



Initial Activities Encouraging Students' Autonomous Learning: Faculty Teacher Training and Education Program

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ABSTRACT

Initial activities become important as the stepstone to raise students' autonomous level. The study aims to explore lecturers' initial activities to encourage students' autonomous learning. Autonomous learning is a process to be apprehensive of taking control of literacy. This study used a case study and a content analysis in the qualitative exploration. The English teacher educators at the English language education department, the faculty of teacher training and education in Pekanbaru became the research samples. A qualitative approach is chosen as exploration design with the help of Nvivo 12 Apps since interviews come as the main instrument. Some interview points questioned how lecturers help learners comprehend the material, determine their particular pretensions, chancing out supporting coffers. The study reveals that the lecturer's exertion as the initial activities were giving the material explanation, giving information about the course figure, giving assignments, giving what students need, giving provocation or motivation, sharing experiences, making personal approach, exercising, being a Model, making agreement letter, warning, having a concession, having references of material, participating gests, checking students' appreciation by reviewing, giving question and test. Yet, giving assignments collectively or in collaboration, systems or incidental test becomes a proposed exertion in the initial process to enhance learners' autonomous.

KEYWORDS

Initial activities;
Encouraging; Autonomous
learning

ABSTRAK

Kegiatan menginisiasi menjadi pondasi pertama untuk meningkatkan tingkat kemandirian belajar. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi aktivitas awal dosen dalam meningkatkan kemandirian belajar mahasiswa. Kemandirian belajar adalah proses untuk menguasai literasi. Penelitian ini merupakan kajian dan analisis isi dalam eksplorasi kualitatif yang dipilih sebagai desain eksplorasi dengan bantuan Aplikasi Nvivo 12. Wawancara menjadi instrumen utama selain observasi sebagai alat pendukung.. Beberapa poin

KATA KUNCI

Kegiatan awal;
Meningkatkan;
Kemandirian belajar

wawancara mempertanyakan bagaimana dosen membantu mahasiswa memahami materi, menentukan tujuan khusus mereka, memiliki motivasi, mencari materi pendukung dan menjadikan bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa utama. Hasil studi mengungkapkan bahwa kegiatan awal dimulai dengan pemberian penjelasan materi, memberikan informasi tentang mata kuliah, memberikan tugas, memberikan apa yang siswa butuhkan, memberi provokasi atau motivasi, berbagi pengalaman, melakukan pendekatan pribadi, menjadi Model, membuat surat perjanjian bersama, memberi peringatan, memiliki referensi materi, berpartisipasi, memeriksa pemahaman, memberi apresiasi dengan cara mereview, memberikan penugasan dan tes. Dari semua kegiatan awal, memberi penugasan secara kolektif atau tes insidental menjadi upaya yang dominan dalam proses awal untuk meningkatkan kemandirian belajar.

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INTRODUCTION

In the field of language learning and teaching, many researchers have been trying to discover what teachers should do to encourage learners to become an author of one's own work. The process of language teaching and learning should be autonomous because language learning is a life-long effort and process. Next, learners cannot achieve autonomy by working alone, need the help and cooperation of their teachers. Further, educators are frequently asked how they might encourage learners to take responsibility for setting the learning objective, picking the material and treatment, selecting the learning approach, monitoring learning progress, and assessing what they have learned. Thus, helping learners to learn more is an issue that many language teachers have recently been dealing with, and one of the conditions for good learning as Murphy (2007) says is to create autonomous learning in EFL. So, every English teacher educator is responsible for establishing the learning goal, deciding the content and the treatment, selecting the learning process, monitoring the progress of learning, and evaluating what has been learned.

Autonomous learning focuses on the willingness of learners to evaluate and take responsibility for their learning process (Benson, 2008; Murphy, 2007; Phan, 2013; Tholin & Smith, 2008; Vázquez, 2016). Vázquez (2016) refers the term "autonomy" to the situation in which learners are entirely self-presented; the collection of skills that can be applied to self-managed learning; the inherent ability that institutional education suppresses; exerting learners' duties to self-evaluate and the right of learners to determine what is happening.

