

*Students' Attitudes Towards Self-Directed Learning Out of Classroom: Indonesian Context*

Silmy Arizatul Humaira, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

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**Abstract**

There is a stereotype viewing Asian students as passive learners and dependent on teachers' instruction. Regarding this issue, this study attempts to address the Indonesian high school students' attitudes on whether they have initiative and be responsible for their own learning out of the classroom and if so, why. Therefore, 30 high school students were asked to fill out the questionnaires and interviewed in order to figure out their attitudes towards self-directed learning in learning English beyond the classroom. The descriptive qualitative research analysis adapted Knowles's theory (1975) about Self-directed learning (SDL) to analyze the data. The findings showed that the students have a potential to possess self-directed learning but they have difficulties in doing self-evaluation. Therefore, this study supports the teacher to promote self-directed learning instruction for EFL successful learning by assisting students in dealing with those aforementioned problems. Furthermore, it is expected to be a beneficial reference which gives new insights on the self-directed learning practice in a specific context.

Keywords: Attitudes, Self-directed learning (SDL), Learning strategy.

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## Introduction

As a lingua franca, English is one of the International languages that is commonly used as a bridge of communication among people who speak different languages around the world. It leads to the consideration of teaching English as a compulsory subject in many countries, including in Indonesian junior and senior high school (Mattarima & Hamdan, 2011). However, unfortunately, time allotment of English in formal school is very limited, approximately 2 class hours per week. This phenomenon becomes very problematic because English is regarded as English as Foreign Language in Indonesian context, meaning that English is rarely used in daily communication. The limited exposure of English language in Indonesia is often claimed to be the major cause of students' low achievement of English language proficiency (Sukyadi, 2015). To cope with this problem, Grover, et al. (2014) suggest the learners to maximize the learning not only inside the formal classroom but also outside the classroom. In the other words, fostering Self-directed Learning (henceforth: SDL) is important to raise students' awareness to take a charge on their own learning.

The term, SDL is discussed in adult education area. SDL is deeply correlated to adult education (Song & Hill, 2007). In contrast, Alghamdi (2016) stated that although this term is often associated with adult education, it is not limited to this area. For example, Lamb (2004) implied that high school students might engage in independent learning. Gholami (2016) stated that this kind of self-access and learning autonomy is originated from Western culture and this idea is claimed to be more appropriate to Western cultures rather than non-Western. In addition, SDL is claimed as effective learning strategies in Western culture but it is perceived as a problematic feature in Asian and secondary level context (Lamb, 2004).

Supporting that statement, Gan (2004) exposed a growing stereotype related to Asian learners by citing from others' scholars such as Young (1987) and Gu (2002) who perceive Asian as passive learners who depend on the teachers and unable to learning independently and identically associated to rote learning mode.

Despite those negative judgments, it is very important to investigate Asian learners more deeply in order to understand the way they learn. It would be better to looking at this views from different sides and avoiding judgmental assumptions by revealing several reasons behind that. Perhaps, in the Asian context, it does not mean that SDL is completely neglected because the different cultures among communities would probably execute different patterns of learning. Dealing with this phenomenon, investigating SDL in Asian context would be significant to explore what are the students be able to do and what are the constraints that the students might have during SDL practice. It is supported by Gan (2003) as cited in Su & Duo (2010) who contended that there is a call for more research on how and why university students conducted such kind of self-directed learning out of the classroom. Therefore, similar to that study, this current study attempts to investigate SDL in Asian context especially in Indonesian context but instead of investigating university students, high school students attitudes towards SDL are elaborated more. In this case. The term "attitudes" refers to students' behavior or learning practice. It is based on Grover and friends' explanation that the word "practice" refers to students' "behaviors or attitudes" to use various resources such as watching TV or reading a newspaper to

enhance their English skills (Grover et al., 2014). In other words, the purpose of this study is to investigate the students' practice of SDL outside the formal classroom to make use of various resources to improve their English.

The participants of the study are thirty students of "Language" class. The consideration of selecting these students is based on Lamb (2004) who contends that the students tend to have a high level of SDL in the area that is familiar to them. Based on this statement, the participants of this study are the students of the language class who are assumed to have a high level of motivation to learn languages, including English independently outside the formal education. Therefore, the exploration of this topic would be very significant to understand the practice of SDL in a particular socio-cultural context. In this case, Indonesia as one of the Asian countries is often viewed as passive learners who are deepened on teachers who have authoritative power. The students' attitudes are needed to be explored more in order to know how they spend their time to learn outside the classroom. Therefore, this study intends to address this issue by delineating students' attitudes towards SDL is investigated in order to understand how they carry out their learning.

