

Exploring the Challenges of Independent English Language Learning Among Non-English Major Students: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Students' ability to learn English independently is a crucial skill required in the higher education learning environment, particularly for students outside of English language programs who have limited knowledge and hands-on experience with language learning and use in the classroom. Despite the importance of this, many students face difficulties and lack the know-how to organize, carry out, and sustain their own learning processes, indicating a lack of understanding regarding the barriers that limit student autonomy. This study examines the barriers and challenges faced by non-English major students, specifically those in the Bachelor of Agricultural Technology and Bachelor of Law programs, in developing their language skills, particularly in independent English learning. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document reviews, and then analyzed thematically. The findings of this study identified four main challenges faced by students in the undergraduate agricultural technology program and the undergraduate law program in the process of independent learning: first, they have low motivation to maintain long-term engagement in the learning process; second, the learning strategies they use are inappropriate and inadequate; third, they have limited access to learning resources; and fourth, they lack confidence in practicing and using English. These internal barriers are further exacerbated by external factors in their learning environment, including a curriculum focused solely on exam results without considering students' learning experiences and institutional support that remains inadequate.

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INTRODUCTION

English's strategic role as an international language influences various aspects of life. This influence occurs in educational settings, cross-cultural human interaction and communication, and in the process of human career development (Li, 2021). The need for English language skills for both active and passive communication is increasing and has become a trend for competing in the global world. English has always been a primary requirement for recruitment and career advancement. However, challenges, obstacles, and difficulties in learning English are not only faced by language students, but also by students of undergraduate programs in agricultural technology and undergraduate law, who often have limited access to and mastery of foreign language skills (Mao, 2022). Students in non-language programs specifically those in agricultural technology and law often face various obstacles when attempting to practice and improve their English skills independently during their studies. Generally, the obstacles and difficulties students encounter in their efforts to improve their English proficiency can be categorized into two factors: linguistic and non-linguistic.

Linguistic barriers include students' limited command of English grammar, vocabulary comprehension, and inadequate English pronunciation skills. Meanwhile, non-linguistic barriers are often more complex, encompassing psychological aspects such as students' low self-confidence in initiating English communication, their anxiety when facing English language learning, and their fear of making mistakes whether in sentence construction or pronunciation. Furthermore, cultural factors, such as students' limited understanding of the cultural contexts of English-speaking countries, and a learning environment that does not support the practice of communicating in English, also exacerbate this situation (Mao, 2022). Previous research findings indicate that non-language majors tend to have low motivation to study English independently. This low motivation is triggered by heavy academic demands in mastering their fields of study and students' weak basic English skills. This situation creates a negative cycle in the learning process: low learning motivation leads to suboptimal learning outcomes, and poor learning outcomes can further diminish students' motivation toward learning and mastering English language proficiency (Li, 2021). Furthermore, conventional teaching method which remain dominated by lectures in large classes result in ineffective learning processes, leading to suboptimal and unproductive learning outcomes. This is because lecture-based methods tend not to actively engage students in the learning process, thereby reducing student interaction with instructors during practice sessions aimed at improving their language proficiency (Angraeni et al., 2024).

Psychological challenges are also crucial in efforts to improve learners' language proficiency in the learning process. Feelings of anxiety, shyness, and fear experienced by learners when learning English are common in classroom settings for instance, they fear making mistakes when communicating in English, whether due to limited English vocabulary mastery or pronunciation errors. These factors are generally driven by a learning environment that does not support learner engagement in the learning process, such as the lack of an English learning community on campus or the absence of English-based campus activities (Sheikh et al., 2022; Angraeni et al., 2024). This study aims to identify the key factors that hinder non-language majors specifically learners in the agricultural technology study program and the law study program from developing their competencies for independent English learning. By using a qualitative approach, this study is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by learners and offer recommendations for more inclusive learning strategies.

English language learning for non-language majors differs from that of students majoring in languages. Generally, for learners of non-language majors, English is as a supporting skill rather than as the primary focus of their studies. This often results in suboptimal engagement in the learning process (Al-Hoorie, 2018). Learners tend to study only when there are academic demands, such as assignments or exams. This situation leads to inconsistent learning. Graham (2019) stated that this low level of engagement directly impacts language development, particularly in productive skills like speaking and writing. Additionally, learners of non-language majors often face challenges such as limited vocabulary, weak command of grammar, and low self-confidence in using English (MacIntyre et al., 2019). These barriers ultimately affect their ability to learn independently. While, Self-directed learning is a process in which students actively manage their own learning activities, from setting goals to evaluating learning outcomes. This concept emphasizes the importance of students' role as active participants in the learning process (Holec, 2020). Students with self-directed learning skills are generally able to plan learning strategies that suit their needs. They are also more flexible in selecting learning resources, including utilizing digital technology (Benson, 2019).

