

## Autonomous Learning under Study: An Annotated Bibliography from Two Studies with Different Approaches

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**Abstract**— The concept of autonomous learning has gained massive attention in educational research and practice over the last three decades. This concept is regarded as an option in this modern educational world (Scharle & Szabo, 2000) which demands more active participation and less teacher- dependence of learners. In the area of language learning, many researchers have put attention to this concept in order to get more understanding of the theory and practice. Two approaches are commonly used by researchers in this autonomous learning matter are qualitative and quantitative. These two approaches are discussed in this paper in order to get good comparison of advantages and weaknesses to be used for research in autonomous learning area. A mix approach or a combination approach between qualitative and quantitative is also discussed in this paper to get more ideas and understanding about the alternative way of conducting the research in this area.

**Keywords**—Autonomous Learning, qualitative approach, quantitative approach, mix approach

### I. INTRODUCTION

In order to differentiate quantitative and qualitative approach for research, I draw on the explanation given by Johnson and Christensen (2004). According to them, there are several aspects that make this two approaches difference in the theory and practice. The quantitative approach is a deductive approach in where researchers begin their research process with theories or hypotheses that are going to be tested with data collected. On the other hand, the qualitative approach is known as inductive approach with the bottom up process. Usually, the new hypotheses or theories are generated after the data collected and analysed.

The other major difference between these two approaches is in the nature of reality or epistemology behind them. Quantitative researchers usually hold an objective assumption for their research, while qualitative researchers tend to see reality as something constructed socially (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; cited in Johnson & Christensen, 2004). It appears that the quantitative approach comes from Objectivism epistemology and qualitative is derived from social constructivism or Subjectivism. This difference means a lot in the practice of researches using each of this approach.

Other aspects that differentiate the two approaches can be noted from the data collection, analysis, and report. The quantitative approach collects data based on precise measurement using structured and validated instrument such as close-ended questionnaires, rating scale and others, and

put them into categories or variables which will then be analysed to identify the statistical relationships. The finding of a quantitative study is known as statistical report. The qualitative approach, contrarily, collects the data by using open-ended questions, in-depth interview, observation, or field note and analyse them to find patterns, themes or holistic features that can explain the research problems. Unlike the quantitative approach, the finding of qualitative research is reported in narrative way with contextual description and direct quotations from research participants.

Those two approaches, as widely used in researches on autonomous learning, are supported by the emergence of mix method approach which combines the quantitative and qualitative approach in research practice. The idea of using this approach is to reduce limitations of quantitative and qualitative and to produce more comprehensive and valid research finding by applying variety of data collection and analysis approach.

This paper discusses two articles using two different approaches on autonomous learning. The first article in qualitative approach gives clear idea of the autonomous learning including theoretical perspective behind the concept, while the second article, with quantitative approach will give a comparative point of view for me in doing the research in experimental method. In addition, some mix method approach articles will also be discussed as alternatives for my research.

## II. STUDIES OVERVIEW

The first article: The first article entitles "Learner Autonomy" is written by Dimitrios Thanasoulas (2000) which is published in [eltnewsletter.com](http://eltnewsletter.com).

The second article: This article is an experimental study's report published in *Kastamonu Education Journal* which is entitled "Fostering Learner Autonomy in EFL Classrooms" written by Cem Balcikanli (2008).

The two studies concern with the same topic, language autonomous learning, but with two different approaches. The first study is conducted with qualitative while the second one with quantitative. The two approaches will be compared in order to find out the distinct on the application, the similarities or differences and the effectiveness in answering the research questions on the two studies. Since they are utilised for the same topic, it is hoped that the comparison will be clear.

## III. THE FIRST STUDY

This first article is obviously the author's point of view regarding the emergence of autonomous learning concept in educational field by referring to many theorists in autonomous and language learning. In the introduction section, the author shows his stand point in this subject that autonomous learning should be regarded as "a perennial dynamic process amenable to receive intervention in educational process rather than a static product, a state, which is reached once and for all" (Thanasoulas, 2000). The author also cites Holmes & Ramos (1991) opinion mentioning that learner must be helped to assume greater control over their own learning so that they will become more aware of it and able to identify any potential learning strategies (cited in James & Garrett, 1991: 198).