## **Literature Review**

Self-directed learning (henceforth SDL) is a topic that is extensively discussed in second language acquisition field. It is argued as a process, attitudes, strategies, etc. Many scholars defined SDL in various ways, but the most popular definition of SDL is proposed by Knowles (1975) which is cited in many sources. According to Knowles (1975), SDL is:

“...a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (p.18).” ( as cited in Du, 2013; Grover, et al., 2014; Su & Duo, 2010 ).

Many studies revealed the effectiveness of SDL to increase all learning aspects such as students' achievements, motivation, etc. SDL is originally from Western culture and it is often said that it does not work properly in non-Western countries due to some reasons Gholami (2016). For example, Young (1987) and Gu (2002) argued that Asian students are passive learners who rely on what teachers instruct them to do (as cited in Gan, 2004).

There are many terms which are associated with SDL such as self-regulated learning, self-efficacy, learning autonomy (LA), self-regulated learning and many more. Alghamdi (2016) explained that those terms are a number of learning models which emphasize the importance of learners' responsibility to control their own learning. Self-efficacy is described as the ability to direct their own learning because of they believe that successful learning comes from efforts they made (Wenden, 1998 as cited in Alghamdi, 2016). Meanwhile, learning autonomy is defined by Holec (1981) as the ability to take a responsibility for own learning (as cited in Alghamdi, 2016). Self-regulated learners are described by Zimmerman (1989) as “people who ‘plan, organize, self-instruct, self-monitor, and self-evaluate’ the learning process (as cited

in Alghamdi, 2016). Meanwhile, Benson (2001) stated that self-directed learning refers to the ability of the learners to direct their own learning not under others instruction (as cited in Bordonaro, 2006). In the other words, SDL refers to how a student takes his own initiatives by himself or under other people's assistance to identify the learning needs, learning goals, learning material resources, appropriate learning strategies and to be able to evaluate learning results.

SDL brings a lot of useful impacts towards the development of learning strategies for successful learning. For instance, Horwitz (1987) stated that time to learn outside the classroom is longer than inside the classroom, therefore, the ability of the students to make use this time effectively for learning would possibly impact their success in language learning (as cited in Gan, 2004; Su & Duo, 2010). In addition, Su & Duo (2010) stated that long life self-directed learning is very important because it might be possible to support an individual to continue learning after graduating from formal school. In addition, Candy (1991) claimed that learners would likely to exhibit a high level of SDL in an areas that are familiar to their prior experience (as cited in Song & Hill, 2007). They gave an example as an illustration of this statement, a rugby player might have high-level of SDL to play football.

One of the useful frameworks of Self-directed learning is constructed by Garrison (1997). According to him, there are three important aspects of SDL such as self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation (as cited in Alghamdi, 2016). He explained that self-management is the activity of the learners in controlling and planning their learning. Then, self-monitoring is the ability of the learners to control the cognitive and behavioral processes. Motivation is the learners' belief of the ability to learn which is supported by the inner drive to decide learning activities, "entering" motivation, motivation to maintain their learning, or "task motivation" (as cited in Alghamdi, 2016). These models are based on metacognitive strategies in which the learners have to "manage, direct, regulate, and guide their learning" (Wenden, 1998:250, as cited in Alghamdi, 2016).

This present study concerns on students' attitudes on SDL. Regarding the term "attitudes", Montano & Kasprzyk (2008) explained attitudes as "the individual's beliefs about outcomes or attributes of performing the behavior" (as cited in Karatas, et al., 2016). Additionally, Hohenthal (2003) and Kara (2009) stated that instead of perspectives and beliefs, the learners' attitudes are reflected from their performances or behavior (as cited in Karatas et al., 2016). There are three components of attitudes such as cognitive, affective and behavioral. The former refers to the beliefs or thoughts about the object, the second refers to the feelings and emotions of the object and the last one refers to act, perform or behave in a particular way (Wenden, 1991, as cited in Karatas et al., 2016). Prior studies on students attitudes are conducted by Gan (2004). Wenden (1991) as cited in Gan (2004) argues that attitudes consist of three aspects such as cognitive, evaluative and behavioral components. Cognitive component refers to the beliefs or perceptions about situations or objects. Then, evaluative refers to like and dislike. Behavioral is the tendency of the learners to adopt certain learning behavior. Gan (2004) interested to investigate the relationship of students attitudes towards SDLL and the language proficiency. He analyzed the characteristics attitudes and strategies of Chinese students regarding their Self-directed Language Learning (SDLL). This study revealed that the SDLL strategies are correlated with language proficiency and strong attitudes on SDLL did not directly

