

Students' teacher-dependency and passiveness in online learning during COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Online learning during COVID-19 pandemic has made teacher and students even parents busy in adapting the change. Many issues rose regarding the implementation of online learning. One of the issues is the student's teacher dependency in learning. Along with this problem, students tend to be passive in online learning. This research was conducted in a higher education context. Quantitative survey research was conducted to 656 sophomore students and 10 teachers in a college of aerospace technology in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Along with the questionnaire, an interview was held to gain the qualitative data to support the quantitative data. As the result, students tend to rely on their teachers and passive in learning.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Entering the year of 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia as well as in other parts of the world has not come to an end and brings effects to several aspects of life including education. The switch from face-to-face interaction to screen to face of classroom meetings becomes an interesting issue to discuss among researchers in education and teaching practitioners [1]–[4]. Despite the hot debate on online learning implementation, many remain believing that it is still the most possible solution to keep schools and universities running in the current pandemic circumstances. When this article was being written, it had been four semesters since the first COVID-19 case entering Indonesia in March 2020. In other words, it has been two years since educational institutions decided to conduct distance learning using internet connection as the medium.

Online classes offer flexibility for students. Smedley [5] stated that online mode provides the flexibility of time and space in teaching and learning. Smedley also added that students and teachers are also able to make agreement to time and procedure of assignment submission so that, students with different pace of learning are well accommodated. Otherwise, flexibility here is not only identified as students' privilege in online learning but also as their challenge in which they have to be responsible in their learning. Starting from how to commence the learning to techniques of evaluation that usually comes in the end of the learning phase, students need to manage all of the involved steps.

Students' responsibilities in online learning makes autonomous learning concept very relevant and reappeared when all sudden the world globally had to switch their learning mode online. The clear relevance

of online learning and students' autonomy are in accordance with some previous studies. Pham, *et al.* [6] gave evidence for how the combination of mobile learning and gamification as part of activities in online learning were successfully able to trigger Vietnamese students' learning autonomy in language teaching classroom. In his work, Due also highlighted his strong belief on the benefits of online learning especially the use of massive open online courses (MOOCs) and recommended three things to achieve high level of students' learning autonomy. The recommendation consisted of stimulation to students' intrinsic motivation and autonomy awareness, implementation of cognitive strategies to strengthen autonomy, and application of metacognitive strategies to monitor the autonomy. Last but not least, in an Indonesian context, Dalilan [7] captured the students' autonomy in joining online classes according to what students perceived. The result showed, students considered that online learning enabled students to learn independently which was manifested through their self-responsibility, self-learning awareness, self-regulation, and self-time management.

Issues in online learning sporadically rose along its implementation in the beginning to end of 2020. However, the issues have been assumed some years prior to the pandemic era. The problems were assumed coming from both parties, teachers and students, as some researchers scrutinized their readiness in facing online learning. On the teachers' side, utilizing technology seemed to be the most challenging matter since most of them were not quite familiar with computer assisted learning (CAL) or mobile learning (ML). On the other side, students tended to face difficulties in the learning process in terms of their attitude regarding being autonomous learners. They were claimed to be less ready to be autonomous learners. Unfortunately, teachers and students defined autonomous learning remain as simple as learning independently with the absence of a teacher [4], [8]–[10].

Conceptually, experts have different perspectives in defining learner autonomy which prove that there is no fixed definition for that term. Richards [11] described autonomy as responsibility in which learners should be able to take control of her or his own learning in terms of what and how they learn. An old yet remaining popular view by Little [12] considered autonomy as students' ability to bridge the gap between learning and living. In literal meaning, little intended to highlight students' skill to bring and connect what they learn in an academic setting or classroom to the real world. Meanwhile, other experts [13], [14] agreed that learning autonomy positively affects internal motivation so that it can strongly generate students' actions to achieve their goal. Nunan [15] proposed a learner autonomy definition in a slightly different way by putting learners into five different levels. In the first level called awareness, autonomous learners fully understand what they aim for in their learning. Besides the learning objective, they are also able to identify the best way that suits their learning. In one level higher, a student is called as an autonomous learner when he/she can independently involve him/herself in choosing the objectives offered by the curriculum or the teachers. He/she is also able to opt the right strategy among the selection of strategies offered by teachers. This level is called the involvement level. Meanwhile, when a student can suggest objectives or strategies for learning from his/her own idea, this students' learner autonomy level belongs to the intervention level. The next level is called creation. This represents students who are independently able to formulate objectives and generate strategies for his/her learning. The ultimate level of learner autonomy is when a student goes beyond the aforementioned levels. In this level students can go beyond by linking their learning with their lives in the real world.

