inggris tanpa banyak penjelasan.	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	10
		B. Tidak Setuju	15
		C. Setuju	25
		D. Sangat setuju	50

	6.	Guru sering memberi jawaban langsung daripada membiarkan kami mencari solusi mandiri dalam bahasa Inggris.	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	10
			B. Tidak Setuju	15
			C. Setuju	30
			D. Sangat setuju	45
	7.	Guru memberi kami kesempatan untuk merefleksikan kemampuan bahasa Inggris kami.	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	30
			B. Tidak Setuju	40
			C. Setuju	15
			D. Sangat setuju	15
	8.	Guru memberikan pilihan bagaimana kami menyelesaikan tugas bahasa Inggris (misalnya presentasi, tulisan, dll).	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	35
			B. Tidak Setuju	45
			C. Setuju	10
			D. Sangat setuju)	10
	9.	Guru membantu mengembangkan keterampilan manajemen waktu dan belajar mandiri bahasa Inggris.	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	35
			B. Tidak Setuju	50
			C. Setuju	10
			D. Sangat setuju	5
	10.	Guru bertindak lebih sebagai fasilitator daripada penceramah di kelas bahasa Inggris.	A. Sangat Tidak Setuju	35
			B. Tidak Setuju	35
			C. Setuju	15
			D. Sangat setuju	15

The data above reveals an overall positive outlook, reflecting the ideas of Benson (2019), who argues that students' views on autonomy are shaped by prior experiences, confidence, and their understanding of its benefits. In this study, 95% of students agreed that they create their own learning plans beyond class assignments, suggesting a strong sense of initiative. Similarly, 85% stated that they set their own learning goals based on their personal conditions, and 75% reported adjusting their learning plans when needed. These responses indicate that the majority of students are actively engaged in self-directed learning. However, 35% disagreed with the idea of creating a learning schedule, and only 5% strongly agreed, which shows that time management is still a challenge for some learners.

Furthermore, aligned with Stevens and Cho (2021), who found that students who see independent learning as empowering are more proactive, this study shows that 60% of students use specific strategies for listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and 30% strongly agree, showing clear efforts to enhance their skills autonomously. 90% of the participants evaluate their learning approaches to find problems or difficulties, indicating a high level of self-assessment and metacognitive awareness. Additionally, 85% of students are aware of whether their learning approaches suit them or not, and 80% adjust their methods when they feel they are ineffective.

Despite these positive indicators, only 40% of students agreed that they practice English outside of class, while 50% disagreed, suggesting that practical, self-initiated learning activities such as speaking practice or recording themselves are still underutilized. This gap between perception and practice implies that while students understand the value of independent learning, they may lack opportunities or confidence to implement it outside structured environments. Therefore, as Benson (2019) suggests, educators should consider students' perceptions as a guide to design classroom practices that reinforce autonomy, encourage self-initiated actions, and provide support systems that bridge the gap between awareness and actual independent learning behavior.

Teacher's encouragement in independent learning based on students' perception

This data analysis is to answer research question number 2, regarding teacher's action to encourage student to be independent learning in English classroom based on student's perception. This data consist of close-ended questionnaire which has spread to 20 students. This data still analysis by using percentage formula proposed by Sugiyono (2013):

Based on the data gathered from the close-ended questionnaire, it is evident that the majority of students perceive their teacher as not actively encouraging independent learning in the English classroom. Most students strongly disagreed (35%) and disagreed (40%) with the statement that they are given the freedom to choose their own learning materials or topics, meaning that 75% of students feel restricted in making choices related

to their learning. Similarly, 30% of students strongly disagreed and 45% disagreed that their teacher encourages them to set personal learning goals, suggesting that only a small portion of the class (25%) feels supported in establishing individual objectives, which are essential for fostering self-directed learning. The trend continues with 80% of students reporting that their teacher does not guide them in evaluating their learning progress, as 35% strongly disagreed and 45% disagreed with this statement. This indicates a lack of reflection and self-assessment opportunities in the classroom. Moreover, 80% of students also disagreed or strongly disagreed that their teacher helps them plan learning strategies, further emphasizing the limited support students receive in becoming strategic, independent learners.

When asked whether the teacher simply gives instructions and expects students to complete tasks with little explanation, 75% agreed or strongly agreed, showing that teacher-centered methods remain dominant. A similar pattern is seen in how teachers respond to student inquiries 75% of students agreed or strongly agreed that their teacher gives direct answers instead of encouraging them to find solutions independently. This suggests that opportunities for critical thinking and self-exploration are limited in the learning process. Students also expressed that they are rarely given space to reflect on their English learning, with 70% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement. Additionally, 80% of students disagreed that they have flexibility in choosing how to complete assignments, such as through presentations or written work. An overwhelming 85% of students indicated that their teacher does not help them develop time management or independent study skills skills that are vital for mastering English outside the classroom.

Lastly, 70% of students disagreed that their teacher acts more as a facilitator than a lecturer, revealing that most students still experience a traditional classroom process where the teacher is the main authority and not a guide for independent learning. Overall, the data clearly shows that from the students' perspective, the teacher has not yet implemented key strategies that promote autonomy, planning, reflection, and learner responsibility elements that are central to effective independent learning in the English language classroom..

DISCUSSIONS

Students' Perceptions of Independent Learning in English Language Learning

The findings showed that most students at SMA Brigjend Katamso 1 Medan perceive independent learning as a necessary and helpful approach for improving their English proficiency. They viewed it as a way to develop responsibility, initiative, and confidence in learning. This also reflects Holec's (1981) theory that autonomy is the learner's ability to take responsibility for their own learning. Students mentioned activities such as watching English videos, listening to songs, reading online articles, and using language learning apps as examples of their independent efforts. These perceptions align with Maesevani (2021), who defines independent learning as learners' active engagement in managing their own study process, from planning to evaluation. The students' understanding of independent learning also resonates with Piaget's theory of constructivism, where knowledge is actively constructed by the learner through experience and self-initiated activity. The fact that students recognized the value of learning beyond classroom instruction supports the theoretical view that independent learning promotes deeper cognitive development and motivation.

Teachers' Support Toward Independent Learning

From the data analysis, finding contrast significantly with theoretical perspectives on supporting independent learning. According to Benson (2001), teachers play a key role in fostering autonomy by encouraging learner choice, goal setting, self-assessment, and reflection. Holec (1981) also emphasizes that autonomy must be supported through the development of learner responsibility and decision-making capacity. Similarly, Little & Dam (1998) argue that teachers should act as facilitators, gradually transferring control of the learning process to the students. In the case of SMA Brigjend Katamso 1 Medan, most students reported minimal support in these areas, revealing a mismatch between theory and practice. Instead of helping students become more independent, the teacher still takes most of the control in the classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

In conlusion, this research shows that students at SMA Brigjend Katamso 1 Medan generally have a positive perception of independent learning. Many students take the initiative to improve their English by watching English videos, listening to English songs, practicing speaking independently, and seeking out materials beyond the classroom. These efforts reflect their motivation to become more self-directed. However, despite students' enthusiasm, teacher support for independent learning remains limited. Most students report that their teacher rarely encourages goal setting, allows limited choice in learning activities, and still applies a predominantly teacher-centered approach. As a result, opportunities for students to grow as autonomous learners are not fully supported in the classroom environment.

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