

A STUDY OF AUTONOMOUS LEARNING STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED BY MEMBERS OF INDONESIA ENGLISH COMMUNITY

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Abstract

Autonomous learning is extremely important because it helps students promote independency, self-awareness, determination, and adaptability in technology employment in learning. The aim of this study is to describe the learning strategies of each autonomous learning level among members of the English Conversation club and to inquire about their outcomes in the form of speaking fluency. Therefore, this study employs a qualitative research method with case study research design to find patterns and connections and inquire about phenomena in depth. The results show that the advanced and intermediated level participants employ a metacognitive strategy and they displayed a high level of speaking fluency as the outcome of the strategy they employed. The beginner level employed a social mediation learning strategy and showed less autonomous learning activity but still had high speaking fluency, probably due the language aptitude. Whereas the emerging level participant employ a social mediation learning strategy and he displayed a low level of fluency. Participants with advanced, intermediated, and beginner level possess intrinsic motivation which helps them with their consistency and improvement. It provides evidence that metacognitive strategy can lead to speaking fluency improvement and intrinsic motivation. Educators should develop teaching methods that promote the development of independent learning skills and intrinsic motivation in students.

Keywords— *autonomous, fluency, metacognition, motivation, language aptitude, speaking*

Introduction

There has been a long-standing interest in studying autonomous learning today although it has applied for decades due to the condition that needs distance learning with a more economical fee. The practice of autonomous learning was found in many fields of study particularly in English language teaching (ELT) (Palfreyman & Benson, 2019). Numerous studies conducted when the world facing a pandemic, schools needed to be closed to prevent the spread of Covid-19, and autonomous learning through distance learning became the problem solver of education (Anthonysamy & Singh, 2023; Kirsch & Vaiouli, 2023). Since technological development is so fast and learners' demands are high, research on autonomous learning is still extremely important.

Few teachers today equip students to learn independently. In the face of the pandemic, the implementation of flipped classrooms and post-pandemic flexible and hybrid learning settings has improved the situation, but there is still potential for improvement (Bosmans, Casciotta, & Fivaz, 2023). Autonomous learning helps students discover learning needs and learning objective, decide the aims of the learning process, monitoring and assess learning outcome (Wael, Akib, & Akib, 2023). Learners are accustomed to determine their learning strategy based on the objective they need to achieve and apply their knowledge in different contexts (Daflizar, Sulistiyo, & Kamil, 2022; Marantika, 2021). Technology, such as mobile

phones, would not be a distraction in learning since learners are able to take control of their learning. They can use any device to foster their learning process (Howlett & Waemusa, 2019). If students want to develop an appropriate degree of communicative competency and become successful language learners, encouraging autonomous learning and effective learning practices becomes more crucial (Daflizar et al., 2022).

The majority of the study on autonomy in language acquisition is focused on institutional contexts, with little attention paid to non-institutional learning (Lai & Chun, 2017). At present, researchers' understanding of autonomous out-of-class language learning is still quite limited. First, the recent research on the topic of autonomous learning has shown that in academic speaking class, students prefer using metacognitive strategy and social mediation strategy (Wael et al., 2023). Second previous research shows educators should focus on creating engaging and supportive digital learning environments, and they should teach students how to use autonomous learning strategies effectively. Policymakers should provide support for programs and initiatives that promote autonomous learning (Anthonysamy & Singh, 2023). Third, the metacognitive ability and autonomous learning gives an awareness of the learning process and strategies that lead to success (Marantika, 2021). Fourth, according to Mansooji et al. (2022), Autonomous learning can be seen in two ways: 1) after class (e.g., distance learning, extensive reading, self-access) and 2) during class (e.g., students sharing their thoughts on material selection or identifying learning goals). The second category, which concerns the promotion of in-class autonomy, can only be accomplished through the instructors' teaching methods, which are influenced by the teachers' attitudes about what language instruction is and how it is supposed to be carried out.

