STUDENTS' AUTONOMOUS LEARNING IN VOCABULARY ACQUISITION OF 7TH GRADE AT SMPN 35 SURABAYA

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary acquisition is a crucial aspect of English language learning, especially for seventh-grade students at SMPN 35 Surabaya. This study aims to examine the level of learning autonomy demonstrated by seventh-grade students in acquiring English vocabulary and to identify the autonomous vocabulary-learning strategies. The study used a mixed method with a descriptive quantitative-qualitative approach. Data were collected through a questionnaire consisting of Likert-scale and open-ended questions, completed by 52 seventh-grade students at SMPN 35 Surabaya. The data were analyzed descriptively to describe the level of autonomy based on the aspects of initiation, monitoring, and evaluation, as well as the comprehension acquisition strategies applied by students. The result showed that most students had a high level of autonomy, as evidenced by their ability to initiate learning, master comprehension, and assess learning outcome. Frequently used strategies included the use of learning applications, audiovisual media, social interaction, and individual techniques such as note-taking and memorization. These findings confirm that strengthening all three aspects of autonomy is crucial to support more effective and sustainable comprehension acquisition.

Keywords: autonomous learning, autonomous learning strategies, vocabulary acquisition

A. Introduction

Vocabulary plays an important role in language learning, especially for 7th grade students who are entering a more complex level of language development. The proper mastery of vocabulary contributes to the comprehension of the learning content by students, their effective communication, and the skill in reading and writing (Surmanov & Azimova, 2020). The acquisition of vocabulary is one of the major components of autonomous language skills development (Hakim et al., 2021). Students begin to experience more types of texts and learning situations, and an extensive mastery

of vocabulary can become an invaluable resource to facilitate autonomous learning, especially in seventh grade. Thus, active and continual vocabulary growth is pivotal to students in attaining the best language proficiency.

Autonomous learning is very important among seventh-grade students, who are yet to master English. This strategy gives the students a chance to increase their vocabulary without necessarily depending on what the teacher teaches in the classroom. Besides, autonomous learning allows students to gain responsibility in their own learning process and makes them motivated to explore and learn new words actively (Ilzam Dhaifi et al., 2024). One form of support that is widely use to strengthen autonomy learning is the use of technology, including Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). As it has been demonstrated in the number of studies, the use of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) can enhance vocabulary acquisition and increase the learning autonomy of students. Thus, autonomous learning strategies play an important role in increasing motivation and enhancing

the English language proficiency of the students (Ruswandi et al., 2024). In such a way, students of the seventh grade get a more chance to enhance their vocabulary and train their general language abilities.

Students who have autonomous learning show certain characteristics generally in their learning process. They are able to determine the objectives they want to achieve. They are so aware of their own learning needs (Lestari & Hardiyanti, 2020). Furthermore, they are accustomed to planning appropriate learning strategies and consistently implementing them. Students with autonomous learning also monitor their learning process, for example by evaluating the methods used and assessing the results (Nguyen, 2023). Thus, students with autonomous learning can be more active, responsible, and effective in developing their language skills.

Learner autonomy describes students' ability to take an active role in their learning process. According to (Dang, 2012), learning autonomy consists of three aspects: initiating, monitoring, and evaluating. Initiating relates to how students set goals and plan learning steps. Monitoring refers

to how students monitor progress and organize the learning process. Meanwhile, evaluating encompasses students/ ability to assess and reflect. Furthermore, levels of autonomy can be categorized into several levels, such as low, medium, and high, as explained by (Abdelrazeq, 2018). This framework provides a clear basis for describing the profiles of students' learning autonomy in this study.

Based on this situation, the researcher aims to examine the autonomy of learning of seventh-grade students at SMPN 35 Surabaya in learning English vocabulary. Several previous studies have examined learner autonomy and its relationship to vocabulary acquisition in the context of learning English as a foreign language. (Mehdiyev, 2020) examined college students' opinions regarding autonomous learning in improving speaking skills, and the results showed that autonomous activities such as watching movies, listening to music, and interacting with foreign speakers play a significant role in supporting autonomous learning. Moreover, the study of Junior High school students at Kumon Institutions by (Indah, 2023) found that their English skills can improve through the

habits of daily autonomous learning with support from the teachers and their families, even though full autonomy has not yet been achieved.