Exploring autonomous learning processes and qualities from a teacher's point of view, would provide another current understanding, empiric evidence, and information that the

evolution of education has been largely determined by the transformation of the role of the teacher from teacher-centered to student-centered learning and from student-highly dependent to interdependent learning. Besides, the current research aims to ensure that EFL teachers have attention to students' autonomous learning processes, and the practices they are engaged in to encourage autonomous learning. This lies based on the idea that teachers' practices and concepts are vital to enhancing and managing educational processes (Cilliers, 2017). Moreover, encouraging autonomous learning could lead to increased engagement, encouragement, and responsibility of learners in learning (Masouleh & Jooneghani, 2012; Studies & Solmaz, 2017).

Therefore, to become an autonomous learner, individuals should have the capacity to handle their learning, take responsibility for the learning process, and take control of learning materials (Javad Riasati & Mollaei, 2014). Besides, they should be mindful of their skills and motivation with a focus on informed thought and decision making (Yim & Chuk, 2004). In a similar way, Nhan & Lai (2012) assert that autonomous learners take responsibility for their learning, participate in setting up learning goals, define content, select tools, take steps in the planning and execution of learning activities, as well as periodically review and evaluate the efficacy of their learning activities. Other experts such as Scharle & Szabó (2000) also argue that autonomous learners possess some other characteristics, which are supporting the concept that their efforts are essential to succeed in learning and behave accordingly, willing to collaborate with teachers and others, tracking their success actively, and doing an effort to maximize the opportunities available to them, also the classroom. Accordingly, autonomous learning may be fostered if learners can take responsibility for and make decisions about their learning since a sense of obligation in language learning and self-management are two facets of autonomy in its nature (Al Asmari, 2013; Barrett et al., 2006).

The ideas above route the writer to focus on how EFL teachers doing initial activities to encourage students autonomous learning especially in the era where blended learning become the chosen activities nowadays (Warman, 2021) . The initiation process of learning involves identifying personal learning interests, setting goals, planning for study, and developing learning opportunities. The learning management process involves learning involvement and maintenance steps which are choosing suitable approaches, changing learning routes, and negotiating with others (Dang, 2012). He also mentions that autonomous learning is not the same as independent learning since some characteristics of autonomous learning should cover in its process.

METHOD

A qualitative design is used in this study since the writer took interview and observation as the instrument to collect the main data for answering the research question namely *What initial activities have been encouraged for students' autonomous learning?* Here, Nvivo 12 was used and chosen as an analysis tool during the research.

The English teacher educators at the English language education department, the faculty of teacher training and education in *Pekanbaru* became the research samples as soon as they confirmed their participation. Twenty-nine items of the interview questions were given and it was open-ended besides the data from observation. A structured interview was employed to dig up information about English teacher educators' conception of autonomous learning processes and their practices observed using the introspective method. Meanwhile, a

retrospective interview was performed to confirm the results of observations, the reasons beyond particular actions, as well as the incongruency between the stated conception and the application of practices in the class. The interview questions were structured to collect data and it was Face to Face interview. These interview sessions were done after the observations, such a procedure may be conducted as a retrospective approach counts on articulating how subjects' minds or feelings are processing when the subjects perform actions (Brown & Ruiz, 2017).