The concept of dependency lies under the umbrella of autonomous learning. Teacher-independency is described as how dependent the students are on their teacher during and to what extent the students can take independent action in their learning process. This is also interchangeably used with teacher-centeredness. These are two variables that can be used to assess learners' teacher-independency learning level. In Cirocki [10], there are initially two variables to see how autonomous a student is in learning. They are: i) Teacher-dependency and; ii) Students' ability, motivation and capacity to plan and take independent action. In brief, the two main topics discussed in this paper are students' teacher-dependency and students' passiveness in online learning.

According to Smith and Smith [16], a 'passive' learner is someone who is not communicating/engaging/bothering during the learning. In this study, the researcher studied the learner's passiveness in online learning during COVID-19 pandemic that is employing synchronous and asynchronous online learning. The working definition of 'passiveness' in online learning in this study is the inability of learners to communicate/engage/bother in synchronous or asynchronous online learning. On the other hand, an autonomous learner is a learner who is aware of his or her learning so that he or she knows what, when, where and how to study so he or she can achieve the learning goals [15]. Someone who is not actively communicating, engaging, nor bothering either in synchronous or asynchronous online learning does not necessarily mean a non-autonomous learner.

This research was conducted in the context of online learning during COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of learner-teacher interaction, mainly it falls into two different modes namely synchronously or

asynchronously. Synchronous online learning means that learner and instructor are in the same certain time and synced. On the other hand, asynchronous online learning is self-paced learning that enables the students to do the tasks and assignments given by the teacher during the given period of time. In this situation it helps the students to independently adjust the time when they have to work on the tasks or assignments.

Issues that take place under the topic of learner autonomy have dragged scholars' attentions in the worldwide. Most of them were interested to investigate the topic from teachers' perspectives [17]–[22] while others were keen on the students' viewpoints which mostly dealt with measurement of the level after particular treatments [23]–[27].

In a context of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning that occurs in Indonesia, learner autonomy is a widely popular topic to discuss among scholars. The most discussed issues under the topic deal with depiction of Indonesian students' learning autonomy. In regard to the first issue, researchers agreed to say that Indonesian students were not able to show their ability to learn autonomously [10], [28], [29]. That striking fact leads the researchers to investigate the similar issue at tertiary level. Among the aforementioned studies, only Ginting *et al.* [28] who had interest in the level of education while Khotimah [29] and Ciroki *et al.* [10] investigated the learner autonomy in secondary schools. In fact, as an adult learner, students in college are expected to be able to negotiate and manage their own learning so that they are ready to pursue their career after graduation. In tertiary level, Ginting *et al.* [28] had successfully conducted a study on that issue as well. However, they specifically focus on graduate students while such study done with undergraduates as the subject seems not to exist. In fact, the curiosity and eagerness to the issue in undergraduate has been shown by Pasaribu [30] who made an attempt in a class of English Language Department to learning autonomy enhancement. All of the studies presented research on learner autonomy in higher education specifically in non-language learning context is hardly found. Confidently, the researcher believed that this topic was worth doing regarding how online learning continued to be implemented due to the uncertain situation of COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, this current study was stimulated by an informal conversation among teachers in a college where the researcher teaches. It was a discussion corresponding to the implementation of online learning during COVID-19 pandemic. Knowing the fact that many teachers complained about the inability of the students to be independent in learning, the researcher was interested in studying the learners' autonomy in higher education context during COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia particularly their dependency on teachers in online learning. More importantly, this study was aimed as confirmatory research responding to the statement mentioned in an article saying that in Asian context the students are passive and tend to rely on teachers [6]. Hence, this research employed two research questions. i) How dependent are the students on their teachers in learning?; ii) To what extent the students are able to take independent action in their learning?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study belongs to quantitative research using a survey design with questionnaires to collect the data. The questionnaires were spread to students as well as teachers. The researcher tried to see both students' and teachers' perspective about students' dependency and passiveness. Exactly 656 students of Aerospace Technology College (89.7%) responded to the questionnaires. In addition to that, ten teachers were randomly selected to answer the questionnaire. The study was done by the end of the even semester 2020 as part of students' learning evaluation. The data collected from the questionnaire was the primary data and is analyzed by employing the descriptive quantitative approach. To analyse the data, the researcher used Microsoft Excel. In addition to the quantitative data, secondary data collected from the interview was also used. Two teachers voluntarily participated in the interview session.