Based on the previous studies, the researcher sees a gap in the relationship between the autonomous level and autonomous learning strategy in speaking fluency specifically. Most of the studies were also conducted in class setting, which mean the students followed the teachers or instructors' advice or direction. To fill this gap this study, focus on the autonomous level and learning strategy. This study also involves members of the English Conversation Club in Surabaya as participants. The researcher decided to conduct this research on members of this club because there is no teacher or facilitator that can intervene in the learning process of the members. There is no specific curriculum and the leader only provides topics to be discussed in the group. However, they gather there with a willingness to improve their speaking skill.

Therefore, this study aims to describe the learning strategies of each autonomous learning level among the members of the English Conversation Club according to their level and elaborate the outcomes of their learning strategy.

Literature Review

Autonomous learning is a multifaceted process that combines metacognitive, cognitive, and affective components. Over the last 25 years, a substantial body of research has investigated these, yet these studies analyze many of the same aspects (Bosmans et al., 2023). Holec, in QI (2012), states that autonomous learning is the capacity to control one's learning process. Being in control of one's own learning means being in charge of all decisions pertaining to every facet of that learning. Chowdhury (2021) cites Sidupa who summarizes that, by taking responsibility for learning means the learners are expected to setting their own learning goals, selecting or defining their own learning materials, choosing the strategy and techniques to be used in learning, monitor their own learning progress; and evaluating the entire learning experience. Autonomous learning emphasizes learners' active roles and determination in learning and make them realize their full potential (Lai, 2019; Lai & Chun, 2017). Autonomous learning also has strong relationship with self-efficacy and metacognition. The relationship between learner autonomy and motivation is bidirectional, varying at different phases of a learner's progress and throughout their lives. Motivation is a fluid concept that can change shape and strength over the course of a learner's education. (Mansooji et al., 2022).

An autonomous student is expected to exhibit the majority, if not all, of the following behaviors: identifying learning objectives, developing strategies to achieve these objectives, developing working plans, deeply thinking about their own learning, identifying methods for

identifying problems, identifying relevant sources, assessing their progress, and setting their learning and performance criteria (Karademir & Akgul, 2019). Those traits appeared different depending on learners' autonomous learning level. Autonomous level refers to an individual's degree of independence in their learning process. It represents the ability and willingness of a learner to take control of their learning (Firat & Koyuncu, 2023). A study on the autonomous level by Abdelrazeq (2018) presents an autonomous level rubric that was developed based on Tassinari's description of each autonomous activity level. The levels consist of the advanced level, intermediate level, beginning level, and emerging level.

Autonomous learning empowers students to take control of their learning goals, including the design and planning of their learning process. Students may use their practices and techniques effectively, examine their learning process, and evaluate and reflect on their learning experience. (Alkandari & Al-Failakawei, 2022; Leary, Walker, Lefler, & Kuo, 2019; Odinokaya, Kreпкаia, Karpovich, & Ivanova, 2019) (Alkandari and Al-Failakawei 2022;). Learners with high autonomy learning ability set their learning strategy. A learning strategy is necessary for learners self-confident in learning (Wael et al., 2023). There are three common strategies to use to promote autonomous learning, namely: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and motivation strategies which is also called social mediation strategy (Daflizar et al., 2022; Dignath & Büttner, 2008; Tham, 2020). Metacognitive strategies are the skill and entire system that students utilize to control, lead, organize, and steer their learning through meticulous planning, process supervision, and assessment of learning outcomes. (Marantika, 2021). Cognitive strategies are implemented by reading, remembering, paying attention, and asking questions. Whereas Social mediation includes relaxing during learning activities, setting the group rules, cooperating with peers, providing communication effectively, and helping peers evaluate their assignments (Wael et al., 2023).

Research Method

Research design

In line with the objective of the researcher, this study employs qualitative research method with case study research design. Case study research design is a research method used to explore a phenomenon or problem in depth and comprehensively in its natural context. It can assist in finding patterns and connections that would be missed using other approaches and explore a phenomenon in depth, taking into account all of its complexities and nuances. The researcher conducted an interview and speaking assessment through phone and recorded. Individuals' autonomous learning strategy was obtained through the interview.

Participants

Members of the English Conversation Community in Surabaya, Indonesia, make up the population. There were 25 respondents who completed a self-report questionnaire, and four individuals were chosen as the sample for an interview based on the self-report questionnaire, they completed based on the autonomous level rubric. These are the four levels: advanced, intermediate, beginner, and emerging.