However, not all students are ready to learn independently. Research indicates that many students still rely on instructors' guidance and are not yet accustomed to managing the learning process systematically (Little, 2018). This poses a unique challenge in English language learning, which fundamentally requires continuous practice.

The results are expected to contribute to the formulation of more adaptive higher education policies, while also fostering an academic environment that supports the development of independent English learning by non-language majors, particularly students in the agricultural technology and law study program at Semarang University. Previous studies have highlighted the learners' challenges in learning English, most previous research has focused solely on the context of language study programs or formal classroom instruction. Studies on the challenges to independent learning for non-native learners remain relatively limited. Previous studies only focus on linguistic factors, while non-linguistic aspects such as intrinsic motivation, language anxiety, and supportive learning environments of English learners have not been comprehensively explored and discussed. Furthermore, this remains a lack of research connecting these barriers to theoretical frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory or the heutagogical approach, which emphasize independent and reflective learning.

METHODS

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen by the researcher because it allows for a more in-depth exploration of the experiences, perceptions, and factors that hinder non-native learners specifically undergraduate students in agricultural technology and law study program from learning English independently. The case study design provides the researcher with the opportunity to understand the phenomenon directly in a real-world context and examine the complex dynamics that influence their learning process.

Respondents

Participants in this study were 15 students from non-language study programs, they are learners of Agricultural Product Technology, and law study program. respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Participant criteria included learners who had taken at least one English course, had experience learning English independently, and were willing to participate in interviews and observations.

Data collection procedures

Data was collected using three main methods; in-depth interviews, to explore students' perceptions of linguistic and non-linguistic barriers to self-directed learning; participatory observation, conducted during learning activities both inside and outside the classroom, to gain a concrete understanding of students' self-directed learning behaviors; and documentation, consisting of records of learning activities, materials used by students, and recordings of supporting activities such as discussion forums or learning communities. Data triangulation was performed by combining these three data sources to enhance the validity of the research findings.

Data analysis

Technique of data analysis were conducted using the thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data analysis process were consisted of six stages: (1) identification of data, (2) initial coding, (3) theme discovery, (4) theme review, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) preparing the research report.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing data collection techniques such as semi-structured interviews, student reflection journals, and documentation of student learning activities in the classroom. The participants consisted of 15 students not enrolled in the English Language program, specifically undergraduates majoring in agricultural technology and law. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, involving the processes of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Table 1. Table of Open Coding

No	Data Quotes	Initial Code
1	“Do not understand many words”	Vocabulary difficulty
2	“Grammar is confusing”	Grammar issue
3	“Do not study unless there is a homework”	Low motivation
4	“Confusing where to start”	Lack of strategy
5	“Afraid of making mistake”	Anxiety
6	“Learning from YouTube”	Digital learning
7	“Learning with friends”	Peer learning

Table 2. Table of Axial Coding

Category	Code
Linguistic challenges	Vocabulary difficulty, Grammar issue
Self-Regulation	Low motivation
Learning Strategy	Lack of strategy
Affective Factor	Anxiety
Technological Solution	Digital learning
Collaboration	Peer learning

Table 3. Table of Selective Coding

Main Theme	Description
Learning Challenges	Linguistic barrier, strategy, motivation
Psychological Factors	Anxiety and self confidence
Learning Autonomy	Low independent learning
Learning Support System	Technology and collaboration

Challenges Faced by Students in Independent English Learning

Linguistic Challenges

Learners of agricultural product technology and law study program face difficulties in mastering vocabulary and understanding grammar.