Two questionnaires were used to measure how dependent and passive the students are. First, the researcher used the teacher-dependency questionnaire to see how dependent the students are in learning. Secondly, the researcher also attempted to see how passive the students are by finding out the students' ability to take independent action in their learning. The questionnaire is adapted from Cirocki [10]. It reveals that the higher score of the ability to take independent action, the lower score for the passiveness. Respectively, the numbers of the items in the questionnaires are ten and fifteen statements. The questionnaire employed four Likert scale consisting of three levels which represent low, moderate, and high to determine the students' dependency and passiveness in learning. To support the descriptive quantitative results, a descriptive qualitative data from the interview was added. Ten students were voluntarily involved in the interview process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before embarking on the research result, the researcher attempted to see the respondent demographically. As displayed in Figure 1, the number of male and female respondents was about equal. The number of the male respondents was only 18% higher than the female respondents considering the research took place in an aerospace technology college where in fact more male students were interested in studying this subject.

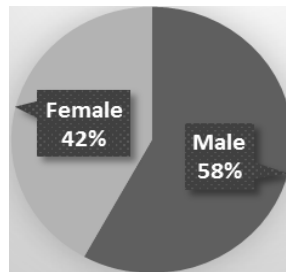


Figure 1. The gender of respondent

The researcher conducted the survey for the sophomore students who are included into the young adult learner. As seen in Figure 2, the age range of the students varies from 18 years-old up to 23 years-old. There were 47 youngest students among the respondents. The oldest students seem to have the least number of the students among the respondents. Majority of the students were at the age of 21 years old. This means that most of the respondents belong to the group of young adult learners. This also means that most of the students have been learning in a formal education for more than 15-year experience; as it is known that sophomore students have been adapting in a higher education context for two years. This should indicate that the teachers may perform their teaching in an adult environment context. In addition, it can be assumed that the students should have adapted in a more independent learning environment compared to their learning context when they were in high school. The results of this study are presented in two different sections based on the order of the research questions.

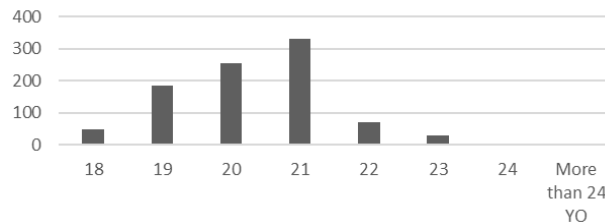


Figure 2. The age range of respondent

3.1. How dependent are the students on their teacher in learning during COVID-19 pandemic?

In a higher education context during COVID-19 pandemic, the students are incredibly showing a high dependency on their teachers. The result in Table 1 representing the students’ perspective about their learning is triangulated by what their teachers perceived toward their learning. It is confirmed that the students tend to rely on teachers and are passive, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Perception toward teacher-dependency in learning

	Teacher-dependency	n	%
Students’	High	421	64
	Moderate	235	36
	Low	0	0
Teachers’	High	9	75
	Moderate	3	25
	Low	0	0

It is clear that students' perception toward their dependency on teachers in learning during COVID-19 Pandemic is roughly similar to the teachers' perception. As the data says, 421 students which is 64% of the total respondents perceived themselves as highly dependent learners. The teachers' perception toward it seemed confirming what the students perceived themselves as highly dependent learners. 75% of the teachers believed that the students remain extremely dependent on their teacher during the learning process in their class. It is 11% higher than the students' perception about themselves for being dependent on their teacher in learning. The rest of the respondents of the students and teachers believe that students are moderately dependent on their teacher, 36% and 25% respectively.

