

Exploring Learner Autonomy Practices in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

Learner autonomy, defined as the ability to take charge of one's own learning, justifies learners' capacity to independently manage and direct their learning process. This concept is critical in cultivating motivated and fulfilled language learners, empowering Learner autonomy to actively engage with the language, set goals, and make decisions about their learning journey. This study investigates learner autonomy practices in English language teaching from the perspective of English education college students in various universities in Kediri. The research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with these college students as participants. Data analysis involves summarizing the results of these interviews and examining Kurikulum Merdeka guidelines, teaching materials, and preparation practices. The key findings emphasize the importance of fostering learner autonomy and its implications for language education.

Key words: English language teaching, Kurikulum Merdeka, learner autonomy, student perspective

Introduction

In the dynamic and ever-evolving landscape of language education, the concept of learner autonomy serves as a guiding principle that illuminates the path toward self-directed learning and educational empowerment. Defined by David Little (2007) as "The Ability to Take Charge of One's Own Learning," learner autonomy fundamentally shifts the focus from traditional teacher-centered approaches to ones that empower learners to actively engage in and direct their own educational journeys. This paradigm emphasizes learners' ability to set goals, make decisions about their learning processes, and reflect critically on their learning outcomes, thereby fostering independence and lifelong learning skills.

The concept of learner autonomy, rooted in educational philosophies emphasizing individual agency and self-determination, traces its theoretical foundation to Henri Holec's influential 1981 work. Holec advocated for active learner participation in shaping educational experiences, particularly resonant in language education supported by the Council of Europe since 1979. The Council regards learner autonomy as crucial for effective language learning, promoting communicative competence, intercultural understanding, and lifelong language skills.

In contemporary educational reforms such as Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka, also known as

the Prototype Curriculum, learner autonomy is prioritized alongside essential content and character development. This flexible curriculum departs from traditional models by encouraging interactive, collaborative teaching methods. It grants educators, students, and schools greater autonomy in designing tailored learning activities. Supported by resources like the Ministry of Education and Culture's Merdeka Mengajar platform, which provides diverse teaching materials and digital tools, Kurikulum Merdeka aims to cultivate holistic learning experiences. These prepare students not only with knowledge but also with essential skills for navigating a rapidly evolving world.

As learner autonomy integrates into curricular frameworks like Kurikulum Merdeka, its implementation becomes crucial for fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability among students. This article explores the theoretical foundations, practical applications within Kurikulum Merdeka, and broader implications for educational practices and outcomes. By examining these intersections, the study aims to provide insights into how autonomy can empower learners and enhance educational experiences from diverse perspectives.

Methods

Research Design

Qualitative research, defined by Fossey et al. (2002), seeks to understand research questions

from a humanistic or idealistic perspective. Qualitative research explores people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions using non-numerical data. It enriches intervention studies by providing insights that transcend variables, offering a deeper understanding beyond what quantitative methods can achieve. This study employs a qualitative approach to explore perceptions and practices related to learner autonomy among undergraduate students in English education programs, aiming to uncover deep insights into participants' perspectives and experiences.

Participants

Participants are undergraduate students enrolled in English education programs at UNISKA KEDIRI and IAIN KEDIRI. Chosen for their roles as both learners and future educators, they are ideal for examining learner autonomy within an educational context.

Data Collection Procedure

1. Google Form Questionnaire
Prior to semi-structured interviews, participants complete a Google Form questionnaire. It assesses their understanding of learner autonomy, solicits consent, and explores their views on its importance and related experiences.
2. Semi-Structured Interviews
Participants who consent are interviewed individually via Google Meet. This format allows flexibility while ensuring coverage of key topics on learner autonomy as students and future teachers.
3. Data Analysis
Transcribed interviews undergo thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and insights on learner autonomy. Perspectives from Kurikulum Merdeka guidelines, teaching materials, and participant preparation practices are triangulated for robust findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines are strictly followed, including informed consent, confidentiality assurance, and the right to withdraw without consequences. Data anonymization safeguards participant identities.