Instruments

The first instrument is the autonomous learning level rubric which consist of three level of autonomous learning, namely: advanced, intermediate, beginner, and emerging; the second is the self-report questionnaire with multiple choice: always, sometimes, rarely, never; The self-report questionnaire is derived from autonomous learning level rubric. The third instrument is the speaking fluency rubric consist of six levels of fluency. Level one is the lowest if the participants are unable speak fluently, use a very limited range of vocabulary, and display many grammar errors, and level six is the highest if the participants speak fluently with no pauses, use a wide range of vocabulary and excellent grammar accuracy.

Data analysis

After filling out the self-report questionnaire, the researcher analyzed the self-report

questionnaire to check the frequency of autonomous activity employed by the population. The highest score is 40 the lowest is 10. Scores of 10-15 are emerging level, scores of 16-25 are beginner level, scores of 26-35 are intermediate level, and scores of 36-40 are advanced level. Derived from the analysis the researcher decided on the four participants based on their autonomous level. The four participants contacted by the research to have interview and assessment via phone and recorded. From the recorded phone call, the research determined the participants autonomous learning strategy and assessed their speaking fluency based on the speaking fluency rubric.

Results and Discussion

Self-report questionnaire was filled by twenty-five respondents, the result shows how frequent autonomous activities practiced by the participants. From the results, the researcher divided the participants into four groups according to their level.

Table 1.1 Frequency of Autonomous learning Activity

Autonomous Activity	Frequently Practiced by Participants
Controlling one's feelings	14
Recognizing one's own need and setting goals	12
Motivation oneself	9
Reflecting	9
Designing, editing, and completing tasks	8
Cooperating	8
Structuring knowledge	8
Self-Evaluation	7
Managing one's own learning	7
Choosing materials and methods	4

Table 1.2 Autonomous level in Population

Autonomous Level	Number of Members
Advance	6
Intermediate	15
Beginner	2
Emerging	2

According to the self-report questionnaire that has been conducted, the writer found that there are four groups of people with four different autonomous learning levels, namely advanced level, intermediate level, beginner level, and emerging level. The sorting is based on the self-report questionnaire the participants filled out by themselves to gauge their autonomous level. The researcher interviewed four participants represent each of four different autonomous learning levels.

Table 1.3 Autonomous level, strategy, and speaking fluency

No	Autonomous Level	Learning Strategy	Fluency Level	Description
1	Advanced	Metacognitive	6	Speaks fluently with no noticeable pauses or hesitations. Uses a wide range of vocabulary and grammar structures with accuracy.
2	Intermediate	Metacognitive	5	Speaks fluently with few pauses

No	Autonomous Level	Learning Strategy	Fluency Level	Description
3	Beginner	Social Mediation	6	Speaks fluently with no noticeable pauses or hesitations. Uses a wide range of vocabulary and grammar structures with accuracy.
4	Emerging	Social Mediation	2	Speaks with difficulty and hesitations. Uses a very limited range of vocabulary and grammar structures with errors.

The Advanced -level Participant (AP)

The participant is a male. 27 years old, bachelor graduate. Most of the time, in learning, the participant applies metacognitive learning strategies because he prefers to arrange everything in order. AP believes that a structured learning path is the best to achieve goals in learning everything. AP states, “It is better to structuring our learning path before learning path so we know our objective and progress clearly”

AP prefers learning English by mixing online resources, books, and interaction with other people. He manages his resources and makes them in order to understand them comprehensively. On a daily basis, he plans what he has to learn on that day and what level he has to reach. His plan consists of the source of learning and the duration of the learning. He uses the Pomodoro technique to set the duration of his learning, the purpose is to prevent exhaustion or learning too short. AP reports, “I mix all resources either books or online. I apply some learning technique in my independent learning to make it effective.”

In learning to speak, AP prefers to gain vocabulary from reading and arranging new sentences using the new vocabulary he just learned by writing it first. He also applies the ‘Thinking in English’ strategy to train his speaking skill on a daily basis, he reported, “I know I can’t practice speaking with anyone at any time, so I find thinking is English technique quite helpful for constant practice although it only occurs in my mind”. He uses mobile applications to help him improve his speaking skills and sometimes he pays for membership for some period. He believes in his preparation; therefore, he feels confident when he has conversations in a club or with native speakers.

