



Exploring Students' English Autonomy Using Mobile Application At The Time Of The Pandemic

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Abstract

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While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education has been widely discussed, there is little empirical evidence for student independence experiences. This study explores and collects information about the experiences students have while learning English online, their perceptions, and how their experiences shape their potential for autonomous learning. The current study uses a Narrative qualitative approach. Data was collected through an online form questionnaire, which was administered to 20 students in grades 11 and 12 of Vocational High School in Karawang. The purpose of this study is to review the use of English learning applications in increasing student autonomy and also students' perspectives in using these applications during online learning. The results showed that students participating in this study appeared to have a fairly good online English learning experience. It was highlighted that students' online learning experiences, in some ways, influenced their self-assessment potential for independent learning. They receive a variety of learning instructions and engage in various types of language learning activities. The majority of students find learning English online quite enjoyable, but many of them show considerable potential to act as independent learners.

Keywords: autonomous learning, covid-19 pandemic, mobile application.

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INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2019, the world had shaken up because of new variants of coronavirus which have namely known as COVID-19 that started in Wuhan, China. The COVID-19 has spread out widely and fastly around the world, including in Indonesia. In order to prevent the spread of the viruses, in March 2020 the Indonesian government with the approval of the Ministry of Health released a statement to do Indonesia large-scale social restrictions (LSRR) which is a restriction in many sectors in Indonesia, from working at the office, praying at the mosque, studying at school and many other things that require people to go outside and make crowds. Thus, in order to make education still alive along with the advice of the Ministry of Education, all learning processes must be done in distance learning that takes place in their respective house (E. U. Hanik, 2020).

The sudden change in the education field from traditional to digital as we require to do distance learning may be a surprise for some institutions since only a few institutions have done the distance learning beforehand. This sudden change must be adapted quickly for teachers and also students to familiarize themselves with the new technologies that can be applied to assist distance learning. The lack of knowledge to use the new technologies or/and due to the limitations of face-to-face meetings with teachers in the middle of a pandemic, learning English online are less effective. Therefore, students' autonomous skills must be improved by

doing some English learning-related activities, including downloading or getting additional knowledge and support from mobile applications available on Google Playstore is one of the alternatives.

Autonomy is an individual's capacity for self-determination or self-governance. Autonomy is a widely used concept in education policy and practice. The etymology of the concept derives from the Greek *autonomos* 'having its own laws' (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015). As such, the debates around the concept circulate around individuals' or groups' ability and capacity to self-rule, and the governance and/or constraints, which limit such a capacity. However, autonomy has also been widely contested in philosophy, and as suggested by Rawls (1980), for example, the concept has been defined in a variety of ways. In educational research too, the concept has been debated from varying viewpoints, as, for example, scholars engaged in education history (Smaller, 2015), education sociology and policy (Ball, 2006), legal issues and pedagogy (Reinders, 2010) have all problematised and defined its meaning in relation to education versatile learning (m-learning) as a sort of learning model permitting students to get learning materials anyplace and whenever utilizing versatile advancements and the Internet.

As per Low and O'Connell (2006) portable learning increment adaptable and gives opportunity sentiments to understudies. Yi et al. (2009) portrayed that m-learning is for the most part considered to build the exhibition of students by making learning open. Versatile learning advancements take out geographic limits and give working together a learning climate between unfamiliar gatherings. Moreover, propels in handheld gadgets have worked with the utilization of mixed media in versatile applications, which permits versatile students to approach a wide assortment of lavishly differentiated learning assets (Huang et al., 2010). Laurillard and Pachler (2007) characterized m-learning as being the advanced help of versatile, analytical, informative, community oriented, and useful learning exercises in far off areas, and proposes a wide assortment of conditions in which the instructor can work. Yi et al. (2009) portrayed that m-learning was a variety of ways that individuals learn or remain associated with their learning surroundings including their cohorts, educators, and informative assets while going versatile.

In general, the mobile application can be categorised into two as native application and web-based application. The native applications are built for the specific MOS using their code library to access the hardware elements of the mobile devices such as camera, memory, global positioning system (GPS). The web-based application is deployed on the host, and then the features of the application are accessed by the mobile browser. The native-based mobile application reduces the start up time and increases the speed of mobile operations that are performed by the mobile application. This is due to the fact that the mobile application is stored on the local mobile devices hence the mobile device need not download the application code from the web to run the application or operation. It requires more storage space since the mobile application needs to be installed in the local mobile device. However, the storage space is not a barrier for the native-based mobile application since the storage space is cheaper due to the advancement of integrated circuit technology. The speed of the web-based application depends upon the speed of the internet connectivity. Moreover, the speed of the web-based application is slower compared to the native-based mobile application. The web-based application fails

to function if the internet connectivity is disconnected but the native-based application can function even without internet connectivity by downloading the contents required when the mobile device is connected to the internet. Example best language apps; Memrise, LinguaLift, Rosetta Stone, Duolingo, HelloTalk, Mindsnacks, Busuu, Babbel, TripLingo, MosaLingua.

