

Learner Autonomy and Culture in Bali: Perspectives from Secondary School Indonesian EFL Context

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Abstract

This article aims to investigate the relationship between learner autonomy in secondary schools and the culture of English as Foreign Language (EFL) Learners of secondary schools in Bali, Indonesia. There have been lots of studies to foster the implementation learner autonomy at different levels of EFL learning at different schools, universities and communities. However, learner autonomy is difficult to implement because of the influence on culture in EFL Learners of secondary school in Bali. Literature on cultures of EFL Learners in Indonesia and in Bali, particularly, states that learners tend to be collectivist, reticent, and passive. Cultural attributes of Balinese society is often regarded as the main cause for society's perspective behavior of collectivism, reticence and passivity. Indonesia's government tries to go against the perspective by including learner autonomy in the school's curriculum. Learners are required to be active in finding information and solving problems by themselves. These situations show that learner autonomy in that education curriculum is made to break the Balinese society's perspective about EFL Learners culture in secondary schools in Bali.

Keywords: culture in Bali, EFL learners, learner autonomy, secondary school.

1. Introduction

There have been many studies to foster learner autonomy on different levels of English as Foreign Language (EFL) context of learning at different schools, universities, and community. Learner autonomy is determined by the methods of learning that is used by the teacher. The traditional methods of learning that are implemented in schools also take charge of fostering learner autonomy. Tudor (1993) states that the teacher in the traditional methods of learning is the supplier of knowledge or the main source of knowledge. Traditionally, the teachers are fully in charge of the learning process, collectively they play this role on behalf of the school, educational authority, and the government. Thus, the curriculum does not emphasize the individual learner's experience, needs, interests, and aspirations. In traditional methods of learning, the power and responsibility are had by the teachers and they play the role as the instructor and the decision maker. Teachers who use traditional

learning methods regard the students as the people who have such a 'knowledge holes' which need to be filled with information.

Fostering learner autonomy in EFL learners, teachers should play their role differently. The teachers' role is being a facilitator and counselor as they help students take the responsibility by setting their own goals, planning practice opportunities, and assessing their progress in learning. Teachers guide the students to have responsibilities for their own learning. Moreover, the teachers guide them to be effectively engaged in planning, monitoring and evaluating their own learning. However, learner autonomy is difficult to implement because of the influence of culture on EFL Learners of secondary school in Bali. Literature on cultures of EFL Learners in Bali, Indonesia, particularly, states that learners tend to be collectivist, reticent, and passive. The cultural attributes of Balinese society are often regarded as the main causes for society's perspective of collectivism, reticence and passivity.

According to Walia (2012), language learning in traditional methods of learning is a process of transferring the knowledge with the help of rules, rather than considering language learning as a skill. However, in order to make the students use the language effectively, in this case in EFL context, the students need to develop their communicative competence. It means that the students use their ability to use the language which they are learning appropriately in a given social encounter. Moreover, in developing the students' communicative competence as well as fostering learner autonomy, the Indonesian government has implemented curriculum 2013 in the education system to replace the previous curriculum which is curriculum 2006. Curriculum 2013 is designed to go against the perspective by including learner autonomy in the school's curriculum. Learner autonomy is included in the curriculum by applying the scientific methods of learning which are inquiry based learning, project based learning and problem based learning. These three methods actually aim to give meaning to the learning process and make the students in Indonesia have learner autonomy. These methods of learning are not new methods in education but, it seems very new since the implementation of curriculum 2013 in Indonesia. This article will be focused on investigating learner autonomy in secondary schools and the culture of English as EFL Learners of secondary schools in Bali, Indonesia.

2. Learner Autonomy and Culture at Secondary Schools in EFL Context

- Theoretically

- a. Learner autonomy

The concept of learner autonomy can be divided into "learner" and "autonomy". Holec (1981) as cited in Little (1991) states that autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's learning. It is also supported by the statement from Banson (2001) as cited in Arias (2015, p.36) which states that autonomy means the ability or the capacity of the learners in taking control their own self in learning process, cognitive process and learning the content of materials. Learning autonomy can be developed based on the characteristics of students and the learning situation. Autonomy has a concept that the learner takes a main role in achieving the goal or the purpose of the learning process (Macaro, 2008 as cited in

Arias, 2015, p.36). The teacher takes a role as the facilitator, guidance, and controller for the students. Moreover, the students take an active role to achieve their goal their own way. The students learn the materials in the class independently. The independence of students influences the success in learning process. Student independence is influenced by the students' personalities. Those personalities are (Ellis, 1997, as cited in Arias, 2015, p.37):

- 1) Extroversion/introversion
- 2) Risk-taking
- 3) Tolerance of ambiguity
- 4) Empathy
- 5) Self-esteem
- 6) Inhibition

Thus, the personalities of learners influence students in implementing learning autonomy.