AP is able to monitor his improvement when using any technique. He noticed weaknesses and strengths in the techniques he uses to learn; therefore, he applies more than one technique to learn English, particularly speaking, such as shadowing, thinking in English, reading out loud, interacting with native speakers on social media, etc. In evaluating his speaking skill, he depends on his self-awareness and feedback. He reported, “I notice sometimes I am stuck and need peers’ feedback to improve my fluency and accuracy.” He notices that sometimes he is unable to speak as fluently as usual and tries to find the problem. He recognizes some problems such as a new environment and anxiety can affect his ability to recall some vocabulary when speaking. After evaluating himself, he usually makes another plan to fix this problem as he reported, “It is useless if we only know our weakness without making any plan to improve it.”

AP believes by learning English he can gain new relationships, particularly with foreigners, he reported, “Learning English helps me to keep me confident and learn socializing, I gain a lot of new friends by joining this kind community.” Additionally, he believes he can gain a lot of information for his own development, he reported, “I also a kind of bookworm and always want to gain more information this is one of my motivations to learn English.” He realizes that some information is limited to language because it is only written in English and not many people can understand it, therefore, by improving his English skill, he can access that sort of information.

The Intermediate-level Participant (IP)

The intermediate-level Participant is a female, 30 years old, bachelor's graduate. In learning, she designs her learning material and makes her own schedule to learn. Therefore, it can be concluded that he applies metacognitive strategies in learning, particularly in speaking.

The participant believes that if someone commits to learning something, one has to arrange one's learning structurally so that one can monitor the learning progress, especially in learning a language, IP reported, "I think if we have great intention to learn, we have to make time and plan it in advance so we can see the progress and will not be stuck." The participant arranges her own learning material from the internet, such as websites, YouTube, and podcasts. She also learns English from books. She makes her own study schedule and makes it an obligation even if she is exhausted.

For the participant, building the foundation is extremely significant before someone gets into an interaction to practice speaking, as she reported, "We have to fulfill ourselves with vocabulary and grammar, speaking will come along." AP builds a foundation that can be conducted by preparing and learning the material. When the foundation has been strong, it would be easy to apply it in an interaction. She intentionally memorizes each vocabulary she has learned and learns how to use it in a specific situation and she can recall the vocabulary intentionally.

In learning speaking skills, AP can be aware of her learning progress. She believes that self-awareness is necessary for learning English, she reported, "To be honest I don't really assess my English academically but I do daily assessment of myself when I express myself in English to other people." The participant prefers to do daily assessments as a form of learning evaluation. She recognizes parts that she needs to improve and searches for tips or hacks in order to improve them and does it repeatedly. It happens every time she learns, whether it is alone or in interaction with other people.

AP main motivation is for her self-development, she reported, "My main goal is to develop myself to be able to speak English more fluently." Her motivation is type of intrinsic motivation for her development behalf and it keeps her consistently learning in her daily basis.

The Beginner-level Participant (BP)

The participant is a female, 23 years old, senior high school graduate. She applies the social mediation learning strategy. She realizes that she is unable to set up her learning resources and manage her time to study. BP does not like to plan her learning schedule and plan her time to study, she prefers to learn by practicing through interaction with other people and she applies this to any subject that she learns. She reported, "I am not really good at managing my time to learn something so I prefer to let it flow without any plan to study because I enjoy it." She believes that learning with flow can be more enjoyable through direct interaction.

BP manages to improve her speaking skill by earning vocabulary from other people and searching for the meaning by herself, but sometimes she asks her partner directly. BP reported, "from my interaction I gain a lot of vocabulary and receive feedback from my speaking partners." She receives feedback from her interaction with other people although rarely asks for it. If she finds new and interesting words, in order to memorize them, she increases the usage of those words. Although the participant prefers to learn with the social mediation strategy, she never intentionally finds people with the same interest. However, she believes that people with the same interest will find each other. Therefore, she always finds people that support her speaking skill improvement because she is an active person and interested to join onsite or online communities.