In the realm of Vocabulary acquisition, research by (Lukman, 2021) showed that the use of video media can significantly improve students' vocabulary skills, especially in pronunciation, fluency, and learning motivation. Research by (Ruswandi et al., 2024) also demonstrated various autonomous vocabulary learning strategies outside of school used by high school students. They predominantly use metacognitive strategies. The level of autonomy and choice of learning strategies can influence age, gender, and motivation. In addition, (Hakim et al., 2021) emphasize that a combination of autonomous learning and appropriate strategies applied in a virtual environment improves vocabulary acquisition. (Jupri, 2022) also emphasizes that autonomous vocabulary learning plays an important role in helping foreign language learners master vocabulary autonomously, with a positive influence on other language skills.

Based on this study, it can be concluded that learning autonomy

plays a significant role in supporting vocabulary acquisition. However, most previous research have focused on college or high school students, or examined English language skills in general, rather than specifically on vocabulary acquisition at the junior high school level (Mehdiyev, 2020). Therefore, there remains a research gap regarding how learning autonomy contributes to vocabulary acquisition in seventh-grade junior high school students in a formal school context. This gap is the focus of this study at SMPN 35 Surabaya.

In addition, this study also wants to identify what strategies students use in learning vocabulary autonomously. Therefore, the research questions in this study are: (1) How is the autonomy of seventh-grade students at SMPN 35 Surabaya in learning English vocabulary? (2) What are the strategies used by students in learning vocabulary autonomously? The purpose of this study is to examine the level of learning autonomy demonstrated by seventh-grade students in acquiring English vocabulary and to identify the autonomous vocabulary-learning strategies they employed.

The results of this study are expected to provide benefits for various parties. For students, this research can be a motivation to improve their learning autonomy. Furthermore, for teachers, this research can provide an overview of students' learning patterns so that they can be taken into consideration in developing appropriate learning methods. In addition, for schools, this research can be one of the references in designing various programs that support the improvement of students' learning autonomy in English subjects. As for readers, the results of this study are expected to increase knowledge and insight related to the importance of learning autonomy in mastering vocabulary and provide references for further research related to similar topics.

B. Method

This study employed a mixed-method design, employing both quantitative and qualitative descriptive approaches. According to Creswell (2005) cited in (Migiro & Magangi, 2011) mixed methods research is an approach that combines the use of a qualitative paradigm at one stage and a quantitative paradigm at another

stage, so that researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the problem being studied. This approach was chosen because it integrates the strength of numerical data and narrative data within a single analytical framework. The combination of these two approaches provides a more comprehensive picture of the students' autonomous learning and the strategies they use in vocabulary acquisition. This allows for a more comprehensive presentation of the research results, not relying solely on a single type of data.

The subjects of this study were 52 seventh grade students of SMPN 35 Surabaya consisting of two classes. The selection of subjects was done purposely, taking into account that seventh grade students are in the early stages of formal English learning and are expected to start developing independence in learning. Involving two classes is expected to provide a more representative picture of the variations in student characteristics in terms of learning independence and vocabulary learning strategies. In addition, the large number of respondents can strengthen the validity of the findings of this study.

The instrument in this study was an online questionnaire structured into two main sections according to the research objectives. Two main sections including closed-ended questions and open-ended questions, research by Creswell (2005) cited in (Migiro & Magangi, 2011). The first section consisted of 15 closed-ended questions using a Likert scale of 1-5, which served to collect quantitative data regarding students' level of autonomous learning in vocabulary acquisition. This Likert scale allowed researchers to assess the intensity of autonomous learning in a structured manner, allowing for the determination of levels autonomous based on the trend score. The second section contained five open-ended questions. Open-ended questions used to elicit qualitative data regarding the vocabulary learning strategies by students and the challenges they faced. These open-ended questions provided students with the opportunity to describe their experiences in greater detail. Thus enriching the understanding of the qualitative data collection in the first section.

The data collection process was conducted through several systematic stages to ensure that the responses

collected were accurate and usable in the analysis step (Makbul, 2021). These stages began with the preparation and review of the instrument to ensure that all questions were clear and easily understood by students. Once the instrument was deemed suitable, researchers distributed the questionnaire link directly to the students to ensure that the answers collected truly reflected their experiences and learning habits. After all responses were collected, the data was checked for completeness and stored regularly for further analysis.

Researchers analyzed all student responses. Quantitative data was applied to 15 Likert-scale questions by calculating frequencies, percentages, and average scores to identify trends in autonomous learning levels and the most commonly used strategies. This analysis helped to numerically describe students' conditions, allowing for clear understanding of learning behavior patterns. Next, qualitative analysis is conducted on five open-ended questions by reading all responses, coding them, and grouping them into key themes. The results of these two types of analysis were integrated to provide a deeper understanding of students' experiences and challenges in autonomously learning vocabulary acquisition.