Limitations

This study's findings may be context-specific to UNISKA KEDIRI and IAIN KEDIRI's English education programs and may not generalize universally due to qualitative research's subjective nature.

Results and Discussion

Google Form Questionnaire

Based on the responses from the 9 students who participated in the questionnaire regarding learner autonomy:

1. Aryo Ramagenis Asmiladi (UNISKA KEDIRI):
 - *Familiarity with Learner Autonomy:* Unfamiliar initially; realized he has experienced it.
 - *Experience with Learner Autonomy:* Described having tasks and presentations handed over to students by professors.
2. Aulia Rizki Nur Imam (UNISKA KEDIRI):
 - *Familiarity with Learner Autonomy:* Familiar.
 - *Experience with Learner Autonomy:* Has not experienced it firsthand.
3. Hawla Rosyida (UNISKA KEDIRI):
 - *Familiarity with Learner Autonomy:* Familiar.
 - *Experience with Learner Autonomy:* Has not experienced it firsthand.
4. Much. Andika Bagus Saputra (UNISKA KEDIRI):
 - *Familiarity with Learner Autonomy:* Unfamiliar.
 - *Experience with Learner Autonomy:* Has not experienced it.
5. Shalsa Billa (IAIN KEDIRI):
 - *Familiarity with Learner Autonomy:* Familiar.
 - *Experience with Learner Autonomy:* Has not experienced it firsthand.
6. Sarbanun Tuanany (UNISKA KEDIRI):
 - *Familiarity with Learner Autonomy:* Familiar.
 - *Experience with Learner Autonomy:* Has experienced it; able to choose her own learning process in English studies.
7. Risma Intan W. (IAIN KEDIRI):
 - *Familiarity with Learner Autonomy:* Unfamiliar initially; realized she has experienced it.
 - *Experience with Learner Autonomy:* Described practical teaching experiences and assessment methods in her studies.
8. Muhammad Asrofi (UNISKA KEDIRI):
 - *Familiarity with Learner Autonomy:* Unfamiliar.
 - *Experience with Learner Autonomy:* Has not experienced it.
9. Diah Mustika Cahyaning Suci (UNISKA KEDIRI):
 - *Familiarity with Learner Autonomy:* Unfamiliar.
 - *Experience with Learner Autonomy:* Has not experienced it.

These responses indicate varying levels of familiarity with and experiences related to learner autonomy among the students surveyed. The qualitative analysis will further explore these perspectives to understand how learner autonomy is perceived and practiced within the context of English education study programs.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Based on the interviews with 6 consenting students regarding learner autonomy, the following insights and opinions were gathered:

1. Aryo Ramagenis Asmiladi

Aryo believes that learner autonomy aligns with Kurikulum Merdeka because the curriculum emphasizes student-centered methods. However, he suggests that learner autonomy may not be suitable for elementary school students who still require significant guidance. He emphasizes the importance of teacher training to facilitate student preparation and choices during learning activities.

2. Shalsa Billa

Shalsa agrees that learner autonomy fits well with Kurikulum Merdeka due to its flexibility. She suggests that learner autonomy is more suitable for higher education levels like high school and college, where students are expected to know what and how they want to learn. She believes that combining learner autonomy with student-centered methods enhances the learning process by allowing students to share their perspectives.

3. Risma Intan W.

Risma shares the view that learner autonomy aligns with the current curriculum. She emphasizes that teachers should introduce options for student autonomy from the outset of each course. Her perspective on the implications of learner autonomy in educational settings echoes those of other interviewees.

4. Sarbanun Tuanany

Sarbanun sees Kurikulum Merdeka as conducive to learner autonomy due to its flexibility and student-centered approach. She acknowledges that elementary students may not benefit from learner autonomy but suggests that high school and college students can. She highlights challenges in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka in English courses, where students' limited vocabulary can hinder autonomy. Sarbanun stresses the importance of teacher adaptation, effective assessment methods, and guided autonomy in the classroom.

5. Hawla Rosyida

Hawla's opinion mirrors that of other interviewees regarding the alignment of learner autonomy with Kurikulum Merdeka and its implications for schools and colleges. She supports the idea that teacher training is essential to support students' autonomy effectively.