BP has no external motivation to learn English, as she reported, "I haven't had any external motivation but I like to challenge myself to develop myself. Although I have a lot of benefit such as able to talk to foreigner or for works but it's not my main purpose." AP main purpose in learning English is only for her self-development which makes her keep learning on her daily basis.

The Emerging-level Participant (EP)

The emerging-level participant is a male, 27 years old, senior high school graduate. EP has the intention to improve his English-speaking skill but never has a serious commitment to learning it structurally. EP prefers to learn English through games and interaction with other people. It can be concluded that the participant employs social mediation strategy in learning.

EP prefers not to manage his own material and schedule his time to study, he reported, "I learn English from English songs and games, but besides that I also have conversation with my brother-in-law who is a native speaker." His main resources to develop his speaking skills are from games because he has interactions with people all around the world, and from his brother-in-law who is a native speaker. He prefers to jump into interaction instead of learning it structurally. Sometimes he finds some content on social media about English material and watches it, but he never intentionally searches for specific English learning content on the internet. He is currently learning two languages which are English and Korean. He uses the Duolingo mobile application but only to learn Korean because, through his interaction with games, he finds a lot of Korean gamers.

The participant always has a willingness to find a speaking partner to improve himself, he reported, "I find people to practice my speaking skill through community." He has the confidence to talk to new people or foreigners. However, he does not receive feedback from his interaction with a native speaker frequently and he has never asked for it. It is because the native speaker he interacts with prefers to understand his limit in speaking English.

EP main motivation to learn English is to work, "I learn English because I want to be a tour guide someday." His primary motivation to learn English is to reach his dream, however, he does not think it is necessary to plan his learning to fulfill his objective.

Autonomous Learning and Speaking Fluency

Autonomous learning was said to be one of the predictors of learning outcomes and achievement (Kirsch & Vaiouli, 2023). In an initial investigation involving undergraduate students, it was discovered that goal-setting and time-management exerted notably positive influences on autonomous control. Effort-regulation also exhibited a positive impact on learners' autonomy, albeit to a moderate extent. In contrast, help-seeking was found to have a significantly adverse effect on autonomy (Papamitsiou & Economides, 2019). This current study shows that EP shows low learning outcomes since he is unable to control his own learning, set goal, and manage his time. However, in this study, the researcher also discovers that the participant with a beginner autonomous learning level (BP) has excellence fluency in speaking even though she is unable to manage her time, plan her study, and make learning objective. From the discussion with the participant, most likely she has language aptitude which makes it easy for her to learn languages. A fundamental assumption of language aptitude is an innate, relatively fixed talent for language learning. Language aptitude has four subcomponents: phonetic coding ability, associative memory, grammatical sensitivity, and inductive language analytic ability (Huang, Loerts, & Steinkrauss, 2022). A study shows evidence that a learner with aptitude improves continuously either in pronunciation accuracy and fluency only by receiving input from their interaction opportunities in their target language (Zheng, Saito, & Tierney, 2022). It is possible for the beginner-level participant to master foreign language only by her interaction opportunities without any structural learning plan. It means learner with low autonomous learning level still can have excellence learning outcome with some exception. However, further research is needed to clarify the relation between language aptitude and autonomous learning.

In this study, the researcher discovers that the advanced-level (AP) and intermediate-level (IP) participants have the same learning strategies which is the metacognitive strategy. This is in line with the previous study that autonomous learning predicts outcomes of learning and the significance of goal-setting and time management (Kirsch & Vaiouli, 2023; Papamitsiou & Economides, 2019). The two participants who has high level of autonomous activity indicated excellence learning outcomes in the form of speaking fluency. Their score is slightly different but still high. They show fluency in conjunction with grammar accuracy.