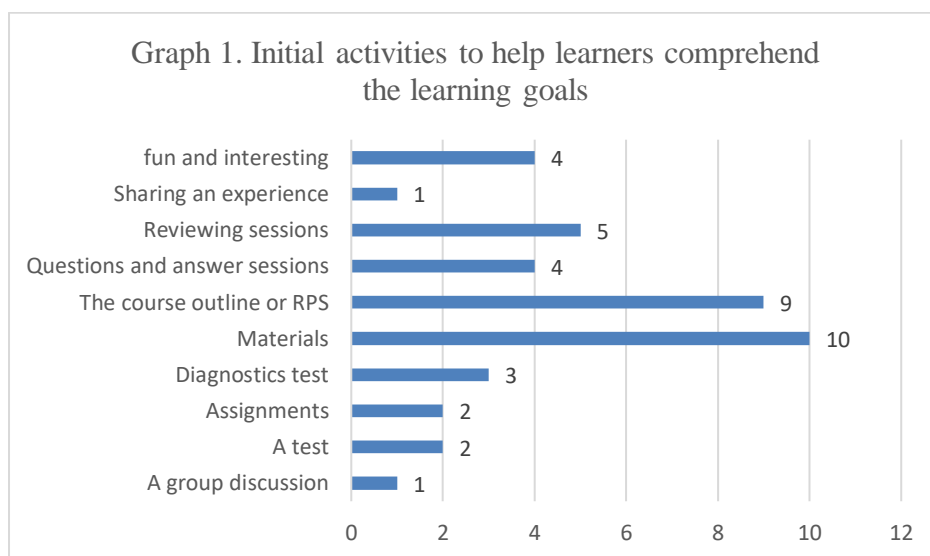
Observation was aimed at gathering the descriptions of activities that have carried out to foster students' autonomous learning. All of the data were about English teacher educators' activities to promote autonomous language learning in the EFL setting. The researcher determines the accuracy or credibility of the findings through two strategies, namely member checking and triangulation theories. Next, the reliability of the research is determined by primary data research finding, namely interviews, as well as the researcher's reduction process, which include themes and analytic coding and evidence recorded in *NODES*. Since research procedures are recorded in NVivo12 and can be displayed during data analysis, the researcher can perform measurements correctly and efficiently with Nvivo12. Meanwhile testing the validity of research data is done by: extending observations and triangulation after obtaining data so that she can process the data by describing qualitatively according to the facts at the research location to more easily understand the procedure.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Initiating Activities

Referring to the research question, here, the writers expose it into five categories of initial activities used to encourage students' autonomous learning (a) understanding the learning goal, (b) setting up EFL learners' personal goal, (c) making plans and agendas, (d) having an initiative to look for resources and opportunities and (d) use of target language as the preferred classroom communication.

a. Understanding the learning goal



Understanding the learning goal (see Graph 1) is essential in the implementation of autonomous learning. Providing learners with understanding to get their actively involved in their own learning, then educators have put efforts on guiding learners to comprehend the target language. There were six informants clearly stating that their educators told the learning goal from the beginning.

Generally, goals have something to do with content and intensity, which are not always easy to discern. Goal content is referred to as a target material, and goal intensity reflects the process of setting and achieving the goal. The goals are examined from learners' commitment, understanding of the goal's value, and the neural mechanisms involved in goal achievement (Klimas, 2017). The fifth informant stated that the target lessons should follow the curriculum. Meanwhile, the content of the materials should be clearly specified by themes. In achieving this goal, educators play as knowledge purveyors and power wielders, and learners are containers that are filled with knowledge. During the process, somehow learners need to interpret the lesson after educators remind them or explain the lesson again. From the observation, at the beginning of course session, learners need to acquaint with the learning objectives. Educators provided printed RPS (*Lesson Plan for the Semester*) and presented them on screen or distributed via Google Classroom and WhatApps. The RPS (*Lesson Plan for the Semester*) served as a springboard into the learning process. and others (E3, E4, and E5) expressed the aims and consequences of the lesson implicitly.

E1: "I usually explains what will discuss before doing the main activity".

E2: "My first meeting will discuss about materials or topics and activities for the whole semester".

E6: " I give students some files cover RPS for the semester"

Thus, Some informants (E1, E2, and E6) provided detailed explanations of RPS (*Rencana Pembelajaran Semester*), All informants thought explaining the course goals was critical to give overview of the whole learning.

There are several prominent steps to innate ignite learner autonomy. First, educators need to explain learning objectives clearly to learners before teaching. They can use meta-language that is possible to help learners identify the learning objective and provide a learning context to perform a task. With the initial instruction, learners will have a better focus on what they are supposed to learn by the end of the lesson. Next, educators ensure the compatibility of learning objectives based on the learners' knowledge; this helps them become more independent/self-directed. Another important aspect is to prioritize learner's needs according to their profiles, pay attention to the availability of learning sources, and set timing to achieve the target stated in the curriculum (RPS). Besides, educators have to formulate a learning purpose by describing and introducing the key concepts, topics, main ideas, and learner's needs.