Online learning is, indeed, quite a new topic within the context of Indonesian education. It has not been extensively studied, and the literature concerning this issue was limited to teacher's professional development or educator training programs and university students (Burns, 2013; Sari, 2012). However, along with integrating ICT and mobile technologies in learning, the issue has received increased interest, particularly from language teachers and researchers. Although the learning process has not been carried entirely online, it has featured English learning activities to bridge classroom and outside classroom learning. The students were made to engage in online learning through various mobile applications and learning platforms (Ardi, 2017; Pasaribu, 2018; Yudhiantara & Nuryantini, 2018). There is, actually, no clear definition of online learning. Literature indicated that the term had often been attached to a wide range of meanings and definitions. Singh & Thurman (2019) found 18 terms over 46 definitions used to describe online learning. It was often used synonymously with e-learning, distance learning, web-based learning, blended learning, online courses, and others. Moore et al., (2011) acknowledged that it was challenging to differentiate e-learning, online learning, and distance learning. There was inconsistent use of terminology referring to these modes of learning, and the term was sometimes used interchangeably without a meaningful definition. Interestingly, one commonality was found to characterize these learning instructions: the integration of technology as the central element in the learning process. Considering this commonality and the varying definition of online learning, Singh & Thurman (2019) proposed defining online learning in two options. First, it is a learning experienced through internet/online computers in a synchronous classroom where students interact with instructors and other students and are not dependent on their physical location for participating in this online learning experience. Second, it is learning experienced through the internet in a synchronous environment where students engage with instructors and fellow students at a time of their convenience and do not need to be co-present online in a physical space.

The present study examines students' autonomous skills during pandemic Covid-19 to enhance their English skills and their perception of the uses of English learning mobile applications as students' autonomous learning skills to deeper their English skills aside from school incorporate with The Newly-Proposed Model (TAM) by Doan (2018). For these purposes, the following questions are constructed. 1) How do mobile English learning applications enhance students' autonomy? 2) How are students' perspectives on using mobile applications to learn English during online learning?

METHODS

This study used qualitative methods. According to Patton (2002), qualitative methods allow the researcher to study issues in depth with data collection often occurring through open-ended questions permitting. The type of study used was

narrative qualitative. Narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research in which the stories themselves become the raw data (Creswell, 2013). The approach has been used in many disciplines to learn more about the culture, historical experiences, identity, and lifestyle of the narrator (Bleaky A, 2005).

The data was collected using a questionnaire given to 20 students in grades 11 and 12 of Vocational High School in Karawang. The students were filled with 3 males and 17 females. They filled in the questionnaire through a message online which was sent via WhatsApp application. The questionnaire was written in Bahasa Indonesia to make it easier for students to understand. It is divided into four sections, labelled as background information, student learning experiences, students autonomy in using mobile application, and perception of mobile application.

Table 1: Questionnaire.

1.	Do you have difficulty in understanding English material during online learning?
2.	What was done to overcome this? Choose 3 of the many choices which are your ways of overcoming difficulties in understanding the material.
3.	Choose 3 of the many names of English learning applications that you know.
4.	Do you use an English learning application on your cell phone?
5.	Since when have you used the app?
6.	If you choose before or after covid takes place, do these applications help you understand more deeply the material that has been taught in class?
7.	For those who install an English Learning application, how often do you open the application and for how long?
8.	How useful is the application in learning English?
9.	Is it easy to use the application in learning English?
10.	How does the application look? Is it interesting?
11.	How often do you use the application to study English in a week?

From the table, we can see that Question number 1-2 is about students' learning experience during online learning. Question number 3-6 is used to know whether before and after using those applications during certain time and from march 2021 until now enhance students' autonomy. Question number 7-11 is using The Newly-Proposed Model (TAM) by Doan (2018). There are perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived playfulness, and self-management of learning. These questions are labeled as Q1, Q2, and so on.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the list of questionnaires that we sent to the students, Q1 revealed that most students had difficulty understanding English material during online learning. Therefore there was one student who did not have difficulty in learning it. In order to maximize their understanding of English material, there were many activities that students can do by themselves or with others besides learning from school, such as listening to English songs, watching English TV series, reading English books, and so on as provided in the list of Learning English Activities beside at school in the Q2. Based on the result of Q2, it revealed that the top 3 activities that students did

to enhance their English understanding were listening to English songs, watching English movies and Program TV (BBC, CNN, National Geographic), and reading English books (short stories, novels, comics, articles). Therefore, it revealed that only 6 out of 20 students chose to use an English learning mobile application.