Data validity was strengthened through method triangulation, which involves comparing the results of quantitative and qualitative analyses to collect more accurate interpretations. Triangulation is a measurement technique commonly used by surveyors to determine the position of an object by utilizing two known points, so that the position of other unknown points can be determined through the "triangulation" process in the same space (Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012). Source triangulation was performed by using data from two different classes to better represent the variety of responses. Researchers also double-checked all raw data to ensure there were no input errors or duplication of responses. These steps were taken to ensure reability of the analyzed data.

C. Findings and Discussion
Findings
1. **Level of Student Learning Autonomy in Vocabulary Acquisition**

The Results of the questionnaire indicated that the level of student autonomous learning in vocabulary acquisition is in the moderate to high level. Level determination is based on the average score of three aspects of autonomy: initiating, monitoring, and evaluating (Dang, 2012). The results show that the majority of students are in the moderate 26 students and high 25 students. While only one student is in the low level. This finding indicates that the majority of students have quite good autonomy in vocabulary acquisition.

In the initiating aspect, 31 students were in the high level, 17 students in the moderate level, and four students in the low level. These results indicate that most students are able to initiate the vocabulary acquisition process without relying on asisstance from others. The data were obatined from student responses to questionnaire items that measured their tendency to search for new words and choose vocabulary acquisition strategies.

The monitoring aspect also showed similar result, with 31 students in the high level and 18 students in the medium level. Only three students were in the low level. This indicates that the majority of students are able to monitor their learning process and adjust their strategies when necessary. The ability to monitor the learning process is an improtant aspect of gradually developing autonomy.

In contrast to the previous two aspects, the evaluation aspect was dominated by the moderate level. There are 30 students fell into the moderate level, 18 students into the high level, and 4 students into the low level. This indicates that the ability to reflect on learning outcomes is lower than the ability to initiate and monitor the learning process. Nevertheless, most students were able to assess their understanding of the vocabulary acquired.

Table 1. Level of Student Learning Autonomy Based on Three Aspects

Autonomous aspects	Low	Moderate	High
Initiating	4	17	31
Monitoring	3	18	31
Evaluating	4	30	18
Overall autonomy	1	26	25

2. Autonomous Vocabulary Learning Strategies Used by Student

The results of the open-ended response analysis data indicate that students use a variety of strategies to autonomously acquire vocabulary. Most identified strategies relate to students' ability to initiate, monitor, and assess their own learning process. This is consistent with previous findings that the majority of students have moderate to high levels of autonomy.

The most frequently used strategy is looking up word definitions using digital applications, such as online dictionaries and translation features. Students reported that this strategy is fast, practical, and helps them understand the meaning of new words without having to wait for explanations from the teacher. The use of digital applications demonstrates initiating skills, as students actively select learning resources that suit their needs (Robin & Aziz, 2022).

Additionally, many students mentioned the habit of writing down new vocabulary in notebooks or on mobile apps. This strategy reflects

monitoring skill, where students attempt to reorganize what they have learned and ensure that important vocabulary is easily remembered. The activity of note-taking also helps students build a more focused learning structure (Ruswandi et al., 2024).

Some students also choose the strategy of watching English videos, whether films, educational videos, or other entertainment content (Lukman, 2021). They find this strategy helps them understand the use of words in real contexts, including pronunciation and meaning in various situations. This strategy demonstrates a combination of initiating and monitoring, as students adjust the type of content to their own level of understanding and autonomy.

In addition, several students mentioned using printed dictionaries, repetition, and reading English texts as autonomous learning. These strategies helped them evaluate their own understanding. For example, they often checked word meanings from more than one source (Jupri, 2022). Some also practiced memorizing vocabulary autonomously.

Furthermore, some students used social strategies, such as asking

a teacher or friend when they encountered a difficult word. This strategy remains in line with the concept of autonomy. The decision to ask for help comes from the student themselves. By choosing friends they believe will be helpful, students demonstrate autonomous learning in managing their learning process .

