

# PROMOTING LEARNERS' AUTONOMY IN READING CLASS BY FACILITATING SELF-ACCESS LEARNING DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMICS

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## ABSTRACT

*In order to be successful in foreign language learning, learners need to be trained to be independent in their learning, especially during emergency like Covid 19 pandemics. This research investigates self-access language learning approach to foster learners' autonomy in an emergency virtual reading class during the covid 19 pandemics. It focuses to investigate how a self-access language learning approach fosters learners' autonomy and to what extent learners have the learning autonomy. Qualitative analysis was applied utilizing two surveys and learners' two assignments. The results show that a self-access language learning approach is beneficial to manage learning which promotes learners' autonomy. Learners become more independent as they have to be responsible with their learning.*

*Keywords: learner autonomy, self-access language learning, reading class, pandemics*

## ABSTRAK

*Salah satu tujuan penting dan universal dari pembelajaran bahasa adalah melatih siswa menjadi mandiri. Penelitian ini menyelidiki penerapan pendekatan belajar bahasa secara mandiri pada kelas daring Membaca selama pandemi covid 19. Fokus penelitian adalah untuk mengetahui bagaimana pendekatan tersebut dapat self-access dapat menumbuhkan kemandirian membaca peserta didik di kelas daring Membaca; dan sejauh mana kemandirian belajar peserta didik dalam kelas daring Membaca. Analisa dilakukan secara kualitatif, dengan data yang didapatkan melalui survei dan observasi tugas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan belajar bahasa secara mandiri (Self-Access LL) sangat membantu dalam mengelola proses belajar dan menumbuhkan kemandirian belajar. Siswa menjadi lebih mandiri karena mereka merasa bertanggung jawab dalam belajar.*

*Kata kunci : kemandirian belajar, belajar bahasa secara mandiri, kelas membaca, pandemi*

## INTRODUCTION

Becoming autonomous learners is one of the most important and universal purpose of foreign language education. Language educators need to facilitate encouraging learning situations to help learners independent and responsible for their learning. Learners need to acknowledge that their ways of learning can enhance their success in language learning. The concepts of `autonomy` and `responsibility` are two crucial requirements in learning and both of them require active practices (Ozlem Yagcioglu, 2015).

Online learning is an unavoidable way of learning for college students during this Covid 19 pandemic. Since the beginning of March 2020, students have been forced to take virtual classes to prevent the spread of Covid 19. This also affects the way learners receive information. They have to read online which requires quite more challenging skills than the ones in reading offline. Reading transformation surely leads to problems because the layouts and text fonts are different. Moreover, hyperlinks inserted in the online reading make it even more complicated.

Studies have proven that offline reading is easier than online reading to get information (O'Hara & Sellen, 1997). Some learners might not have problems adapting to this situation, but some other weak readers might struggle with it. Therefore, there is the need to increase learners' curiosity, responsibility, and autonomy to manage learning by themselves. This paper will focus to describe the application of self-access learning approach to promote learner autonomy in reading class. It aims to describe the way self-access learning fosters learner autonomy in the emergency virtual reading class and extent to which learners have learning autonomy in the emergency virtual reading class.

According to Ivan Moore, Director of Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy CETL, an autonomous learner has evolved the role to be in charge of their learning, provided the chance to manage his/her learning by the learning environment. It is necessary to have some characteristics to foster the role: confidence, motivation, taking and accepting responsibility,

and ability to take initiative. Besides, it includes academic, intellectual, personal, and interpersonal skills. With the assumption that an autonomous learner takes responsibility for his/her learning, they can determine: their learning goals (what they need to learn), their learning processes (how they will learn it) and how they will evaluate and use their learning.

Lee (1997) considers some crucial factors as prerequisites for autonomy, including (1) voluntariness, (2) learner choice of learning tasks, pace, location, and related conditions, (3) flexibility to establish a supportive environment, (4) teacher's role, (5) peer support. Those important factors suggested by Lee are relevant to the assumption argued by Moore as mentioned above. An autonomous learner has evolved the role to be in charge of their learning; it involves learner voluntariness and choice of learning tasks, pace, location, and related condition. Learner responsibility can be evolved in the supportive learning environment involving the teacher as the learning facilitator, and peer support.

Herrera Diaz (2012, p.54) suggested that self-access has to do with the organization of learning materials and tools made for students at hand without the inevitable presence of a teacher. According to the Cambridge dictionary, self-access means a method of learning in which students use books, videos, etc. to study on their own. The self-access learning approach is beneficial to develop learner autonomy. Learners can access the learning materials by themselves, facilitated by the teacher to guide, feedback, encouragement, and reinforcement. By applying self-access learning, learners can study on their own, as well as work together with their peers to foster their intellectual, personal and interpersonal skills.