affect language proficiency. In line with these results, Karatas et al (2016) also found that language proficiency, gender, and type of school did not significantly correlate with English language learning.

SDL is also regarded as learning strategy (Du, 2013). Oxford (1990) stated that “learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable in the new situations (p. 8) (as cited in Su & Duo, 2010). According to Alghamdi (2016), learning strategy is considered as the important aspect which supports the learners to control and manage their learning. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) as cited in Gan (2004) divided language learning strategies into three categories such as metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective. Metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring and evaluating. Alghamdi (2016) explained that metacognitive strategies that were discussed by Oxford (1990) included self-management and self-monitoring that are related to self-directed learning.

The previous studies on SDL are conducted by several scholars. For instance, Alghamdi (2016) carried out a study on students’ SDL in Saudi Arabia educational context. Due to the low achievement in language learning, he investigated the students’ agency and responsibility in learning English. The learners’ effort to study was measured through General Aptitude Test (GAT) score. The successful and less successful students were compared in order to diagnose the problems in learning English. The results revealed that there are significant differences between successful and less successful students in terms of the self-management and study time but there is no significant difference regarding self-monitoring and motivation. Meanwhile, the GAT score of less-successful students is higher than the successful one. Meanwhile, Rahardjo et al. (2016) investigated the relationship between internet access towards SDL. This study reports that due to the limited access to internet, the students’ willingness to learn through internet is low. They recommend improving students’ SDL by using social media that can be accessed from hand-phone. Dealing with the use of technology and ICT, Maryam (2016) conducted a descriptive study of the use of ICT media by employing SDL method. The Android game is used as a learning media to learn Bahasa Indonesia.

Despite of various studies which investigated SDL from many different point of views, this current study focused on investigating the learners’ attitudes. Regarding this consideration, Some prior studies on students’ attitudes are summarized. Lamb (2004) concerned on investigating language learning attitudes and activities in Junior High School in Indonesia. This study revealed that the young learners are ready to learn independently inside and outside the formal school. He said that it is important to promote learning autonomy because the students seemed to enjoy learning English. According to him, independent or autonomous learning requires much exploration on what the students do outside the formal school and teachers’ instruction. In 2002, Lamb has conducted almost similar study with university students as participants (Lamb, 2002). He conducted small-scale research in a university in Indonesia. He found several students who could perform English better than their peers. In this case, they claimed that it happened as the results of individual learning out of classroom and they tend to blame learning in formal education. Similarly, this study explored the learners’ attitudes and behavior in a certain context in depth. The limitation of this

study is the limited time constraints. It is a case study of “focal group” of learners in one school. It was conducted within 20 months.

Humaira & Hurriyyah (2018) previously conducted the similar study focusing on students’ perspectives towards SDL. They found that the students learning English because they have various reasons, needs, goals, and objectives. Moreover, the students’ select their own materials based on their interests. Regarding the strategy used by the students, memorizing vocabularies is popular strategies among the students. The students relied on the teacher’s assessment and they seemed reluctant to do self-reflection. Considering those aforementioned prior studies, this present study is conducted because of the need for more exploration on why do the students pose these kinds of attitudes and the difficulties they face during SDL practice. Regarding this problem, this further study attempts to fill the gap of the previous studies.