In the second part, the author explains his conclusion about what the autonomous learning really is. He mentions that there are several characteristics in autonomous learning that must be matched by any learning environments to be regarded as an autonomous learning. Among other are learner needs, motivation, learning strategies, and language awareness.

The author also discusses three dominant theoretical perspectives regarding the autonomous learning development. The first is Positivism theory which assumed knowledge as objective reality that is translated into leaning process as traditional classroom in where knowledge is transferred from teacher as the main source of knowledge to students as the receivers. The author concludes that this approach runs counter to the development of autonomous learning which bears active participation on students. The second one is Constructivism which regarded knowledge as something to be constructed (Candy, 1991) rather than discovered as what Positivism proposed. This approach is regarded as an applicable perspective since it can encourage and promote self-directed study which is necessary in autonomous learning concept. The third is Critical theory which almost the same point of view as the Constructivism in regard to the idea of knowledge which is constructed rather than discovered or taught. This approach considers knowledge as a product of different social groups that bring their own interest and ideology to the knowledge (Benson &

Voller, 1997). The author mentions that this approach can also be applied in autonomous learning study as it regards learner autonomy as a social character which must be aware of social context bounded it, and in the end will make learners become more independent in their learning.

This article is a comparative analysis under the library or literature research. It can be concluded easily that the author stands on Social Constructionist epistemology with Constructivism perspective.

### A. Annotated Bibliographies

Brookfield, S. (1984). Self-Directed Adult Learning: A critical paradigm. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 35(2), 59-71. This article is based on a critical research, with subjectivism epistemology, directed to many researches on adult self-directed learning. The author argues that the researches in this field have been conducted precisely and suggest the researchers to infuse self-critical scrutiny in their researches. There are four critics discussed by the author in this paper; 1) the use of middle class adult as the sampling frame, 2) the exclusive use of quantitative or quasi-quantitative measures, 3) individual exclusiveness in the study without paying attention to social context, and 4) the absence of further and extended discussion of the implications raised in the studies regarding social and political change. These arguments are backed by the author with many researches finding and theorists' opinion regarding the self-directed study. The conclusion achieved by the author is in related to the four critics proposed. The author concludes that 1) self-directed study on adult learning should use wider sampling frame and not just middle class adult, 2) the study should use other form of measures such as qualitative approach by applying the structured and un-structured interview, 3) the study in self-directed learning should also consider the participants social context, and 4) implications raised in any studies in this field need to be given further discussion.

Nordlund, J. (1997). *From Here to Autonomy: Autonomous Learning Modules (ALMS)*. Retrieved May 11th, 2010 from [http://www6.gencat.cat/llegcat/publicacions/autoapren\\_actesVII/docs/VII\\_annex1.pdf](http://www6.gencat.cat/llegcat/publicacions/autoapren_actesVII/docs/VII_annex1.pdf). This article is a study report conducted by the author at Helsinki University language centre by using action research approachology which is applied in case study form because it relates to the implementation of a new program to certain group of participants (Creswell, 2008; 476). The participants are Helsinki University students from various faculties who joining the language centre to improve their English. The author uses Autonomous Learning Modules (ALMS) with five main features; Learner awareness, Plans and contracts, Skill support groups, Counselling, and Record keeping and Evaluation, in teaching and learning process at the centre. The study objective is to find out the effectiveness of ALMS in developing autonomous learning attitude for students at the language centre. The author uses all authentic elements from the centre to collect the data for the study. The main source is counselling reports containing information about student's progress during the study conducted in interview, email and videotape. The result shows that students become more autonomous in their learning after conducted the study at the language centre.