Learners have to be independent and responsible for their learning. The instructor has to facilitate encouraging remote learning situation. One way to facilitate is by implementing self-access learning approach. How it fosters learner independence and responsibility are identified. Some findings from the research are expected to be enlightening for language facilitators to keep developing learners' autonomy.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This is a qualitative study to describe the application of the self-access learning approach to promote learner autonomy in the virtual reading class. The class was conducted online throughout the semester by using the Google Classroom, Google Meet, and WhatsApps.

Data were taken from the online surveys at the Academic Reading 3 class, consisting of 49 students in semester 3. The first survey was done in the third week of the semester to see the plan of their learning. The rationale of doing the first survey in the third week is for the students to be familiar with the e-book material in the first and the second weeks, and to make sure that all class members are completely registered after the period of add and drop classes. The second survey was done at the latest week to see the students' learning experience in the virtual reading class during the semester. While assignment analysis was also done twice, at week 6 and week 14 of the semester, to support the survey results. The analyzed assignments were chosen based on the most preferred content of the e-coursebook, involving Part 2 - Vocabulary Development and Part 5 - Critical Reading.

In the first survey, there were 36 responses out of 50 students or 73,5% of the total class members. While in the second survey, there were 40 responses out of 49 students or 81,6% of the total class members. The numbers of the responses could be suitable to represent the expected data for this study.

The first assignment analyzed was Part 2 – Vocabulary Development, Lesson 5 - While you read, define the words in context. The lesson is part of vocabulary development, focusing on defining the words in context. This is **the review of the lesson and the instruction in the e-book *Activate: College Reading*, by Ivan G. Dole & Leslie Taggart (2012), page 135.**

### ***Review: Context Clues to Understand New Words***

*Use context clues to help you figure out what words mean while you are reading, including these four EASY-to-remember ones:*

- *E = Examples*
- *A = Antonyms (words with opposite meanings)*
- *S = Synonyms (words with similar meanings)*
- *Y = Your logic*

*Remember that context clues are often found in the same sentence as the mystery word, in the sentence before it, or in the sentence after it.*

### ***Create EASY Note Cards to Study Words.***

*You need a way to keep your study of vocabulary organized, and it's a smart idea to keep reminding yourself of the meanings of new words so you can commit them to memory. Creating and then studying EASY notecards is a simple way to learn and remember enough about a new word so that you can start to use it comfortably.*

***Here is an example of an EASY note card.***

#### **Front**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The word</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">(the part of speech-- noun, verb, adjective, adverb)</p>
--

Example-- Write a sentence using the word that shows you know its meaning.
Antonym (if there are any)
Synonym (if there are any)
Your Logic-- Use your logic to make up a definition in your own words.

**Back**

**Here is Teacher's Instruction in Google Classroom**

*Create EASY Note Cards to Study Words. See Lesson 5 - Interaction 2-20 (in groups)*

**Here is an example of group 9 work.**



The second assignment analyzed in this study was PART 5 – LESSON 16, Application – Critical Reading , *Activate: College Reading*, by Ivan G. Dole & Leslie Taggart (2012), p. 606 – 614. This is **Teacher's Instruction in Google Classroom**.

*Practice all the skills before, during, and after reading the following passage "Lessons from the Oscars: Turning Obstacles into Opportunities", by Jill Koenig, (p. 606 - 614).*

*Answer Critical Thinking Questions*

*Level 5: Evaluate, write down the answers to question number 19.*

*Level 6: Create, write down the answers to question number 20.*

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The object of this research is a College Reading 3 class, consisting of 49 students in semester 3. It is an emergency remote reading class that is facilitated with a Google Classroom application set up by STBA LIA Jakarta. This self-access learning tool functions to facilitate and manage the classroom stream, classwork, people, and grades. People in the Google Classroom, the students, teacher/s, and campus administrator can post learning materials, assignments, and announcements in it. They can communicate with each other regarding the class through the application. It also integrates with other applications in Google relevant to the learning, such as Google Meet, Google Drive, Gmail, GDocs, GSlides, GCalendar, YouTube, and so on. The teacher can post the major reading material of this class, an e-course book, *Activate: College Reading*, by Ivan G. Dole & Leslie Taggart (2012), which is supported with the answer key. The syllabus, PowerPoint Slides, videos, documents in line with the major materials can also be posted in the Google Classroom. Therefore, students can easily access the learning materials by themselves anytime and anywhere they like without the teacher's presence. In addition to the very useful application, access to dictionaries and extra reading materials are readily available in the internet. Self-access learning is beneficial to develop learners' autonomy learning since learners have access to the learning materials, The roles of the teachers the ones who guides, gives feedback, encouragement and reinforcement. By using WhatsApp and Google drive, the learners can work together with their peers. These foster their intellectual, personal and interpersonal skills. Data from the surveys in this study reveal learners' autonomy.