### **Research Methods**

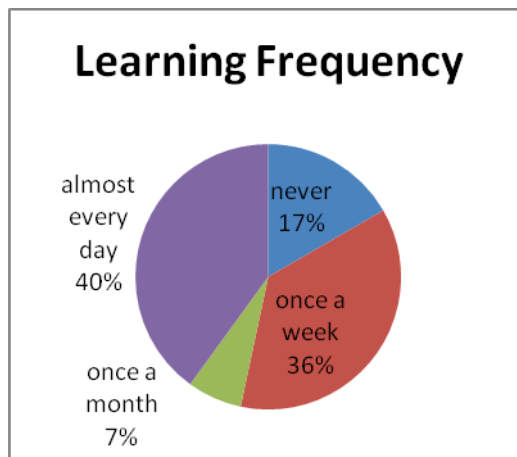
This study employed qualitative design to elaborate the students’ attitudes in SDL in depth. The data are gathered from the questionnaires and interview. These instruments are considered by considering previous research on SDL and students attitudes. Such as what has been conducted by Lamb (2002; 2004) and Joshi (2011) who conducted a study collected data from questionnaire and semi-structured interview and employed mix-method design to analyze the data. In this study, the questionnaire is given to 30 students in language classroom. There are four males and twenty six females ranging from 16 to 18 years old participated in this study. Basically, in Indonesia, students get a chance to choose one class based on their interest, such as natural science, social science, and language classes. Meanwhile, this study only focused on students in language class. The consideration of selecting these students because Candy (1991) stated that the students would potentially have a high level of SDL in the area that they are familiar with (as cited in Song & Hill, 2007). Therefore, regarding the willingness to practice SDL focusing on enhancing English language skills, the students from language class are assumed to take a responsibility to learn independently outside the classroom. They are interviewed in order to reveal their learning habit out of school. The data that were collected from the questionnaires were coded and input in a table. Then, descriptive statistics are analyzed to know the students’ attitudes of SDL learning. Meanwhile, the data from the interview are transcribed. The themes found in the data are interpreted in words. The researchers make sure that the students answered the questions without worrying because the students were reassured that there are no wrong or right answer.

### **Findings and Discussion**

This study focused on investigating students attitudes towards SDL in learning English out of classroom. The purpose of this study is to elaborate how the students’ practice SDL outside formal school’s activities. The students’ learning behavior is elaborated in depth and their problems on learning by their own are investigated. The students are labeled as students 1 to 30. Based on the analysis, there are five subtopics that are discussed in this section based on Knowles (1975),

a) Diagnosing learning needs

Almost all of the students argued that English is important because it is an international language. It was the major reason for them to learn English. Regarding the students' ability to diagnose their learning needs, they seemed aware of what they really need to learn more. There are some English skills that are problematic for the students such as listening, writing, reading, speaking, vocabularies, grammar, structure, pronunciation, translation, and conversation. It is very related to individual needs so each student had problems with different skills. For example, students 1 said that she had problems in listening and writing, student 9 stated that she had problems in reading and listening, students 14 could not speak fluently, student 27 noted conversation as her major problem, student 25 dealt with pronunciation and grammar problems, student 16 had difficulties in translation and limited vocabulary, and student 11 said that structure, grammar and pronunciation skills are her weaknesses. Thus, each student argued that they knew what they should do in order to enhance their ability. They understood their strengths and weaknesses. For example, some students stated clearly that they had a problem in some aspects as it has been mentioned before. Therefore, some of them also stated that they are trying to solve the problems by studying in their spare time. However, their learning frequency is various, but from the chart below, the students who learn almost every day and once a week is in a large proportion rather than those who never learn or learn only once a month.



b) Formulating learning goals

The students learning goals are very general. It can be said that the goals of the majority of the students are categorized as long-term goals because they believe that English would contribute towards their success in the future. For example, the students believed that they might easily get a job if they are able to use English, go abroad, speak with foreigners, speak with people abroad, get their dream jobs, study abroad. For example there is a student who wants to be a stewardess (student 10), to work in tourism field (student 18). Only few students who had stated short term-goal in learning English such as to be able to do the test well at school (student 15) and watch movies without subtitle (student 4). There are also few students who did not have clear goal because they just wanted to enrich their knowledge in English (student 1 and

student 5). In contrast to above goals, there are some students who learned English just because they like English or in the other words they had intrinsic motivation. One student stated that her hobby is learning English (student 6).

c) Identifying human and material resources for learning

Most of the students are able to identify the tools that they need for learning. It could be in the forms of technology devices such as laptop, computer, hand-phone, speaker, earphone, LCD, TV, radio, electric dictionary, application, games. Manual such as movies, magazines and books, and human resources such as teacher, course mentor and family member.

