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"Questioning What Works Best: Implementing Pedagogic Innovations for Creating Teacher & Learner Autonomy in TEFL"

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PREFACE

First of all I'd like to start by saying *Alhamdulillahirrabbil 'alamin,* thanks to Allah for allowing us to have The 7th International Conference on Teaching English as A Foreign Language (7th COTEFL). I wish to thank the Rector, the University of Muhammadiyah Purwokerto: DR. H. Syamsuhadi Irsyad S.H.,M.H. and the vice rectors for supporting us to have this conference. I wish to thank and congratulate the committee who has worked hard to prepare this annual activity. I'd like to thank all the keynote speakers: Bapak Anis Baswedan, Ph. D. (The Minister of Indonesian Education and Culture), Prof. James Chapman, Prof. Dr. Lindsay Miller, Assoc. Prof. Lubna Alsagof, Prof. Helena I.R Agustien, Shanty Hawanty, Ph.D., Handoyo Puji Widodo, P.h.D., and our Dean Ibu Sulasih Nurhayati. My gratitude also comes to our reviewers: Prof. Jufrizal, Rina Agustina, M.App.Ling. TESOL, Handoyo, Ph.D., Michelle Kohler, Hameed Barjesteh, Prof. Amporn Sa-ngiamwibool, Vineet Kaul, and Johana Woods for reading and sorting out lots of abstracts, to refine the best ones. I wish to thank the presenters, as you are the chosen. I wish to thank all the participants for spending your time at this COTEFL, without you all this conference will never be.

We have passed a long journey to survive. It was seven years ago we started this conference with the spirit of *Hari Pendidikan Nasional.* We realize that education, in which the day we celebrate every May 2nd, is one of principal elements we have to pay attention to make this country a counted one. COTEFL is meant to be parts of the endeavors to achieve the goal.

Surely, the people behind the education are the essence to drive the ideal education, then. In their hands, we rely on the future of our beloved country. I know I address to most of those angels, the teachers who will shape the face of the world. You are here now because you care, you want to promote your excellence, especially in English Language Teaching.

The papers we received have shown us that promoting good standards need good practices. Some of you show us you have done well. Some practice humanitarian touch in which varieties of activities done. Some prepare themselves by implementing high technology as well as creating new methods. The ultimate goal is to create an 'autonomous atmosphere' in the teaching and learning process of English in all education levels among the students and the teachers.

Your ideas are the seed of higher success tree that, I believe, can protect us from the hot sun's shine. They will grow up into big trees that give us fresh atmosphere to breathe, to live our life. I do hope our sharing ideas will exist, as we have passed it into the 7th COTEFL.

Finally, with the souls of *Hari Pendidikan Nasional,* let's color the education on earth. I wish you a fruitful and flying color conference. Thank you.

Wassalamu 'alaikum Wr.Wb.

Khristianto, S.S., M.Hum.
Chairperson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Assalamu'alaikum wr. wb.,

This Seventh Conference on Teaching English as a Foreign Language (7th COTEFL) is monumental this year, held to commemorate the golden anniversary of the University of Muhammadiyah Purwokerto and the 15th one of Faculty of Letters. The word 'monumental' not only implies the spirit of gratitude for the anniversary, but also the commitment the Faculty of Letters has been making and sustaining to facilitate the development of English language learning and teaching by the conference. By the development, teaching English should be seen as growing along the growth of human culture in which the novelties of pedagogic innovations are there. Their essence not only marks the dynamic of English classrooms but also their implications on the independence of English learning process.

Hence, the conference focuses on the essence of pedagogic innovations on the learner autonomy. This theme is taken into account as the best practices from the theoretical domains of teaching method in attempt to enhance the students' self efficacy in learning and using English as a foreign language. It also suggests that the innovations should lead to the contextualization of English language from which the learner autonomy will be achieved.

At last, I would like to express my gratitude to all of presenters and participants who have attended and presented the papers. The gratitude is also expressed to the committee who has worked hard and well to run the program. For all inconveniences, may we be forgiven.

We will welcome you to our next conferences.