Here, the informants usually began with Q and A to check learners' understanding before and after the material discussed. These findings correspond with Govender & Ajani (2021) stating that questions and answers whether written or verbal could make educators identify their learners' understanding of the learning topic. When the learning objectives are clear, learners can discern the learning objective. As a result, educators can evaluate classroom practice better and generate techniques and activities to achieve the teaching goals in addition to scaffold learners' foreign language acquisition process. Another method to check on the

learners' understanding is providing an incidental test both written or oral and periodical test in the mid-term and final term.

b. Setting up EFL learners' personal goal

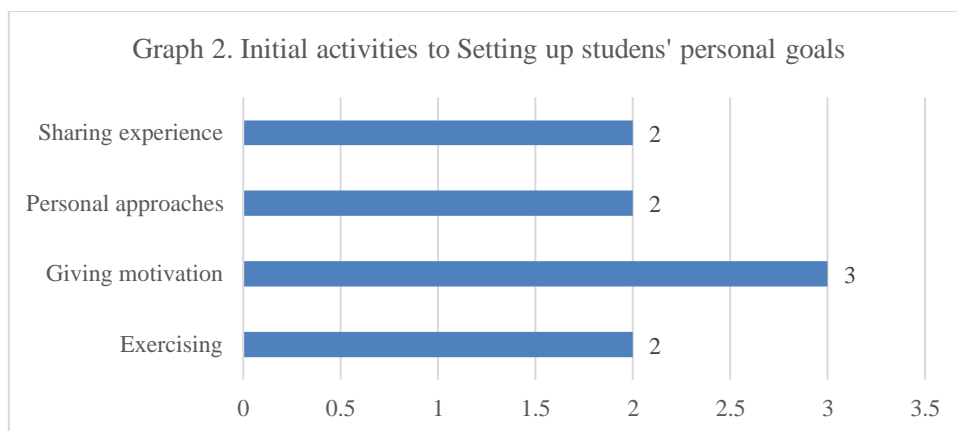
The importance of goals in learners' achievement and accomplishment can be calculated by how good the learners understanding the nature of goals themselves. The interview results showed that the informants helped the learners set up personal learning goals by providing a description of learning benefits and facts about actual teaching practices, exercises, and simulations. Besides, educators generally can give clues in order that learners cultivate prospective development of the personal goal. Provided strategies and feedback individually or in a group are other ways to embed autonomous learning. The observation showed that some informants focused more on the target curriculum than personal goals but not for E1 and E5. What they gave was sharing experiences as a motivation for learners' achievement. E1 and E5 shared their successful experiences e.g., being one of delegation of student exchange or finding a study allowance, internship and scholarship.

Exercises become another effort to help learners have a personal goal. In the informants' classes, the learners were also involved in nonstop questioning for effective learning activities. They shared, debated, analyzed, and assessed a topic with the entire class. The informants often carried out questioning at the start of the session while learners could raise their hands and offer a question about work, project, mid-term or final exam, and individual or group collaboration. The learners appeared to be more engaged in what they were expected to accomplish for the topic than in the issues themselves. Sometimes, the learners' questions were not about the topics but procedures and so on.

Next, the informants used a simulation to get accomplishment. E1, for instance, directly routed learners to use Quiz APPs during class. Meanwhile, E2 showed a video about academic public speaking or a systematic presentation. The simulations were related to the lesson that day. Visual support help learners recall instructional goals. Educators, for example, wrote the learning goals on the blackboard and returned questions to them frequently. The learners were expected to understand the course outline for the whole class and the final learning goals. Moreover, experience sharing, exercises, and a simulation make learners self-regulate their learning properly while educators assist them to overcome challenges and barriers. Vlachopoulos & Makri (2017) stated that a simulation, in general, increases not only learner motivation, but also emotional involvement, self- efficacy, and satisfaction. Thus, everyone may self-regulate his or her learning better with the right scaffolding from the educators.

However, the observation result of this indicator was not explicitly described. E1, E4, and E5 attempted to assist EFL learners to set their learning goals through experience sharing and movie watching in class. E1 and E5 also presented their successful learning experiences e.g., how they became English instructors and made a better change to their life with this position. E2, E3, and E6 provided easier exercises to assist EFL learners by reminding them of the course objectives for their learning success. Some informants explained the course objectives within the first hour of class (E1, E2, E5, and E6), while the others after class (E3 and E4). They explained vocally what was essential after completing the course materials, and they attempted to demonstrate the benefits of the activities. Graph 2, describes about initial activities to set up students' personal goal which could start from sharing experience

how benefit of mastering certain skill, having personal approach for personal one since every learner is unique, giving motivation in every occasion and doing regular exercising.