In Q3 revealed that despite having great knowledge of English learning mobile applications that we provided on the questionnaire and available on Google Apps or Apple Store (Duolingo, Simpler, English Speaking Practice, Cakap, ELSA Speak, Memrise, CAKE), students' willingness or students' potentials to learn autonomously by installing or learning through mobile application speak otherwise. In Q4, it revealed that 8 out of 20 students do not install one or more applications mentioned above on their phones. The reason why they did not install the mobile application might be because 3 of 8 students have their tutor or were applying for English private courses. According to Huang (2017), stronger intention to learn English and exhibited a higher frequency of English learning behaviors both in and out of the school of those who applied to the English course were higher compared with those who only received English instruction in mainstream classrooms.

According to Oxford Dictionary (2015), autonomy originated from Greek, "autonomous" means 'having its own laws'. So autonomy is individuals' or groups' ability and capacity to self-rule, and the governance and/or constraints, which limit such a capacity. Related to that, Q5 revealed that 4 out of 12 students who installed the application were identified as regular autonomous learners because they used the application before the pandemic and there were 8 out of 12 students who acknowledged that they were using it after the leak of covid in Indonesia. In Q6, it can be seen that there were 8 out of 12 students admitted that they find it helpful in understanding English material through the applications they have installed. Meanwhile, there were 2 out of 12 students that recognized the application are not helping them to understand material deeper. In line with Hidayati and Husna (2020) that it was clearly proven by statistical analysis, it highlighted that students' online learning experiences, in some extent, influence their self-rated potential to learn autonomously.

In Q8 and Q9, it is about the usefulness and ease of use of mobile applications in learning English. Many students who responded to the usefulness of the mobile application in learning English feel that it is helpful to use the mobile application in learning English and there were about 5 out of 12 students who installed the application still find it difficult to use it. This happens because students are not accustomed to using the mobile application or indeed the mobile application still needs to be developed.

With the development of technology that continues to grow today, it is one of the solutions in the world of education. The presence of technology helps teachers communicate with students more easily and help them to teach, as well as other advantages enjoyed by every student where technology is one of the factors that influence student learning interest, with the presence of technology as well as online media as a learning aid because of the ease of finding various information and also look for additional materials that may not be found in school.

Interest is a feeling of liking more than being interested in an activity, without anyone telling. Students who have an interest in learning something will be seen from their behavior. So with the presence of a learning platform via

smartphones with various features and attractive appearances in the world of education, it is hoped that it can help students with learning difficulties and attract students' interest in learning.

Based on the results of the data collected, most of the applications used by students during online learning have an attraction for students who use them, this is influenced by the features and appearances found on the online learning platform, with an attractive appearance that makes it easier for students to learn the material they are learning on that platform.

With attractive features and appearance, it can affect how often and for how long students use the online learning applications used. Based on the results of the data, most students use the application 2 to 3 times a week, there are even students who use the learning application 8 to 9 times.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the data, the researcher concluded that most students had difficulty understanding English material during online learning. The top three activities that students did to enhance their English understanding were listening to English songs, watching English movies and Program TV (BBC, CNN, National Geographic) and reading English books (short stories, novels, comics, articles). Besides, it is revealed that students tend to use an English learning mobile application to improve their English ability. It was highlighted that students' online learning experiences, to some extent, influence their self-rated potential to learn autonomously. The findings were supported by previous study from Hidayati and Husna (2020). There were many students who installed the application were identified as regular autonomous learners because they used the application before covid and also the students acknowledge that they find it helpful in understanding English material through the applications they have installed. Many students who responded to the usefulness of the mobile application in learning English believe that using the mobile application in learning English is helpful. It is influenced by the features and appearances provided on the online learning platform. The attractive appearance definitely makes it easier for students to learn the material on that platform. Along with that, the attractive features and appearance also can affect how often and for how long students use the online learning applications used. Most students use the online learning applications 2 to 3 times a week, there are even students who use the learning application 8 to 9 times.

Related to the findings, the researcher attempts to explain the answer to the following research question.

1. How do mobile English learning applications enhance students' autonomy?
2. How are students' perspective on using mobile applications to learn English during online learning?

As stated above, most of the applications used by students during online learning are appealing to students who use them. That is influenced by the features and appearances found on the online learning platform. The attractive appearance makes students easily learn the material provided on the platform. It proves that mobile english learning applications are able to enhance students' autonomy. The statement is in line with students' perspective towards the application and The Newly-Proposed Model (TAM) by Doan (2018). The mobile application allows

students to perceive usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived playfulness, and self-management of learning.

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