Purwokerto, 1 April 2015
Sulasih Nurhayati, S.S., M.Hum.
Dean of Faculty of Letters

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PROMOTING AUTONOMY IN EFL WRITING THROUGH OUT-OF-CLASS ONLINE PEER FEEDBACK

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ABSTRACT

Autonomy has been a key issue in the field of language teaching and learning since Holec's report (1981) to the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project. The notion emphasizes that learners are fully responsible for their own learning. Thus, the promotion of autonomy in language classroom should involve learners to actively take part in the process of learning. Peer feedback in academic writing is to enhance learner autonomy since it gives an ample chance for learners to be more responsible for their learning and be less dependent on the teacher.

This paper aims to report part of a larger ongoing study of blended learning course using Schoology. It focuses on the extent to which out-of-class online peer feedback activities could foster learner autonomy. Fifteen students enrolling in a blended EAP course became the participants of this study. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was employed to gather the data. The data were coded. Four major themes included autonomous behaviors, developed confidence, sense of interdependence, and increased knowledge. These findings imply that out-of-class online peer feedback could increase students' active participation in academic writing. Implications and suggestions for further research are also provided in the paper.

Keywords: autonomy in language learning, peer feedback, and academic writing.

1. Introduction

The paradigm shift from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness in the field of language education suggests practitioners and researchers pay more attention to language learners. Concurrently, learner autonomy has become a key discussion for the last three decades. Autonomy is one of the requirements for the implementation of the communicative approach (Richards, 2005, p. 7). The notion also serves as one of the general goals in the field of language education (Benson, 2007), which aims to "develop the attitude that learning is a lifelong process" (Knowles, 1976, cited in Wenden, 1987, p. 9).

Little (2002), however, reminds educators that learners are not automatically responsible for their own learning in a natural English classroom. Therefore, to promote learner autonomy, teachers should make initiatives in their teachingpractice.Implementing autonomy, though, is a challenging task for English language teachers in Indonesia. Dardjowidjojo (2001) mentions three culturally-bound constrairts that may inhibit the implementation of learner autonomy. The first constraint is the *manut-lan-miturut* philosophy which says that good children should obey their parents. Another block stems from the *ewuh-pekewuh* philosophy in which people are uncomfortable and uneasy to give differing opinions to people of higher authority. The last constraint comes from the *sabdapenditaratu* philosophy which considers the saying of people in high positions as god's truth.

This study is part of a larger project which examines the integration of Schoology as a learning management system into a face-to-face writing course. Integrating a Learning Management System (LMS) into classroom can help to minimize the intervention of teacher in the process of learning. One common use of an LMS is peer feedback. Reciprocal online peer feedback activities conducted beyond the classroom help the students become less dependent on the teacher and display a greater level of autonomy. This paper aims to examine the extent to which out-of-class online peer feedback activities can promote learner autonomy in academic writing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Learner Autonomy

Holec (1981, p. 3) defines autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning." He states:

To take charge of one's learning is to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all decisions concerning all aspects of this learning, i.e.:

- determining the objectives;
- defining the contents and progressions;
- selecting methods and techniques to be used;
- monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.);
- evaluating what has been acquired

Responsibility becomes the first step toward learner autonomy (Little, 2004). Little (1999) articulates three important points of autonomous learners. Firstly, learners carry out their own learning. Secondly, learners' critical awareness of learning goals and methods make their learning more effective. Lastly, learners' critical awareness enables them to surpass the limitations of their learning environment.

Benson (2001, p. 110) asserts that autonomy is "an attribute of the learner rather than the learning situation." Highlighting the importance of learning management, he describes learner autonomy as "the capacity to take control of one's own learning" (p. 47). The notion of controlling over learning is more observable than that of taking charge or being responsible. Therefore, to hold learning autonomy as an observable field, the term "take charge" is changed into "control."

2.2 Components of Learner Autonomy

Littlewood (1996, p. 426) explores two interdependent components of learner autonomy: ability and willingness. He divides each major component into two other components. Ability is dependent on possessing "both knowledge about alternatives from which choices have to be made" and "skills for carrying out whatever choices seem most appropriate." Willingness is dependent on having "both the motivation and the confidence to take responsibility for the choices required."