AP and IP appeared to have high metacognition which is defined as the awareness of thinking about what is known and what is unknown. In the context of learning, students learn how to learn, knowing the capabilities and modalities of learning, and know the best learning strategies to learn effectively (Samsudin & Hardini, 2019). Learners with good metacognition are usually aware of their process of thinking and able to design their learning path and apply the metacognitive strategy in their learning process (Marantika, 2021). In line with that, another study shows that participants who employed a metacognitive strategy focused on their preparation by arranging their learning resources and planning their study plan (Dörr & Perels, 2019). AP and IP are aware of their capabilities and modalities, therefore they can design and evaluate their learning. Whereas BP, she has low awareness of her capability, therefore most of the time she needs peers to give her feedback to improve. It is possible if she was unable to find any peers to speak English her ability would be adherent. While EP, since he has low self-awareness has difficulty in improving himself

A study in 2022 about metacognition and speaking skills finds that learners with mature pre-existing metacognitive skills may benefit more from indirect metacognitive interventions such as the use of reflection diaries (Paterson, 2022). Language classes had various influences on students' out-of-class language learning, such as stimulating learners' interests, helping them to find language resources, and prompting them to notice language opportunities and progress in their activities outside the classroom (Palfreyman & Benson, 2019). This current study was conducted outside of class and no direct or indirect intervention, however, the researcher found that the AP and IP know what they have to do to achieve their learning goals, monitor their process, and evaluate their learning progress.

According to self-determination theory (SDT), autonomy is a fundamental psychological need of human beings. SDT postulates that three types of motivation fall along the continuum of the extent to which individuals' behaviors are autonomously motivated. These types are intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation (Pan & Gauvain, 2012). Recent study shows autonomously motivated students engage in learning driven by their own will and interest. Their actions stem from personal preferences and desires, guiding their involvement in academic activities. Within autonomous motivation, two sub-components exist: "identified regulation," where students connect with externally initiated reasons or personally important goals, and "intrinsic regulation," the highest level of autonomy, observed when students study out of curiosity and genuine interest in the learning material, driven by internal causality (Vergara-Morales, del Valle Tapia, Mujica, Fernández, & Villalobos, 2019). In this current study AP, IP, and BP have intrinsic motivation in learning and appears extremely significant since it keeps them consistently and constantly learning and improving, this is in line with the two previous studies. Whereas EM, who has extrinsic motivation in learning, appears struggling with his consistency and improvement.

The researcher realizes there are still limitation of this current study. This study has a small sample size, which is only four participants since the focus is an in-depth understanding of the pattern of each level that is represented. However, it makes it difficult to generalize the findings to a larger population. There is no control group in this study, thus it is difficult to know if there are any other factors that influenced the finding. Another limitation is the source of data which was self-report data, there is a risk of bias as the participants might have or underreported their autonomous learning skills.

Conclusion

The aims of this study are to describe the learning strategies of each autonomous learning level among the members of the English Conversation Community according to their level and elaborate the outcomes of their learning strategy. Therefore, to achieve this aim the researcher employ case study research design to find patterns and connection between autonomous learning strategy, autonomous level, and the learning outcomes. This study found that members with Advance and Intermediate level of autonomous have high speaking fluency. They hone their speaking ability by employing metacognitive strategy in learning, therefore they design their learning plan, monitor and evaluate their learning. Learner with beginner level of

autonomous also display high speaking fluency by employing social mediation strategy. It appears that autonomous learning does not always predict learning outcomes with some exception such as language aptitude. In this case, although learner with beginner level displayed low autonomous learning activity employment, she is able to learn directly from her interaction. Whereas participant with emerging level of autonomous employs social mediation strategy but displayed low speaking fluency.

Regarding motivation in learning, participants with advance, intermediate, and beginner level of autonomous possess intrinsic motivation that keep them learning consistently and improving. In contrast, participant with a beginner level of autonomy possess extrinsic motivation and low learning consistency which also affect his improvement in learning. It shows motivation in learning is extremely significant for learning consistency and improvement. This study contributes to the understanding of the relationship between autonomous learning strategies, autonomous level, and speaking fluency which is occurred outside of classroom. This study provides evidence that metacognitive strategy can lead to speaking fluency improvement. It suggests that learners need to learn to take control of their learning by employ metacognitive strategy in their autonomous learning. This study also highlights how important intrinsic motivation which affect learning consistency and improvement in speaking fluency. This study also suggests that language aptitude might play a role in autonomous learning. A Learner with low autonomous learning skill still can achieve high speaking fluency if the learner has language aptitude. Overall, this study suggests educators to develop teaching methods that promote the development of independent learning skills and intrinsic motivation in students. Teachers can support students in creating their own learning objectives and in reflecting on their own learning.

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