From the first survey in the third week of the semester, the students' general plan of learning in the College Reading 3 class can be revealed. The questionnaire was designed to see their responses to the e-course book, *Activate: College Reading*, by Ivan G. Dole & Leslie Taggart (2012) and to find out their Plan for Success. They are interested in the course book, and most eager to learn especially two parts of the content

which include 'Developing Vocabulary' and 'Critical Reading Skills'. The students' Plan for Success can be seen from the responses to the 10 questions discussed below.

The first question asked is for the students to write things that prove that they believe in themselves. Almost all of the students expressed that they believe in their potential and motivated in their learning. This reflects two characteristics of an autonomous learner: confidence and motivation.

The second question asked is about their general goals in the reading class. Most of the students (88,9%) can determine their general goals of learning in the class. it was revealed that more than half of the students wanted to get the reading strategies and understand the text better. Almost one-third of them wanted to pass the class with a good, even A score. Only 2 students didn't mention any goal. 2 students responded with irrelevant answers with the class subject: to understand grammar and to become a stewardess. It indicates that most of the students have fulfilled one requirement to be responsible learners: being able to identify their learning goals.

After finding out the learners' confidence, motivation, and ability to determine their general goals, questions 3 until 10 are set to find out the ways the students learn. It was found that the learners can manage and control themselves well in the learning process. They can organize their assignments, set priority, be active in class, avoid procrastination, maintain health, make use of their network to support their academic success, and motivate themselves to do their best. The analysis of each answer is as follows.

The third question was to know their ability to organize their learning. This reflects their ability to control their learning process. Almost three-fourth (72,2%) of the students are well organized, as they manage to do the assignments as soon as possible. The rest of them usually do the assignments almost near the deadline.



The students' ability to control their learning is also indicated by their skills to set priority. The answers for question 4 reveal that almost all of the students (97,2%) prioritize doing college assignments on top of other activities. This is how they do it. Firstly, they check Google Class Room to see the material, the assignments, and the due. Then they make a plan and a 'to do list' based on the number of assignments and the level of difficulty. Some of them set the alarm, and have discussions with friends to understand the material.

The fifth question was to know their awareness of being an active learner. Almost three-fourth (72,2%) of the students consider themselves as active learners. This is important for them to keep up being active in the class. They participated by joining the online meeting and doing the assignments. The active learners in the class paid attention to the session, asked questions the teacher and friends if they did not understand and answer the teacher's questions. The less active learners just listened and paid attention.

The sixth question was to know whether the students have procrastination habit and it turned out that 61% agreed to that which is considered high. The possible reasons were that sometimes students found the assignments hard to do or they did not feel well. However, the learners knew how to avoid procrastination and mentioned some ways to boost themselves to get the spirit back. Among others mentioned are maintaining good health by getting enough rest; making timeline and obeying it; doing assignments immediately before doing other activities; stop wishing and not overthinking or analyzing; getting rid of distractions (cellphone, television, game); and not being lazy.

Question 7 was about utilizing network (people and resources around) to help the students succeed academically. Most of the students (83,3%) make use of their network as the source of academic support, such as friends, family members, books, computers, as well as internet and phone to access the online resources. This is a good way for learners to get the information they need to learn, to get more understanding about the

materials, even to share their ideas with other people around them.

The answers to question eight indicate that most of the students (91,7%) knew the importance of being healthy so that they are able to learn well. In conclusion, to stay healthy mentioned by the learners are; eating healthy foods and less sugar, drinking enough water, having regular exercise, getting enough rest or sleeping, consuming vitamins, thinking positively, having some “me time”, and avoiding stress.

Question 9 was about taking initiative in learning. Unfortunately, it seems that students do not show the way they take initiative because their responses are not relevant to the question. However, their initiative can be seen in the way they do the assignments which will be discussed later in the assignment analysis.

The last question in the first survey were related to the idea of doing their best. Most of the students (86,1%) wanted to get the best of their learning by trying to do their best efforts. They motivated themselves to do well.