“I don’t understand many of the words in the English text when I study alone.” (P3)

“Grammar is still confusing when studying on my own.” (P7)

In Studying foreign language especially English, the mastery of vocabulary is a fundamental element that significantly determines learners’ ability to comprehend texts and engage in communication. Limited vocabulary directly affects a person’s capability to understand linguistic input. Without adequate vocabulary comprehension, learners will struggle to process information, thereby hindering the learning process (Nation, 2018). Furthermore, grammar also plays an important role in building the structure of language comprehension. Webb and Nation (2017) said that understanding grammar is not only important for language production but also for grasping meaning within context. When learners do not understand the basic structures of the language, they tend to become confused, especially when learning independently without accompanied by lecturer. However, the findings of this study also indicate that the challenges faced by learners not only from a lack of mastery of the material but also from an inability to address these shortcomings independently. This suggests a gap between the knowledge they possess and their ability to manage the learning process. In other words, linguistic challenges do not stand alone but are closely related

to students' ability to learn independently. Without the right strategies, limited vocabulary and grammar will continue to be major obstacles in the learning process.

Low Self-Regulated Learning

Students lack discipline and lack control over their learning. They only study when there's an assignment from their lecturer.

"I study when any assignment from lecturer. If there's no assignment, I don't study." (P10)

"It's difficult to consistently study on my own because there are no specific time for learning." (P5)

Self-regulated learning (SRL) refers to students' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning process (Zimmerman, 2018). In this context, students with strong SRL should be able to learn without needing to be prompted by assignments or instructions from instructors. However, the results of this study indicate that most students do not yet possess this ability. They tend to study only when there are demands, making the learning process unsustainable. This finding aligns with Reeve's (2018) observation that a lack of autonomy in learning can lead to low intrinsic motivation. When linked to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), this low level of self-regulated learning can be understood as a result of unmet autonomy needs. Learners do not feel that they have full control over their learning process, so the motivation that arises is more external than internal. Furthermore, this condition also indicates that the previous learning system may not have provided sufficient space for learners to develop independent learning. The learning focused on teacher-centered can make students accustomed to receiving instructions, causing them to struggle when they must learn independently.

Limitations of Learning Strategies

Students of agricultural product technology and law study program are unaware of effective learning methods.

"I don't know how the strategy to start learning English." (P2)

"When I study by watching English videos, I find it is difficult for me to understand the conversation." (P12)

In foreign language learning in this case English, learning strategies play a crucial role. Oxford (2017) explains that language learning strategies encompass various techniques used to improve understanding and use of the language itself, such as cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. Students who lack good and effective learning strategies tend to study in a haphazard manner. Although they have access to various learning resources, such as videos or apps, without the right strategies, these resources do not have a significant impact on improving their language proficiency. Research by Griffiths (2018) indicates that the use of effective learning strategies can significantly improve learning outcomes. However, these strategies do not emerge automatically, they need to be taught and practiced systematically and continuously. These findings suggest that one of the main issues is not a lack of learning resources, but rather a lack of students' ability to utilize these resources effectively and practically. This serves as an important critique of learning practices that do not place sufficient emphasis on the development of learning strategies.

Affective Factors (Anxiety & Confidence)

Students of agricultural product technology and law study program feel anxious and lack confidence.

"I'm afraid of making mistakes in word choice and pronunciation when speaking." (P8)

In the study of foreign language learning in this case is English, this phenomenon is known as foreign language anxiety. Anxiety in studying of language can hinder performance and reduce learners' engagement in learning process (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019). This anxiety often arises from a fear of making mistake or feeling insufficiently competent in the language. Consequently,

students tend to avoid practice, particularly in speaking skills. However, practice is a crucial component of language learning, especially in this study, which focuses on English. Through the lens of Self-Determination Theory, this situation showed that learners' need for competence has not been met. They did not feel capable of implementing English well and correctly, leading to a lack of self-confidence. A less supportive learning environment can make learners more reluctant to try practicing. Conversely, a positive environment can help reduce anxiety and boost learners' confidence.

The Impact of Barriers Faced by Students on Their Independent Learning Skills

Independent learning skills, which every student must possess when studying English in the Agricultural Technology and Law programs, are among the key competencies in the higher education learning process, which requires active student engagement both inside and outside the classroom. However, the findings of this study indicate that the various barriers faced by students not only affect their comprehension and retention of course material but also significantly impact their ability and motivation to engage in self-directed learning. These impacts were identified across three main themes: a decline in motivation to maintain consistency in learning, a reliance on instructors regarding both course content and the learning process, and a stagnation in students' competency development.