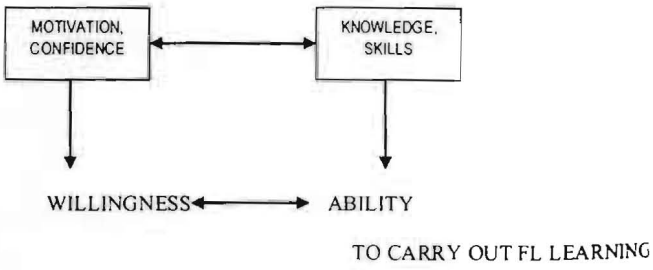

Figure 1 Components of Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning (Littlewood, 1996)

According to Littlewood (1996), motivation, confidence, knowledge, and skills should be present together in autonomous learners because they complement one another. A student may have high motivation to learn a second language but he is lack of the necessary knowledge or skills to organize his time effectively; a student may have ample opportunities to develop knowledge and skills for

organizing his second language learning, but he does not wish to do so since he thinks that it is the teacher's role; a student who is accustomed to a high degree of teacher's control and support may lack the confidence to carry out whatever skills he is taught.

2.3 Autonomy in East Asia

Even though the notion of autonomy in language learning was born in western context, Asian students possess learning autonomy but the criteria are different from those of the western context (Littlewood, 1999). While the western culture takes individualism and independence into account, the eastern culture appraises collectivism.and interdependence. Asian people are stereotyped to work together and act as a family, seeing themselves as an integral part of their group and expected to give the priority to the group goal.

2.4 Autonomy and peer feedback in academic writing

The implementation of learner autonomy in East Asia should consider collectivism and interdependence. Pair and group work is strongly emphasized to minimize students' dependence on the teacher. The students learn to collaborate with their classmates and develop their autonomy. In a writing course, the promotion of learner autonomy can carried out by implementing peer feedback.

Peer feedback is an activity in which students provide and obtain feedback from their classmates. Yu and Lie (2014) find Chinese students used L1 in peer feedback activity to deal with content and organization while L2 is used to assess form-related problems. Miao, Badger and Zu (2006) reveal that students did not entirely accept the feedback from their peers, implying that they were stick on their own ideas. Thus, peer feedback activity instigates the exercise of autonomy.

3. Method

3.1 Participants and setting

The present study took place in an EAP 2 course at Sampoerna University. The researcher was the instructor of the course. A blended learning method was implemented by using Schoology® as the learning management system. The main focuses of the course were writing (a) cause and effect essays and (b) compare and contrast essays. The data reported in this paper were taken after the students finished giving peer feedback on cause and effect essays via the Schoology® platform.

The study included 15 enrolled students. All of the students majored in Business. Some students had experienced peer feedback on process essays in the previous semester.

Peer feedback was given online and beyond the classroom. Students' drafts were uploaded to Schoology. Each draft was commented on by fourteen students, andthree essay drafts were uploaded per day.

3.2 Data Collection

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted to gather the data, which was led by a research assistant. Each group consisted of five participants. The discussion of each group took approximately one hour. Each discussion was video recorded.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data were coded to identify themes and patterns. The initial coding themes were grouped into broader categories. The final coding themes included autonomous behaviors, developed confidence, interdependence, and increased knowledge.

4. Results

4.1 Autonomous behaviors

The online peer feedback activity conducted outside class hours fostered students to exercise autonomous behaviors. The students

becameincreasingly less dependent on the teacher throughout the activity. Dona, for example, admitted that she could not only rely on the teacher but *"I am responsible for helping my friends to improve their compositions. It is not all totally my lecturer's task."* Her statement indicated that she possessed willingness to carry out peer feedback to assist her friends.

Another student revealed that peer feedback activities could help her practice the knowledge she got in the classroom to assess her friends' essays. Giving feedback to friends-challenged the students to assess their own understanding.

> **Rosa**: Well, I learn a lot from the lecturer in the classroom. But, this peer feedback forces me to apply my knowledge to my friends' essays. This can show me how far I understand the principles of writing academic essays.

Since the activity was conducted online and outside the classroom, the students could carry it out anytime and anywhere at ease without the intervention of the teacher. Therefore, they managed it by themselves.

> **Dian**: I like this online peer feedback because I can choose the time and the place by myself. I usually do it at the night and there is no time limitation from the lecturer. If it is conducted in the class, the lecturer usually gives time limitation.

The students were aware of the objective of giving feedback to help the development of their friends' essays. A student admitted she tried to provide specific and goal-oriented feedback. Little (1999) contends that students' awareness of learning goals makes learning more effective.