This result is in parallel with Ginting [28] whose research unveiled that most of the students who joined their MOOC program were not legitimately autonomous meaning that the students still highly dependent on others such as friends or teachers. This condition is probably caused by reduced learning time that the students experienced during pandemic. Huber *et al.* [31] in Di Pietro *et al.* [32] mentioned, averagely schools for students under twenty years old in worldwide reduced the learning time between four and 8 hours since the outbreak. Because the learning is not as long as it is done in common situation, the students tend to lack knowledge and understanding on materials that develop their dependency on friends or the teacher. On top of that, Di Pietro [32] posit students naturally experienced hardness of concentration and anxiety during the disaster that made them need guidance and support from surroundings for learning.

From teachers' side, the result also showed most of the teachers realized that their students possess high level of dependency in learning. That perception might come from amount of time they invested for the students. The more time they gave to students for guide and support such as reexplaining the materials, repeating the instructions, or responding students' questions through personal messages or group messages, the more possibilities they have to look students' autonomy low. Findings of qualitative studies in an Indonesian context [1], [2] mentioned lack of communicative interaction as one of challenges that teachers and students should deal with. Since the communication is not as effective as one in offline classes, teachers should anticipate the problem by designing interactive activities, composing clear and understandable instruction for their given tasks, and setting up the materials and tasks in online learning platform [33]. In addition, some Indonesian teachers should send a gentle reminder for the students to access the platform, download materials, and do the activities before the deadline.

The Table 2 helps readers to look at the case more closely and clearly. This also explains how the students perceived themselves as a dependent learner. This can be seen from the attributes that have a high level of dependency. They prefer to have a thorough explanation directly from their teacher. They even feel more comfortable when the teacher does not test them about their understanding through questions. In other words, the teacher's explanation seems more comforting for the students since more than 80% of the students feel more comfortable when the teacher passes knowledge to those who quietly listen to his/her presentation. It means that students do not opt to ask questions or confirm during the class. Surprisingly, more than 90% of the students prefer to be guided by the teacher exactly step by step on how to work on the task.

The statistical result seems to be confirmatory evidence of the interview results. Most interviewed students admitted that they need to ask questions to their classmates related to the instruction given by teachers. They found it difficult to comprehend the instruction even though teachers had given clear instruction. One student admitted that teachers must make detailed information and make them into clear points. They could go along with the topics and subjects given by the teachers if the teachers guide them step by step to do the task. In vice versa, students do not feel content when teachers were not around to guide and did not give step-by-step instruction.

Related to the ability of the students to reflect and make self-assessment, most of the students which is around 87% do not prefer to identify their own mistakes. They do not have enough confidence to reflect on their own learning. However, this data cannot tell the readers whether the students are able or unable to identify their own mistakes. They need their teacher to tell them their mistakes. Unexpectedly, the result shows that almost all of the students prefer to be given feedback regularly. They also prefer to be told what to improve instead of making a reflection about their learning. This indicates that students are not capable of independently seeing their drawbacks in their learning. They do not seem to be able to figure out the room for improvement within themselves in relation to their learning. Related to the assessment, students are definitely not able to assess themselves. They require their teachers to assess them since the data shows 88% of the students prefer to agree that the teacher is the only figure who has the authority to assess students. However, this result is very much understandable since the ability to assess and evaluate belongs to the highest in high order thinking skill (HOTS). It is according to Krathwohl and Anderson [34] that the activities for evaluation encourage students to coordinate, detect, monitor, test, critique and judge an object.