6. Aulia Rizki Nur Imam

Aulia also believes in the alignment of learner autonomy with the current curriculum. She emphasizes the need for students to be familiar with the material before learner autonomy can be effectively implemented. Her insights on the implications of learner autonomy in educational settings are consistent with other interviewees.

These interviews collectively highlight a consensus among the students regarding the potential of learner autonomy within Kurikulum Merdeka. They also underscore the importance of teacher preparation and adaptation to support effective implementation of learner autonomy across different educational levels.

The integration of questionnaire responses and interviews offers a comprehensive perspective on learner autonomy among students in English education programs. Responses varied widely, with some students well-versed in autonomy principles while others were unfamiliar. This diversity underscores the need for targeted educational efforts to ensure all students benefit from learner autonomy, especially within evolving frameworks like Kurikulum Merdeka.

Interviews with students further enriched our understanding. Aryo Ramagenis and Sarbanun Tuanany highlighted Kurikulum Merdeka's support for autonomy but noted challenges across different educational levels, emphasizing the role of teacher training in student preparation. Shalsa Billa and Risma Intan W. emphasized the curriculum's flexibility in fostering student engagement, aligning autonomy with student-centered approaches to deepen learning motivation.

Conversely, Aulia Rizki Nur Imam and Hawla Rosyida noted benefits and challenges in autonomy implementation, stressing student familiarity with course materials and teacher guidance as pivotal. Overall, these insights underscore the intricate relationship between educational policies, student readiness, and effective pedagogical practices needed to promote learner autonomy.

Moving forward, these findings advocate for educational institutions to enhance awareness and provide educators with necessary tools and

training. This approach will facilitate autonomous learning experiences that align with student needs, preparing them for lifelong learning and navigating a complex global landscape effectively.

The examination of Kurikulum Merdeka guidelines, teaching materials, and preparation practices is crucial within the context of English education, illustrating how learner autonomy operates in this study's educational setting. Kurikulum Merdeka emphasizes flexibility and student-centered approaches, aligning closely with learner autonomy principles as highlighted by interviewed students. These guidelines encourage educators to adopt pedagogical practices that empower students to take ownership of their learning processes, set their own goals, and evaluate their progress independently.

Teaching materials under Kurikulum Merdeka are designed to be adaptable, facilitating personalized learning experiences that cater to diverse student needs and interests. This flexibility not only supports learner autonomy implementation but also fosters creativity and critical thinking among students. For example, Sarbanun Tuanany emphasizes the importance of adapting teaching methods and assessments to ensure students can effectively exercise autonomy while receiving necessary guidance.

Preparation practices stress initial engagement with students to introduce learner autonomy concepts. According to Risma Intan W., offering choices and opportunities from the start of each course encourages a classroom environment where students feel empowered to engage actively in their learning journey.

However, challenges exist, particularly in subjects like English, where language proficiency may hinder students' autonomy. Educators, as noted by Sarbanun Tuanany, must assess capabilities and provide scaffolding effectively to support autonomous learning practices. Successful implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka depends on educators' readiness, training, and the adaptability of teaching materials. Addressing these aspects comprehensively empowers students as independent learners, preparing them to succeed in an increasingly dynamic and globalized world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, learner autonomy plays a pivotal role in Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka, echoing Henri Holec's advocacy for active learner participation. Embraced by the Council of

Europe in language education, learner autonomy enhances communicative competence and lifelong skills. Kurikulum Merdeka's emphasis on autonomy alongside essential content and character development supports interactive teaching methods, granting flexibility to educators and students.

However, challenges persist, particularly in subjects like English, where language proficiency can hinder full autonomy. Educators must navigate these challenges by assessing student capabilities and providing effective scaffolding. Despite these hurdles, integrating learner autonomy into Kurikulum Merdeka prepares students with critical thinking and adaptability crucial for navigating a globalized world. Continued efforts to promote autonomy will empower students to take charge of their learning, aligning with international educational goals for lifelong success.

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