b. Asian Students' Characteristics

The personalities of students affect the way they learn the subject materials in school. Asian students, especially Balinese have some difference in personalities from others students. Concerning the sociocultural perspective most of the students in Indonesia are not ready yet to be independent learners or learner autonomy (Dardjowidjojo , 2001 as cited in Sahiruddin (2013). Literature on cultures of EFL Learners in Indonesia Bali, particularly, states that learners tend to be collectivist, reticent, and passive (Cheng, 2000, p.435). Asian students are diligent, have a good persistence in learning, good skill in memorizing the material, and have strong desire to learn English. But, they are very reticent and passive in doing individual work. They prefer to work in a group rather than individually which is known as collectivistic. The characteristics affect the ability of learner's autonomy. In this case, the government designs the curriculum 2013 to include the learner autonomy.

c. Curriculum 2013

According to Sahiruddin (2013), the government has design the education curriculum several times. Curriculum 2013 is the newest one that is designed by the government. The curriculum 2013 is designed in order to improve the quality of ELT (English Language Teaching). The concept of the curriculum 2013 is the students can improve their ability in learning English independently. It is student centered. According to Sahiruddin (2013), now days the learners in Indonesia have a potential to be an independent learner and autonomous. It can happen when the teacher can built the students' learning awareness. Students should take an active role in finding and solving the problem during the learning process in the classroom. The teacher takes a role as the controller and the facilitator for the students in achieving their goal. There are some difference of curriculum 2013 with the others curriculum (e.g. the time allotment in learning English in Indonesia). Time allotment in learning English is limited. The government demand the students be active in

finding and learn English independently. The students learn English not only in the school, but also learn English outside the classroom.

- Empirically

In a study Asmari (2013) reported that it is important to provide students in a group for giving learner training then separate become an integral part in doing teaching process in order to improve the learner's autonomy. He argues that the teacher should build the students awareness in achieving the goal in learning English. This study is supported by Fumin and Li (2012), they argue that in order to build the students' awareness in learning English, the teacher takes important role to take a challenging and multiple roles in the new teaching model. They argue that the learners' autonomy can encourage the learner in learning English from the constraints of time or place.

3. Research Questions

- a. How do secondary school students in Bali perceive learner autonomy in EFL context?
- b. How does culture in Bali affect learner autonomy in the secondary school students?

4. Research Method

The present study was a qualitative study on current practices and prospects of learner autonomy in English Language Teaching at secondary school level. Data was gathered through a guided interview and an observation checklist. The interview guidance aims to investigate the students' perspective toward learner autonomy which is implicitly implemented in the curriculum 2013. In order to investigate students' perspectives about learner autonomy, a guided interview was designed containing three aspects those are, the current situation of learner autonomy at secondary school level, the education curriculum which is implicitly implemented scientific approach to foster learner autonomy, and the culture of students in Bali. A triangulation test will be conducted to avoid the subjectivity.

5. Results

The data collected from the teachers through guided interviews which were analyzed by using the transcript of the interview. The guided interviews consisted of three aspects and the responses have been analyzed by coding. The purpose was to investigate the present position of learner autonomy, the culture of students in Bali, and the new education curriculum as a strategy for fostering learning autonomy in EFL context.

5.1 Learner Autonomy – Current Situation

The first aspect in the guided interview focuses on the characteristics of learner autonomy by Holec in a classroom on EFL context. The data reflects a discouraging situation as means of all the responses states that most of the students in Bali do not realize that they are far from the characteristics of learner autonomy. When the secondary school students

are asked about the new education, most of the students state that they do not feel the difference with the previous education curriculum. Meanwhile, Indonesian government has tried to foster learner autonomy to the students by implementing curriculum 2013 which implicitly fostering learner autonomy for the students.

5.2 Including Learner Autonomy Implicitly in the Education Curriculum

The second aspect in the guided interview focuses on the scientific approach which is implemented in the education curriculum. The scientific approach inculcates learner autonomy in EFL context at the secondary school level. Voller (1997) identifies three roles for teachers willing to work on an autonomous pedagogy: the teacher as facilitator, the teacher as counselor, and the teacher as resource. The analysis transcript of the interview showed that the implementation of learner autonomy in the education curriculum is not implemented well because of the sociocultural perspectives which are maintained by the students.

5.3 Learner Autonomy and Culture of Students in Bali

Most of students in Bali have a strong motivation in learning English. It because the place where they live is a tourism area in which most people uses English in communicating with the foreigners. Most students in Bali have a wish to get a job in tourism area. They have potency in learning English. Most of them are diligent and have strong desire in learning English, but they are afraid to learn English independently in school. They are too shy and reticence in the class. They prefer to learn together with their friends in a group rather than studying independently. But, now days most of students take private English course in their house. They learn English independently without friends. They finish what the teacher English course give to them (e.g. English task).