To sum up, educators have provided activities to gauge active participation and motivation of the learners. As a result, learners can have their learning styles, create learning objectives during their study, and select the learning methods to reach the actual goals. This never-ending process needs collaboration between educators and learners (Agustín-Llach & Canga Alonso, 2017).

c. Making plans and agendas

The learning comprehension and planning of the learning objectives are the primary structures in establishing autonomous learning. However, in reality, educators do not lead learners to a pre-planned curriculum that is supposed to include learner objectives. As the informants would formulate the lesson plan, they started to make it by conducting study program meetings where they would generate the course according to the vision and mission of the study program. They are in an arbitrary position between the demands of the curriculum and the various learning objectives according to learners' needs (Nguyen, 2011). Before announcing the course objectives, discussing the work plans is the initial step to accomplish. All informants considered that learners' prior knowledge and learning experience, as well as personal learning objectives impacted the work plans. Therefore, they tried to comprise personal learning goals, dynamic learning requirements, favored learning techniques, and diverse values and responsibilities into their class. The use of work plans is to forward self-evaluation and unique learning goals while educators are keeping the class syllabus in mind. With the use of the work plans, educators hoped the learners got the idea of the classroom activities that pertains to learning agendas. However, ineffective work plans are resolved by negotiation between both teacher and learners to create better circumstances and avoid intimidation. For example, E1, E2, and E6 stated that they negotiated about types of task, learning activity, supporting material, or procedures not only in the first meeting but also during the class meeting.

In general, educators in each department negotiated the syllabus before the course began. Negotiation about syllabus is also known as process syllabuses (Nguyen, 2011) which are drawn around joint decisions by educators and learners at different stages of a course. The joint decisions demonstrate the two parties' common knowledge of class management and

coverage of learning materials. In reality, a syllabus indicates a shared clear understanding of what is happening, what has to be done, and how interaction might be accomplished between educators and learners (Nguyen, 2011). Nguyen's research is in line with the current finding that negotiation between educators and learners can facilitate learners to share what is going on, what needs to be done, and the process since they only focus on the technical parts, such as time limit or the number of group members for a project or procedural work plans. E4 mentioned there was no syllabuses negotiation except for technical issues.

Besides, the educators were also concerned about the vision and mission of the English Department, learning resources, learning objectives, learning media and sources, learning activities, time allocation, and types of tasks and assessment with the outcome profile or institution profile, without neglecting learners' inputs.

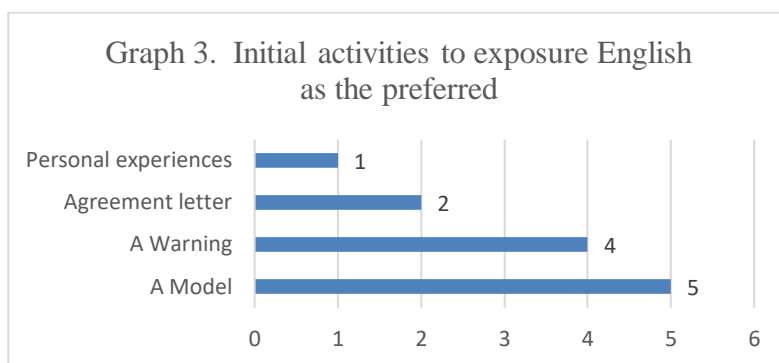
d. Having an initiative to look for resources and opportunities

Learners must also be guided on how to check out materials and tools themselves; with this guide, they could recognize what is important and what is not. If the learning environment is enjoyable and motivating, learners will be more likely to try out new learning styles and daunt to ask questions and help. The result mentioned that all informants forced learners to look up other resources on SAC (Self Access Center) that provides literacies, links of e-books and e-journals. Other previous studies explained that self-access language learning is a method of instruction that demands learners to have high control over their learning i.e., learning management, cognitive processes, and learning material outside classroom (Khotimah et al., 2019; Khulaiiyah, Utami Widiati, Mirjam Anugerahwati, 2021; Lengkanawati, 2017; Myartawan et al., 2013; Smith, 2000; Suharmanto, 2003).