Although students demonstrated a variety of positive strategies, they also faced several challenges in vocabulary acquisition. Some students reported difficulty memorizing new words, especially when the vocabulary required was large. Others felt inconsistent in applying learning strategies, such as taking notes or reviewing vocabulary. Some students struggled to understand the context in which words were used, requiring assistance from teachers or friends. These challenges indicate that students are capable of initiating and monitoring their learning process autonomously (Surmanov & Azimova, 2020). However, their ability to evaluate their learning still needs improvement.

Overall, the strategies and challenges in this study indicate that the development of students' autonomous learning is gradual.

Students have been able to select and apply strategies appropriate to their needs. But, some aspecets, particularly consistency and self-evaluation still require support. These findings suggest that vocabulary autonomy develops when students' regulate their vocabulary acquisition strategies autonomously.

Discussion

The result of the autonomy levels in vocabulary acquisition showed a dominance of the high level, followed by the medium level, with only a few students in the low level. This pattern indicates that students' ability to regulate their vocabulary learning is beginning to develop. This level determination takes into account students' tendencies in initiating, monitoring, and evaluating during the vocabulary acquisition process. These findings suggest that the ability to manage vocabulary acquisition strategies can emerge as early as seventh-grade. However, development in each aspect does not occur evenly across all students.

Students at the high level demonstrate strong initiating skills when faced with new vocabulary. They immediately look up word definitions using online dictionaries,

translation apps, or other digital sources without teacher guidance (Robin & Aziz, 2022). This ability to initiate vocabulary acquisition autonomously is the primary reason why the high level dominates. Students are also able to choose the vocabulary acquisition strategies they find most effective. This ability demonstrates a strong awareness of their learning needs. Therefore, the initiating aspects plays a significant role in driving the high level of students.

In addition to possessing strong initiation skills, high level students also demonstrated stable monitoring in vocabulary acquisition. They noted new words, repeated specific vocabulary, and checked meanings across multiple sources. These habits demonstrate their ability to consistently manage vocabulary acquisition strategies. Consistent monitoring of vocabulary comprehension strengthened their autonomous learning. Some students even adapted strategies to the context in which the vocabulary was used in sentences. This integration of the ability to initiate and monitor vocabulary acquisition placed them at a high level of autonomy. These

findings confirm that autonomy in vocabulary acquisition can be seen through the integration of several aspects simultaneously.

These findings indicate that most students were able to initiate the vocabulary acquisition process with good self-awareness. They not only began searching for meaning autonomously. But also, they choose strategies they deemed most appropriate for understanding new vocabulary. This ability to initiate learning autonomously is an important characteristic of autonomous learning. Because students begin to shift control of their autonomous learning from the teacher to themselves. By setting goals, selecting strategies, and taking initial action, students demonstrate that the foundations for autonomy in vocabulary acquisition are beginning to form.

Students at the medium level demonstrated developing initiating and monitoring skills. But, these were not yet consistently applied in vocabulary acquisition. They could initiate word meaning searches but did not always follow up with note-taking or repetition. Some of them switched strategies without assessing their effectiveness in acquiring word

meaning. This indicates a weak evaluation aspect. Consequently, they remained at the medium level despite showing early signs of autonomy (Mehdiyev, 2020).

The behavior of students at the intermediate level indicates that their monitoring of vocabulary acquisition is not yet stable. They are aware that repeating or writing down words can aid the acquisition process, but the apply it irregularly. The strategies they choose often only emerge when faced with specific tasks, rather than as part of an ongoing acquisition process. Furthermore , they frequently doubt whether the strategies effectively contribute to word comprehension. This doubt indicates a weakness in the evaluation aspect of vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, their autonomy is in the transition step towards a more mature level (Nguyen, 2023).

Students at the low level demonstrate weaknesses an all three aspects of autonomy in vocabulary acquisition. They rarely initiate strategies for finding word meanings without assistance and often wait for explanations from teachers or friends. Furthermore, they are not accustomed to assessing the appropriateness of the strategies used to understand vocabulary. The combined weakness of these three aspects explains why they are at the low level (Indah, 2023).

D. Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of students autonomy in vocabulary acquisition appears gradual and is strongly influenced by mastery of the initiating. monitoring, and evaluating aspects. Students with high levels of autonomy demonstrate strong integration between these aspects. Students at medium levels still require reinforcement, especially in evaluating strategies. Low-level students require assistance in developing all three. These findings confirm that vocabulary acquisition is not only examined by the number of words. But also, by students' ability to manage the internal processes that shape understanding. Consistent learning support through reflection activities, vocabulary journals, and strategy reviews. It can help to increase student autonomy in vocabulary acquisition more consistently.

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