Maculewicz, M. (2003). Learning How to Teach Autonomous Learning: A Diploma Project (NKJO Ciechanów). *Teacher Development and Autonomous Learning Special Interest Group (TDALSIG) IATEFL – Poland*. Retrieved from <http://iatefl.org.pl/tdal/n10nkjo.htm> on May 11th, 2010. Through the study, a diploma project conducted in action research approachology with case study approach, the author wants to prove the important value of autonomous learning for language learners. The author applies three lessons in her class of fifth year English students. Those lessons are prepared and given in regard to promoting autonomous learning behaviour to the students. The author believes that the autonomous learning attitudes can be gained by students when they are exposed to learn autonomously. This perspective proves the author's stand point as Social constructionism that expects his students to change after several interactions. The study result shows that students become more autonomous upon finishing the class.

Morris, M. Y. (2010). *Jigsaw Reading to Promote Autonomous Learning*. Retrieved on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010 from <http://www.wfu.edu/eal/SEATJ2009/SEATJ09%20Yonezawa.pdf>. This article discusses a project conducted with action research in case study approach to second year Japanese language course in a liberal arts college. The project concerns with the use of jigsaw reading as one of the steps leading to development of reading proficiency and autonomous learning. The participants' progress is then monitored during the learning process and a questionnaire is distributed at the end of the session. The result shows that during the learning process, students study by themselves, discuss the content collaboratively, and take the opportunity to monitor their performance and see models to aim for, while improving their reading skills. The questionnaire result which is analysed qualitatively shows similar finding that the degree of autonomy grows among students after finishing the session.

Railton, D & Watson, P. (2005). Teaching autonomy 'Reading groups' and the development of autonomous learning practices. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 6(3), 182–193. This article discusses one particular approach to designing 'structured autonomy' into a first year core media studies module. The module is designed in form of reading groups that is expected to encourage learners' autonomy on study. This is a case study involving a class of university students which in the process assigned to work with group of six from the beginning of semester until the lesson completed. By observing the participant progress through the study, the author concludes that the participants develop their autonomy in learning and shift from traditional approach of teacher centre model to autonomous learning model.

#### IV. THE SECOND STUDY

This study focuses on fostering autonomous learning through several designed activities in EFL classroom. This is an experimental, as part of quantitative study, conducted at Gazi University, Turkey. There are two groups functioning as experimental and control group in this study. The former group is given the treatment while the latter is not (Creswell, 2008).

Forty students from various faculties of Gazi University participate in this study. The participants are divided into the two groups; the experimental group with twenty participants, and the other twenty in the control group. The rigorous probability sampling strategy or simple random sampling is used by the author. With this strategy, the participants for the sample are regarded as an equal probability of being selected from the population, so that they can be a fine representative of the population (Creswell, 2008).

This study uses adapted questionnaires for identifying autonomous aspect as the variables and data measurement. The same questionnaires are applied to both control and experimental groups at the beginning and end of the study. Pre-test and post-test should also be completed by both groups to see how the treatment affects the experimental group and to get a comparison result with the control group.

The result shows that the development of learner autonomy can be seen from statistical analysis of pre and post test compared to one another for both group. As the conclusion, the author mentions that autonomous learning can be fostered through certain class activities or treatments. It is also suggested that teachers should take action in applying similar activities in their classes in order to make students become autonomous and independent in their learning.

It is quite clear that the author is based his study on objectivism epistemology under the Positivism theory because by doing the study experimentally, he tries to see whether or not the autonomous learning behaviour can be fostered. The approach used is statistical analysis by interpreting the questionnaire and the pre and post test result with statistical tool such as SPSS.