Only a few of the attributes contribute to decreasing the level of dependency. There are five out of fourteen attributes that make the student seen as moderately dependent learners. The students prefer to be controlled by the teacher and stating that they cannot work on themselves. In terms of the frequency, the number of the students who agree to this statement remains overlapping the number of the students who do

not. The same result also happened in the next attribute that the students feel confident when the teachers are around them during the class. Regarding the overall result of the teachers' and students' perception toward students' dependency on teachers in learning, this article agrees that students tend to rely on teachers quite significantly. They feel confident when the teachers are around, guide them and control their learning. In fact, Blesia [35] confirmed that self-confidence is a significant factor for students' success in non-academic and academic contexts. On top of that, Wanabuliandari [36] appointed that self-confidence is a powerful tool the students should own to win any competition in this globalization. Another problem shown from the data in accordance with students' unwillingness to reflect and evaluate their own learning that indicates their low learning autonomy. In regards to this problem, Pasaribu [30] recommended digital reading response as an activity to elevate students' independence in learning since the activity encourage students to self-evaluate their learning.

Table 2. Students' perception on their learning independency level

Item	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Score	M	Level
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			
I prefer my teacher to explain everything to me without asking me questions and testing my thinking.	311	47	301	46	38	6	4	1	2,227	3.4	High
I prefer my teacher to pass knowledge to students who quietly listen to his/her presentation/ explanation.	226	34	362	55	60	9	8	1	2,118	3.2	High
I prefer my teacher to give me activities to work on (either on my own or with my classmates), telling me the exact steps I should take to complete them.	274	42	321	49	55	8	3	0	2,172	3.3	High
I prefer my teacher to nominate me to talk about my interests.	149	23	402	61	99	15	5	1	2,005	3.1	High
I prefer my teacher to tell me what mistakes are without asking me to identify them on my own.	243	37	331	50	77	12	4	1	2,123	3.2	High
I prefer my teacher to control my learning, I am not good at working on my own.	111	17	345	53	186	28	14	2	1,865	2.8	Moderate
I prefer my teacher to nominate me to express my view in the classroom.	110	17	395	60	135	21	15	2	1,910	2.9	Moderate
I prefer my teacher to be around as I do not feel confident of learning on my own.	111	17	314	48	213	32	15	2	1,827	2.8	Moderate
I prefer my teacher to give me regular feedback on my work and tell me how to improve things.	342	52	306	47	7	1	1	0	2,301	3.5	High
I prefer my teacher to create opportunities where all activities can be completed with him/her in the classroom, and thus no homework is set.	259	39	300	46	85	13	12	2	2,118	3.2	High
I prefer my teacher to assess my work on his/her own without asking me to make any judgement.	164	25	417	64	68	10	5	1	2,048	3.1	High
I prefer my teacher to assess my classmates' work on his/her own without asking me to make any judgement.	162	25	411	63	75	11	5	1	2,036	3.1	High
I prefer my teacher not to make me help him/her to select activities or texts to work on in the classroom because I don't have sufficient knowledge.	60	9	268	41	291	44	37	6	1,663	2.5	Moderate
I prefer my teacher to tell me precisely what to do without asking me to take an action or control a situation (take the initiative).	125	19	353	54	166	25	12	2	1,903	2.9	Moderate
									Overall	3.1	High

3.2. How passive are the students in learning during COVID-19 pandemic?

The students tend to be moderately passive toward their own learning process during COVID-19 pandemic when online learning was implemented. Table 3 shows that the overall rate for the students' ability to take independent action is at 2.9. This number can be interpreted that the passiveness of the students in

online learning equals to moderate. In this study, the teachers employed both approaches synchronous and asynchronous online learning. Both groups of respondents, teachers and students, agree that students in higher education during pandemic remain passive in their learning. Table 3 shows that more than 500 out of 656 students are moderately passive learners which is approximately 78% or the respondents. The result of teachers' perspective toward students' passiveness in learning does not show a significant difference compared to the result of the students' perspective which is 67% of the teachers perceived that students were moderately passive.