> **Nori**: I tried to give feedback which is specific and it should be related to the rubrics given by the lecturer. I still remember that before we do peer feedback, the lecturer gave us the rubrics for assessing cause and effect essay. He told us to consult with the rubrics and to make specific feedback. So, we are supposed not only to write "good or bad" but explain why it is good or bad.

The peer feedback fostered the students to monitor their essay. The feedback given by peers stimulated students' to rethink the flow of their thoughts in the essays. Thus, it can stimulate the students to be reflective learners.

> **Ella**: I can identify my weaknesses in writing. Before I do the peer feedback activity, I just think that my writing is all correct and I just write everything which comes to my mind. But now I can know which sentences are not coherent and words that is unnecessary in my writing.

Making decision is one of key capacities possessed by autonomous learners. Some students admitted that they evaluated the feedback. The students felt that they had freedom to accept or not to accept their friends' suggestions.

> **Nia**: I think about my friends' feedback. I accept some feedback and I do not accept some also. Usually, I always accept my lecturer's feedback.

4.2 Developed confidence

Confidence is a factor influencing the development of learner autonomy (Littlewood, 1996). The students admitted they increased their self-confidence due to the practice of giving feedback. Mora, for instance, said that by giving feedback to her friends' essays, she started to trust her own ability.

> **Mora**: I start to be aware that I have ability to assess my friends' essays, as if I were the lecturer. But, it is interesting and it is good for me because I get more confident in doing so. In the first peer feedback activity, I was confused. I was doubtful with my ability to give feedback on my friends' essays.

The students were able to exercise their capacities to express their ideas and opinions. This brought about the feeling of being accepted by their friends. They felt that their presence was taken into account by their friends.

> **Lena**: I feel challenged to assess and give feedback on my friends' essays. I am free

to express my ideas. If my friends accept my ideas and suggestions, I feel satisfied....because they consider me.

4.3 Sense of Interdependence

The peer feedback activity promoted students' sense of interdependence. Cooperation among the students to provide reciprocal feedback encouraged the students to rely more on one another. The activity became a medium for them to actively engage and collaborate with their friends to develop their essays. The students felt the affective supports from their friends through the comments and feedback given.

> **Nella**: It is really helpful because usually they give suggestions that I never think before, and we can share our ideas. We learn together about academic writing.

The peer feedback fostered collaboration among the students. It enabled the students to contribute to the development of their friends' essays. As a result, the students learned from others.

> **Milla**: Peer feedback activity gives me positive atmosphere. I can learn together with my friends. I know their mistakes and they also tell me my mistakes. So it is mutual symbiosis.

4.4 Increased knowledge

The peer feedback activity enhanced students' knowledge on writing academic essay. First, their linguistic awareness was raised due to reading and commenting on their friends' essay. The students learned grammar and diction of their friends' essays. Thus, it could help to bring their knowledge to the level of consciousness.

> **Merry**: What is interesting is when I read Rona's essay. She is good at grammar and I learn from her a lot. I learn also the words she used in her writing.

Besides raising their linguistic awareness, the peer feedback activity also fostered the students to be a critical reader. When responding to their peers' essays, the students tried to analyze the flow of logics. Erma mentioned it in the FGD that "*I analyze my friends' essays. Sometimes, their essays are not logical and I give suggestions.*" Some students also criticized that their friends' essays were lack of supporting data.

> **Rona**: When reading my friends' essays, I try to think hard whether my friends provide supporting details. I often find that the essays are lack of supporting details and I give suggestions.

Lastly, the students admitted that reading their friends' essays gave them additional knowledge on unfamiliar topic. A student admitted that his friend essay opened his eyes on new issues.

> **Temmy**: Reading and commenting on my friends' essays are interesting. I get new information that I have not known before.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The out-of-class online peer feedback activity encouraged the students to take control of their learning. The students exercised their autonomous behaviors, developed their self-confidence, built sense of interdependence, and developed knowledge. It entails that the peer feedback activity provided an ample chance for students to actively engage in the writing processes.

The out-of-class online peer feedback activity can be implemented as a part of writing process to facilitate autonomous learning skills and minimize students' reliance on the teacher. However, the teacher should provide clear guideline. The guideline should clearly mention specific aspects of essay to be assessed: organization, grammar, supporting details, and the like. Providing training on how to give feedback prior to its implementation is beneficial for the students since any given feedback should be specific and goal oriented.

The data of this study were only taken from FGD. Further research should include students' learning journals to cater for richer autonomous learning experiences.

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