#### A. Annotated Bibliographies

David Gardner. (2007). Understanding Autonomous Learning: Students' Perceptions. Article presented at Proceedings of the Independent Learning Association 2007 Japan Conference: Exploring theory, enhancing practice: Autonomy across the disciplines. Kanda University of International Studies, Chiba, Japan, October 2007. [Online] available at <http://www.independentlearning.org>. This paper explains a research conducted by the author at the Centre for Applied English Studies of University of Hongkong. The participants are 30 students from engineering faculties learning at the centre to improve their ESP. The research is aimed at looking for evidence of increasing comprehension in students' definitions of self-access learning as they became more familiar with it over a period of time through exposure to explanations, peer discussion and hands-on experience. The author uses action research study with open ended questionnaires as data collecting tool. There are three steps questionnaires used in this study, before and after class orientation (Q1 and Q2), and at the end of the course (Q3). A comparison of responses for Q1 and Q2 is used to show the effect on students' perceptions and the teacher's orientation session about self-access. A comparison of responses from Q2 and Q3 is used to show the impact on perceptions, and the students' 10 week period of hands-on experience with self-access learning. The research results in

a conclusion that there is no evidence of increasing understanding on autonomous learning among the students.

Wu Shao-yue. (2009). A study of network-based multimedia college English autonomous teaching and learning model. 2009, Volume 7, No.7. This article is a report of an experimental study with social constructivism approach aiming at comparing the teaching effectiveness of the network-based multimedia autonomous teaching and the traditional model. The participants are 188 freshmen of non-English majors in grade 2006 of Guangdong University of technology (157 male students and 31 female students). They were divided into two groups: Experimental Group (EG) which is given the new model of teaching, and Control Group (CG) with the traditional model. The approaches used for data collecting are paper test, questionnaires, and interview. The latter is used to strengthen the finding. The result shows that the experimental group achieve better score in language test than the other group and that the network-based multimedia autonomous learning and teaching model can successfully facilitate the needs of learners to utilise their language learning strategies to be more efficient in learning.

Guo, N & Willis, R. (2004). *An Investigation of an Optimizing Model of Autonomous Learning of TEFL using Multimedia and the Internet technologies (ICT)*. Retrieved on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010 from: <http://www.aare.edu.au/05pap/guo05086.pdf>. This article is a study report conducted with contrastive teaching experiment approach at Shanxi University of Finance and Economics (SUFEE). The participants are students of 2004 grade which are divided into two group based on their English test conducted at the beginning of the study. The experimental group is set to a situation in which they are situated to be aware of the desirability of becoming autonomous learners, and believe that they can develop a high level of competence in listening and speaking as a result of their efforts. The control group is set in traditional approach. It is found from the two years study that most of students can manage and in charge of their own learning. Students' motivation to study is aroused and most of them volunteer to find appropriate sources or learning materials outside of their class activity.

Ponton, M.K., Derrick, M.G, & Carr, P.B. (2005). The Relationship between Resourcefulness and Persistence in Adult Autonomous Learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*. 55(116). This article explains a study investigating the tenability of a proposed path-analytic model relating resourcefulness and persistence in the context of adult autonomous learning. The data are collected by using from a non-probability sample of 492 American adults and analyse it with valid and reliable measures for resourcefulness and persistence. The author uses ILR and ILP questionnaire model designed specifically to investigate participant's autonomous learning attitudes. The result of the study comes up with a conclusion that an adult's persistence in autonomous learning is more related to the anticipation of future rewards of present learning.

Murray, D. (2000). *Autonomous Learning Behaviours: A fulcrum for course design, implementation and evaluation with larger classes*. Retrieved on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010 from: <http://kuir.jm.kansai-u.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/10112/1391/1/>

KU-1100GI-20080331-07.pdf. In this article, the author reports the finding of his study which is conducted in order to seek for a better way of developing students' autonomy in larger classes. The author uses Task-Based Language Teaching, the Milestone and Swiss versions of the European Language Portfolio, and CALL/e-learning as the teaching approach. Participants are learners at three different years of various universities students from different background studying at a language program in several classes consist of ten to fifty students in academic year 2006-2007. In collecting the data, the author uses questionnaires with categorised set of autonomous learning behaviours questions, and one pre-test at the beginning of program and one post-test at the end. Data analysis indicates modest gains in the use of target learning behaviours; however the data is quantitative, context-dependent and based on the learners' subjective impressions that could be limiting its use in rigorous statistical analysis. From the students' interaction assigned in this study, it can be noticed that this study is an applied research with social constructivism approach.