Declining Student Motivation to Study Consistently

A participant's statement "*Because it's hard to learn English, I get confused and do not feel like studying*" (P6) reflects a direct relationship between the difficulty of students in understanding and absorbing English language learning materials and the learning motivation of students in the Agricultural Technology and Law study programs. In the context of self-directed learning for English proficiency, motivation is a key factor determining students' success in improving their language proficiency. When students face obstacles and difficulties they cannot overcome on their own, this can potentially lead to feelings of frustration and giving up, which ultimately reduces their motivation and desire to continue the learning process. This phenomenon aligns with the theory proposed by Ryan and Deci (2020), which states that there are fundamental psychological needs that must be met by every individual, namely the need to improve learning competence, freedom, and active student engagement in the learning process, as well as the presence of supportive relationships to motivate them; this theory is known as Self-Determination Theory (SDT). When students feel incompetent in understanding and absorbing the English learning material they are studying independently for example, due to the difficulty of memorizing new vocabulary or their difficulty and inability to understand English grammatical structures, it indicates that their basic need to improve their language competence is not being met. This results in a decline in students' intrinsic motivation.

Recent research indicates that facing significant obstacles and difficulties without sufficient assistance and support can lead to learned helplessness, a condition in which an individual feels that their efforts will not result in improvement (Wang & Eccles, 2021). In this context, students tend to avoid independent learning activities because they believe that independent learning will not improve their understanding of competencies. This aligns with the findings of this study, in which unresolved obstacles and difficulties can cause students to lose interest in independent learning. Moreover, the decrease in student motivation during the English learning process was also connected to learners' lack of ability to manage and select appropriate and effective learning strategies. Learners who lack of metacognitive skills tend to be unable to decide and direct their own learning process (Zimmerman, 2020). This results in students feeling overwhelmed and helpless when faced with complex and difficult material. In the long term, such conditions can lead to a negative cycle that can be described as follows: difficulty → frustration → decreased motivation → avoidance and neglect of learning → increased difficulty. From a constructivist perspective, learning should involve an active process in which students construct knowledge through experience and interaction. However, when obstacles are too great, the process of knowledge construction is hindered. Learners considered learning English as a burden that they should avoid it. Therefore, learners needed motivation to stay enthusiastic about learning English on their own, and lecturer can use scaffolding techniques to help them understand the difficulties they face.

Reliance on the Lecturer's Role

The statement “*I understand the course material better when it is explained directly by the lecturer*” (P1) indicates that students in the agricultural technology and law study programs still rely heavily on the lecturer's role in understanding the material. This reliance serves as an indicator of students' low capacity for independent learning, as they are not yet able to manage and determine their own learning process without direct assistance from the lecturer. Teacher-centered learning environments still dominate in various teaching contexts today. In this approach, the lecturer serves as the primary source of knowledge, while students merely passively receive the information presented by the lecturer. Such an approach does little to support efforts to foster students' independent learning in higher education (Tran, 2019). Recent research indicates that reliance on lecturers to deliver course material and knowledge is often due to students' lack of confidence in independent learning (Broadbent & Poon, 2018). Students feel that explanations from lecturers are easier to understand and absorb compared to learning on their own through books or other online sources. This is also related to students' low academic literacy skills, such as the ability to read English texts critically and independently.

In addition, cultural factors also play a significant role in shaping students' dependence on instructors. Instructors are viewed as the sole and ultimate source of truth, leading students to rely on their explanations rather than attempting to understand the course material on their own. This runs counter to the principles of self-directed learning, which aim to foster students' initiative and sense of responsibility in their studies. The perspective of self-regulated learning (SRL) showed that setting learning goals, selecting appropriate learning strategies, and the ability to evaluate someone's own learning outcomes are essential characteristics of independent students (Panadero, 2017). However, students' reliance on lecturer for information and academic material particularly in English language learning indicated that they had not yet practiced developing these skills to their full potential. They relied more on external regulation (lecturer) than on internal regulation (themselves).

In addition, the dependence on lecturer can also hinder the development of students' critical thinking skills. When students passively receive information and knowledge from instructors without engaging in independent exploration, they miss out on valuable learning experiences and opportunities to deepen and expand their understanding of the subject matter, which results in a decline in the overall quality of their learning outcomes. Given this issue, there is a need to shift the teaching approach from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning, in which the lecturer acts solely as a facilitator who guides and assists students in the learning process and problem-solving, particularly in English language instruction.