The students' learning experience can be seen from the second survey at the end of the course, which involves learners' identification of specific learning objectives, learning strategies, how they evaluate and use their learning. They identified the specific learning objectives and most had reached some of the goals. Most of the students (82,5%) knew their aims of learning in each lesson. This means many of them were able to identify the goals or what they needed to learn in each lesson. They considered that they had achieved their learning goals. It revealed that the students were responsible for their purposes of learning which eventually led them toward their learning goals.

In addition, to be able to determine specific learning goals, the students also applied some other learning strategies, including learning individually or in groups to understand the materials, choosing the interesting topics of the passages in the course book, and reading other online passages for more practices. From the learners' strategies of learning, it can be concluded that they are independent learners. The learners'

autonomy are caused by the influential factors; their willingness/motivation to learn, freedom to select learning materials, time and space to learn, peer support, and teacher's guidance, feedback and encouragement.

In terms of evaluating their learning, the students applied certain ways which revealed their intellectual, personal and interpersonal skills. They asked themselves about some ideas in the passages, answered the questions by highlighting the information in the passages and discussed passages with their friends.

The first assignment analysis reveals that the learners are independent, confident, take initiative, have intellectual, personal, and interpersonal skills. The work of group 9 was great. The teacher's instruction was just simple, *Create EASY Note Cards to Study Words. See Lesson 5 - Interaction 2-20 (in groups)*. The students followed the instruction and then learnt the review and guidance in the easily accessed e-course book. The sample EASY notecard in the e-course book only showed the word's part of speech, the example in the sentence, the antonym, the synonym, and their logic. The sample notecard in the course book neither gave a picture of the word nor the pronunciation symbols, but the students added the word pictures as well as the pronunciation symbols of the words 'car' and 'umbrella'. It reflected that learners were motivated to do the task because they liked to learn the material of their choice. They were confident and took initiative to do the task better than expected because they could easily access the reliable source of online dictionaries to look up the word's antonym, synonym, an example in sentence, even pronunciation, and picture, which helped them find their logical definition of the word. As the group members, they were responsible to contribute by having a discussion, making cards of particular words from each member. That means they used their intellectual, personal and interpersonal skills.

The second assignment analysis indicates that the learners are autonomous, have the academic and intellectual skills to do the task. The analysis was focused on the students' answers for critical thinking levels 5 and 6, as the two highest levels of learner cognitive skills. The teacher's

instruction is as simple as mentioned above. But from the students' works, it can be inferred that they are independent learners because they knew what to do before answering question number 19 and 20. They could easily access the relevant previous materials in the form of PowerPoint slides, e-course book as well as video via the Google Classroom application. Their appropriate answers to the questions of critical thinking level 5 - Evaluation and level 6 - Create reveal that they have reached the highest level of cognitive ability because they have remembered, understood, applied, and analyzed the reading passage to be able to answer the questions 19-20. That means the learners have the academic and intellectual skill.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that the self-access language learning approach influences the development of learners' autonomy. Students can easily access the learning materials by themselves anytime and anywhere they like, through Google Classroom application integrated with Google Meet, Gdocs, Glides, Google Drive, YouTube, and other applications in Google. Although the teacher presence is not always available, learners were given guidance, feedback, encouragement, and reinforcement via the Google Classroom. Besides, learners can easily access other online resources such as dictionaries, reading articles, and videos to support the major learning materials. They also worked in groups in Google drive or group discussion in WhatsApp. By applying a self-access learning approach, learners studied by themselves, as well as worked together with their peers. This fostered the students' intellectual, personal and interpersonal capacity.

Learners' autonomy evolves, as the learners become more responsible for their learning. They identified their general learning goals at the beginning of the class, and then determined the specific learning objectives in each lesson. The learners managed and controlled themselves well in the learning process. They know the strategies to reach the goals: they read the objectives/reading skills of each lesson, tried to master the

reading skills, learnt individually and chose the topics of their interests, and read other online articles for more practice. To be successful, they tried to be well organized, prioritized learning, be active in class, took initiative, avoided procrastination, maintained health, and made use of their network as the source of academic support. They also applied some ways to check their understanding of the lessons and used the reading skills in real life to develop the skills. The evidence reveals that learners are independent because they have confidence, motivation, responsibility, and initiative. Also, their intellectual, personal and interpersonal is developed.

In general, the Covid19 pandemic has led all learning processes to be conducted virtually. The self-access language learning approach develops learner autonomy. Learners become more autonomous. Even without the teacher's presence, students learn independently to develop their reading skills and succeed academically, supported by a variety of online resources and their network. For further research, it is recommended to investigate whether self-access language learning approach is useful to be applied in other language classes.

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