6. Discussions

6.1 Learner Autonomy – Current Situation

The current situation of learner autonomy, as perceived by the secondary school students, is not encouraging as all the responses regarding students' involvement in setting their own learning. The secondary school students (ages 11-13) considered in learning a language. They should build their awareness in learning language by themselves (Kuntz, 1997 as cited in Mora, 2005). Concerning with those characteristics, the students already build their autonomy in learning English. However, the responses of students show that cultural attributes of Balinese society influence the implementation of curriculum 2013 as one of the strategies to foster learning autonomy. This reflects that the students are not really ready to be an autonomous learner. Based on the responses of students in this study, the students are not encouraged to learn English at secondary school level in Bali, it also suggests that most of the students come to the school without having sufficient background of independent learning. The students are not confidence to use English, they prefer to learn together with their friends rather than learning

independently. Moreover, students do not active to find and solve the problem that find in learning English. They are still waiting for the teacher's explanation rather than finding the materials by themselves.

Hence, the teachers have to start with the very basic ideas of self-learning, independent learning and learner autonomy at the secondary school level. Several studies suggests that students should be considered equal partners and given an opportunity to set their learning such as determining the time, place and pace of the course (Little, 1991; Dam, 1995; Nunan, 1997; Benson, 2001). However, many secondary school students in Bali may encounter difficulty to involve in decision making (setting their learning) as the students are affected by the cultural attributes of Balinese society. They are reluctant to bring more learner autonomy into the classroom because they feel that since their students come from cultures which depend heavily on the authority of both the teachers and institutions, they feel uncomfortable with learner autonomy initiatives. This situation will be more challenging to foster learner autonomy at the secondary school level.

6.2 Including Learner Autonomy Implicitly in the Curriculum 2013

Curriculum 2013 is designed by Indonesian Government to develop not only students' cognitive aspect but also, affective aspect and psychomotor aspect by applying scientific approach including three major methods of learning. Those methods of learning are inquiry based learning, project based learning and problem based learning. Those methods are actually aimed to give meaning to the learning process and make the students in Indonesia to be an autonomous learner. Those methods of learning are not a new method in education but, it seems very new since the implementation of curriculum 2013 in Indonesia.

According to Scardamalia (2002) as cited in a book entitled, 'Capacity Building Series' (2013) defines that inquiry based learning method is one of the approaches of learning in which students are at the centre of the learning experience. The teachers as educators play an important role through the process of establishing a culture in terms of a habit in which students' ideas are respectfully challenged, tested, redefined and viewed as improvable. Next, Coffey (2015) defines project based learning as an approach in teaching that occupies students cooperatively in doing a factual-world exploration in which the projects are organized in a diversity of assignments Furthermore, problem based learning method is defined by Finkle and Torp (1995) as the development of curriculum and instructional approach which simultaneously develops both problem solving and disciplinary knowledge bases and skills by giving the students such a situation in which they play an active role of problem solvers. Based on the explanation of those methods of learning, it means that learner autonomy is implicitly inserted in Curriculum 2013 with the Indonesian EFL context as the main focus.

6.3 Learner Autonomy and Culture of Students in Bali

The secondary school students in Bali have the same characteristics with Indonesian students in general. Indonesia and most of the countries in Asia have different personalities than students in the western countries. Most ASIAN students have different learning style in EFL learning process. Suharmanto (2003) states that Indonesian are normally passive, introvert, and resist changes. Based on the observation checklist which is focused on the implimentation of learner autonomy in Indonesian EFL context, secondary school students in Bali show all those characteristics of Indonesian stsudents who are not ready yet to be autonomus. It is also supported by Dardjowidjojo (2001) as cited in Sahiruddin (2013) which states that in sociocultural perspective most of the students in Indonesia are not ready yet to be independent learners or learner autonomy. Literatures on culture of Asian EFL Learners state that learners tend to be collectivist, reticent, and passive (Cheng, 2000, p.435). Meanwhile, based on the results of the observation and guided interview which has been conducted, secondary school students in Bali potentially have a good persistent in learning, good skill in memorizing the material, and have strong willingness in learning English. However, the culture that has been maintanced for a long time by Indonesian students especially Balinese make them very reticent and passive in doing individual work. They prefer to work in a group rather than individually which is known as collectivistic. Moreover, they always wait for the teacher's instruction in looking for a new information or material for a certain topic. It makes learner autonomy is difficult to be fostered in Bali, Indonesia.

7. Conclusion

The implementation of learner autonomy at the secondary scool level cannot be fostered easily. That is why Indonesian's government designed curriculum 2013 to foster learner autonomy implicitly. However, the Balinese society's perspective about EFL Learners influence the implementation of learner autonomy in curriculum 2013. This study focused on the students' perspective about the learner autonomy through the guided interview and observation checklist. In the interview section, the study reported that the students know about the curriculum 2013 and what they should do as students. They know that they should be autonomous learners by having higher participation in learning process. Otherwise, based on the observation section it shows differently. The students do not have a confidence in EFL learning. They are not confident and very reticence in learning English independently. The students still do not really understand about the concept of learner autonomy. In this case, the students cannot build their own awareness in learning the target language and their responsibility of their learning. Based on those results, it can be concluded that learner autonomy cannot be fostered well in Bali. The collectivist, reticence and passivity as the characteristic of Balinese students should be changes in order to build the learner autonomy.

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