These are the example of students' views:

Student 12: "I need a dictionary and (download) some applications"

Student 13: " I use hand-phone because it is easy to carry, and I use laptop when I am in my house"

Student 26: "I need a tutor to guide me"

d) Choosing and implementing strategies

Snow (2006) stated that the learners, even experienced language learners do not always have ultimate skills to carry out learning, therefore, teachers' guidance is the very important to assist the learners to learn effectively by using different learning strategies and monitoring their own learning (as cited in Su & Duo, 2010). The students have different strategies to learn English. Many students stated that their strategies are intended to enrich the vocabularies. Therefore, they did several activities to increase their vocabulary. However, when the students were asked about their problems in learning English and how to solve those problem. For example, when a student was asked of the strategy to learn English, student 4 answered, "I learn English by memorizing vocabularies, listening to the music and watching movie." Then, the other question is related to the strategy that the student's use if the previous strategies do not work, the student remained answering the similar strategies "I memorize vocabularies, and trying to do conversation with friends." It happens to other students too, therefore, it can be said that some students tend to answer the different questions by repeating the same strategies that they have mentioned before. This response indicated that the students have a problem to solve the problem independently. It implies that they need teachers' assistance or guidance to solve the problems they face.

e) Evaluating learning outcomes

Self-evaluation is one of the SDL components that cannot be neglected. Stern (1975) as cited in Alghamdi (2016) mentioned that personal learning plan and self-evaluation are the key of successful learning. It is also related to self-assessment. Gardner and Miller (1999) as cited in Gholami (2016) argued that self-assessment is helpful to assist the students to do self-monitoring from the feedback on the language competence and strategies. He explained that self-assessment would not only motivate the students but also encourage the



teachers to raise students' awareness of the important of self-assessment, to teach the students how to do self-assessment and to help the students to understand the progress. Based on the analysis, most of the students did not conduct an evaluation of their learning. In this case, it seemed that the students rely on their teachers to evaluate their learning. In this case, the students regards the teachers as someone who knows anything. Some of the students perceived that teachers have lots of experience (student 7), teacher know more than students (student 3), teacher is the expert (student 9). It seemed that they felt that they have no responsibility to assess their progress because it was the teachers' duty. Moreover, they stated that they know their improvement from the score they got from the daily test or examination. They evaluate their learning from the score that they have gotten through the test-administered. However, although they relied on teachers' assessment, the students argued that they rarely consulted their problems to their teacher. There are many different reasons for why they did not do this. Students said that they felt embarrassed, some of them claimed that they did not have time to consult with their teachers. They also said that the teachers' were busy and had no time to talk with the students. This phenomenon was interesting because most of the students stated that they almost never met their teachers outside classroom meetings. Despite these problems, there are several reasons that hamper the SDL. Such constraints make the students' reluctant to practice SDL to learn English outside the formal classroom including lazy, busy with many other activities, time limitation, tired, less motivation, and feeling afraid or nervous.

## **Conclusions**

This study provides information about the students' practice of SDL in Asian context especially in one of the Senior High Schools in Indonesia. The results of the study exposed the way students learn English out of classroom. The analysis shows that the students might be able to identify their learning needs by detecting some skills that they wanted to learn in their spare time. They also had learning goals in their mind but most of the students had a tendency to think long-term goals rather than short-term goals. Moreover, they had a capability to select the learning materials, they used technology devices such as hand-phone and laptops to access knowledge through the available applications. They employed various learning strategies but regarding the problems that they might encounter during study, they had difficulties in choosing appropriate strategies. It can be seen from their answers which were constantly repeated. Unfortunately, the students were not able to evaluate themselves. Sometimes, it might be caused by their assumptions of the teachers' role. They regarded teachers' as the all knowing who knew them best. In other cases, the students stated that teachers were the expert who has lots experience than them. Moreover, they said that they needed teachers to give them feedback on their learning because they did not know whether they had improved or not. Therefore, this leads to further recommendation for teachers to give the students more time to consult and raise the students' confidence and give students' guidelines in order to be able to do self-evaluation. There are several barriers to carry out SDL based on students' opinion such as, lazy, busy with other activities, less-motivated, limited time, tired and nervous. Overall, it can be concluded that senior high school students in Indonesia might carry out SDL but they need to learn how to conduct self-evaluation. However,

the results of this study cannot be generalized because it is a kind of small-scale study which is conducted only in a particular school or context.

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**Contact email:** [humairasilmy@gmail.com](mailto:humairasilmy@gmail.com)