## V. DISCUSSION

The development in language learning nowadays has forced teachers and learners to modify their roles in teaching and learning practice. Autonomous learning as an emerge model in language learning also contribute to the modification. This concept demands learners to be more active and independent as well as fully responsible in their learning while at the same time it also reduces teacher's portion in teaching and learning process.

Many experts have contributed to the development of autonomous learning especially in language learning at higher education level. Most of them agree in autonomous learning concept, learners are the centre and teachers should only play their roles in limited but meaningful way (Little, 1993; Dickenson, 1995; Benson; 1997; Littlewood, 1999). In addition, Van Lier (1996) states that learners must be fully responsible for their learning and for deciding the choice to learn in order to gain a success in their learning. Meanwhile, Little (1995) also mentions that there must be a clear objective, good initiatives and ability to measure or evaluate the process and result of the learning in autonomous context. Chan (2001, p.285) supports the above opinion and points out autonomous learner as "being actively involved at all levels of learning, from goal-setting, defining content and working out mechanisms for assessing achievement and progress and points out that the locus of control for decision-making shifts from teacher to student". Dickenson (1995, p.330) gives conclusion on autonomous matter and describes autonomous learners as "those able to discover how to clearly identify the learning objectives of the course, formulate their own learning objectives, consciously select and implement appropriate learning strategies, identify strategies that are effective/inappropriate and substitute others, and develop a rich repertoire of effective strategies".

Based on the opinions, it seems difficult to be an autonomous learner. Autonomous learning students need to be aware of their status as an adult student who must be autonomous in learning. The problem which interests me to do my research is the awareness of Polytechnics students, as part of higher degree education in Indonesia, toward

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

autonomous learning. This problem seems to lie on most students in this institution since they are used to traditional model of teacher centred education. These students are mostly educated in traditional education background in the first and secondary level. They are trained to study according to anything designed and directed by teacher as what happens in most Asian countries so that most of students are categorized as reactive students (Littlewood, 1999).

The general idea of qualitative approach is to interpret behavior and intention of participants regarding the problem being investigated, or in this case is autonomous learning behavior. Most of the researches try to portray the natural context of autonomous learning and sometimes search for larger patterns to get more understanding of the problem (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). The researchers and participants involve in the research for a period of time to maintain interaction between them. By doing so, the researchers, as the primary instrument in the research, hope to find enough data in order to derive proper analysis and valid finding for the research. The report of a qualitative research is usually written in descriptive and holistic language with no statistic data. At this point, the qualitative approach arrives at its primary research concept which considers reality is socially constructed (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010) as what is applied to autonomous learning.

Unlike the qualitative approach, the quantitative approach is stand on Objectivism epistemology with its positivism perspective. This perspective gives assumption that knowledge should reflect objective reality. If teachers are considered as the source of the objective reality, then learning can only occur in form of knowledge transmission from them to the learners (Benson & Voller, 1997). Congruent with this view, of course, is the maintenance and enhancement of the traditional classroom, where teachers are the purveyors of knowledge and wielders of power, and learners are seen as 'container to be filled with the knowledge held by teachers.

Regarding the purpose of study, the quantitative approach usually intends to make generalization on findings, predict behavior or try to provide causal explanation of the research's problem. The study in quantitative approach is grounded by theory. The practice is known by data manipulation and variables controlled which are mostly reduced to number to find any relationship or correlation among the variables as study's conclusion. The report in quantitative data is written precisely by using abstract language (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). Quantitative researchers believe in objective reality which needs to be found through the study. The analysis in this approach is based on logical empiricism; therefore the inquiry in this study is conditioned as value free as possible (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). Regarding the autonomous learning, this concept can be seen as to find out the degree of autonomy among students as the participants without any intervention given to them.

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