Another way of teacher's initiative to make their learners independent is they gave assignments. E4 and E6 mentioned that internal motivation existed because learners were given tasks, for example, looking for a related topic or producing a note or resume from the recommended reading links. Assignments varied from making a presentation, doing a project, looking for materials on Media (YouTube), and adhering to rules (reward and punishment). Such initiatives are also viable in previous studies where project-based research i.e., digital video projects could encourage learners' autonomy (ÇAKICI, 2015; Espinosa, 2015; Hafner & Miller, 2011). Assignments explore unlimited possibilities to allow learners' creativity and critical thinking and ignite autonomous learning in the classroom. Educators can ask learners to be ethnography investigations by writing diaries. Such activity is useful to shape learning communities who are social, integrated, and supportive for self-awareness and self-improvement.

e. Use of target language as the preferred classroom communication

Graph 3 stated 4 initial activities which encourages students to use English, they are personal experiences, agreement letter, a warning and a model.



Life-long language learning, especially in the EFL setting, is the state where learners have limited opportunities to use English due to infrequent interactions with native speakers. A foreign language in this context is a language learned only during formal education. Sharing personal experiences to students about living and using English daily has given excitement for them. Here, teachers tried to create situation as if they learn foreign area of native speakers. E1 and E5 spoke the target language as the primary means of teaching and learning instructions from the beginning; their method was modified to be some agendas, such as personal experience sharing. Guo (2018) mentioned that past autonomous experiences of educators affect how learners perform their duties and provide autonomous opportunities and interactions for their learners. Presentation or direct comment is another assignment to see the progressive learning development with continuous appraisal. Agustín-Llach & Canga Alonso (2017) said that foreign language learners utilized the target language correctly as a means of communication with peers or parents. As a result, learners' foreign language proficiency will be better, and learners can be more engaging in communication.

Language learning is unlikely to be effective unless a learner strives to involve in the foreign language learning process. For example, E3 handed in formal written speaking rules or agreement letter to the learners. This letter is to ensure learners speak English. Another previous study stated self-reliance assignments might foster learners to speak the target language for communication purposes (Gao, 2011). There were warnings and punishments for incompliant learners.

Three essential concepts of learner autonomy have something to do with determination of appropriate target language usage. First, to build a learning plan, learners must reflect on their learning process; second, they must make commitments to complete the activities; third, they must assess their tasks individually and in group. In contrast, E6 tolerated some excuses such as using a mixed language for difficult words. She even tolerating some learning aspects to make learners can take a trial and error in language learning.

Being a model when communication and interaction held in and out of classroom. Here the educators' role as a facilitator and a prompter are occurred, where educators assist learners and deliberate multiple role-play or modelling conversational patterns (Masouleh & Jooneghani, 2012) to help them overcome some confusion and barriers (Balcıkanlı, 2010). Giving warnings and punishments, sharing personal successful experiences, and guiding to classroom interaction are methods the educators here used to raise learner participation in speaking the target language. These activities were organized as role of the teacher as manager to meet the expectation, and those evident in line with Vázquez (2016) that educators should

be responsible for coordinating different activities that acceptable and relevant to classroom teaching and that best meet the needs and expectations of the learners.

CONCLUSION

Basically, the fifth informant believed that as long as they gave choices related to the topic, such as alternative lecturer objectives, learning, supporting materials, learning methods, and learning strategies students will be increasingly trained to make decisions when and how they learn. They also have the same opinion that to encourage students to be more careful in making learning decisions, they still pay attention to the needs of students or student profiles, the suitability of the syllabus with the curriculum, vision and mission of study programs and institutions. Ideally understanding and knowledge and skills lecturers about autonomous learning have to be honed with CPD (Continuing Professional Development) or continue participate in training and workshops because the quality of the education system is closely related to the quality of educators and offers a variety of learning strategies with a constructivist learning environment that allows learners to manage self-study considering educators are the main players in realizing independent learning in where reactive autonomy is still a common character of Indonesian students. It would better for the further study focusing on obstacles on raising autonomous learning level.

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