Table 3. Perception on students' passiveness

		Passiveness in learning		N	%
Students'	High			9	1%
	Moderate			514	78%
	Low			133	20%
Teachers'	High			1	8%
	Moderate			8	67%
	Low			3	25%

Being unexpected and contrary to the result in the first research question, in this second questionnaire, the result shows around 440 students admit that they are able to identify their strengths in learning. It means that they understand their potential to maintain and automatically they figure out of theirs that need to be improved. Therefore, students who realize aspects of skills that they need to elevate have strong ability to find strategies to learn the skills. According to some experts, that ability is the manifestation of learning autonomy [10], [28], [29], [37].

Table 4 shows the doubt of the students that they are able to be strongly active learners. Around 150 students admit that they are not able to suggest activities for class work and home work. This number can be interpreted as 22% of the total respondents are not able to see the best activities for their learning. Only 10% of the respondents strongly believe that they can make suggestions related to the activities for class work and home work. Only six percent of the respondents strongly believe that they can set a learning objective for in class learning. Only thirteen percent of the students are able to decide what to learn in the next meeting of their course. The lowest score of the attribute is that students are able to assess their classmates' learning. This result assures that students are doubtful to be active learners. A strong character of active learners does not appear in the numbers.

Table 4. Students' ability to take independent action

Item	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Score	M	Level
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			
I am able to:											
Suggest activities/exercises for class work.	65	10	446	68	134	20	10	2	1,876	2.9	Moderate
Suggest activities/exercises for home study.	65	10	435	66	147	22	9	1	1,868	2.8	Moderate
Set learning objectives in class.	41	6	400	61	208	32	6	1	1,786	2.7	Moderate
Set learning objectives outside class.	54	8	416	63	174	27	10	2	1,822	2.8	Moderate
Select learning materials for class work.	44	7	371	57	230	35	9	1	1,758	2.7	Moderate
Select learning materials for home study.	68	10	412	63	163	25	11	2	1,845	2.8	Moderate
Assess my own learning.	87	13	353	54	202	31	13	2	1,824	2.8	Moderate
Assess my classmate's learning.	53	8	288	44	289	44	21	3	1,675	2.6	Moderate
Evaluate my course.	94	14	450	69	109	17	3	0	1,947	3.0	Moderate
Identify strengths in my learning.	129	20	447	68	71	11	8	1	2,007	3.1	High
Identify weaknesses in my learning.	128	20	473	72	49	7	6	1	2,035	3.1	High
Plan my learning.	97	15	488	74	64	10	6	1	1,986	3.0	Moderate
Decide on what to learn next in my course.	82	13	408	62	147	22	12	2	1,858	2.8	Moderate
Take the initiative in the classroom.	72	11	453	69	124	19	6	1	1,901	2.9	Moderate
Reflect on my learning.	89	14	492	75	69	11	5	1	1,975	3.0	Moderate
Overall										2.9	Moderate

4. CONCLUSION

Some critical issues can be derived from the presentation. First, in relation to the learners' dependency on teachers, a significant result has been articulated that most learners in some higher education contexts in Indonesia remain dependent on teachers in many ways. Learners tend to not be capable of setting goals of, determining, controlling, evaluating and making reflection of their learning. This perspective is not only admitted by the learners themselves as respondents, but also articulated by their teachers who are

involved in this research. Second issue is related to the learners' passiveness in the learning process that learners are not strongly sure about themselves for being active learners.

This study confirmed that only few learners are not in doubt of being active learners as they set the goals, suggest and choose activities for classroom learning, and planning as well as evaluating and assessing their learning. Considering the fact that most learners in this research have been experiencing formal education for more than fifteen years, the result of this research should be put on the first priority list of the teachers to impose the learners to learn 'how to learn'. Developing training for students about 'how to learn' might become the main suggestion in this article. In favor of the training for learners about 'how to learn', training for the teachers on how to facilitate students in learning is also highly recommended.





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