Skill Decline

Research findings indicate a decline in students' skills. This occurs due to the cumulative impact of a decrease in students' motivation to learn English and their reliance on the course lecturer, causing them to stagnate and fail to make significant progress in their learning and mastery of English language skills. In English language learning at the university level, students outside language programs heavily rely on the limited classroom instruction time and the quality of practice for both written and oral communication. If students tend to be passive and lack motivation to engage in independent study outside of class hours to improve their language skills, their proficiency will inevitably stagnate and decline. Nation (2019) stated that English language learning requires consistency and continuity to ensure ongoing progress. Learners who learn English cannot achieve significant progress if they do not actively engage in self-directed learning to improve their English language skills and proficiency outside of class hours. The habit of independent learning needs to be cultivated and practiced learners gradually so that learners can become self-reliant and not entirely dependent on their lecturer. Learners must also be able to evaluate their own learning outcomes and reflect on the weaknesses and obstacles they encounter during the learning process in order to improve their proficiency in English.

Meanwhile, Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) refers to the gap between what a person can do on their own and what they can achieve with the help of others in this case, the lecturer. Students' abilities will remain stagnant and fail to develop if they remain passive without taking the initiative to learn independently and improve their skills. Stagnant academic performance also affects learners' self-confidence, for example when learners see no progress in their studies, they tend to lose confidence in their own abilities. This leads to a decline in motivation to

study and improve their skills, and naturally increases their reliance on instructors in the learning process, which can ultimately exacerbate the problem. Over the long term, this stagnation in students' skills can affect their readiness to meet the demands of the workplace and the business world, which require strong English proficiency. Therefore, it is important to identify and address the factors causing this stagnation at an early stage.

The three findings identified in this study indicate that barriers to English language learning are not only cognitive in nature, but also affective and social. Declining motivation, reliance on course materials and lecturer's explanations, and stagnant student performance are interrelated and form a cycle that hinders the development of independent learning among students in the agricultural technology and law programs. Based on these findings, the concept of student-centered learning has not yet been fully implemented in the English language learning process; consequently, support for the development of independence in English language learning has not yet been effectively and properly realized. Lectures remain the primary method used by lecturer in the classroom to deliver instructional material, without involving students or providing them with opportunities to interact and express their opinions. The number of English assignments assigned to learners to complete in accordance with the current curriculum poses a significant obstacle to efforts to develop learners' independent learning strategies. Learners only focus on completing their assignments and submitting them for grading, while their need to develop English competencies, particularly in English language skills is somewhat overlooked. They aim only to pursue grades without considering the skills they have mastered. The experience of learning to develop themselves independently does not form the basis of their learning goals, even though this could serve as a foundation for them later when they enter the workforce. From the learners' perspective, the lack of readiness for independent learning also poses a challenge. Learners of agricultural technology and law study program were not yet accustomed to managing their time, setting goals, and evaluating their own learning activities. Therefore, developing independent learning skills cannot be achieved overnight but requires an ongoing process. Practical solutions based on these findings include integrating self-regulated learning training into the curriculum, using active learning methods and learner-centered learning such as problem-based learning, training learners to reflect on their learning through self-reflection journals, and providing flexible learning support through technology. Additionally, it is important to create a supportive learning environment where learners feel safe to try, fail, and learn from their mistakes.

Strategies for Overcoming Learners' Obstacles

When facing various obstacles in learning English in the agricultural technology and law study programs, learners should not remain passive. The findings of this study indicate that students must attempt to develop various adaptive strategies to overcome the difficulties they face. These strategies reflect learners' efforts to build independent learning skills, even though they are still in the early stages of development. Three main findings are emerged: the use of technology in English language learning, the implementation of collaborative learning, and the contextual use of English materials. These three strategies do not only demonstrate the efforts to overcome learners' barriers but also serve as steps toward more independent and meaningful learning. However, the effectiveness of these strategies depends heavily on how they are implemented in English language learning and supported by the learning environment.

The Use of Technology in English Learning

The participant's statement, "*I often learn English from YouTube*" (P9), it reflected a shift in the learning paradigm from that previously relied on formal sources (lecturer and textbooks) toward the use of more flexible digital learning resources. Technology, particularly video-based platforms such as YouTube, has become an important alternative in helping students understand difficult English language material. There is already a wealth of literature discussing the use of technology in education, which is the implementation of digital learning and self-directed learning. Lai and Bower (2019) demonstrate that student engagement in learning can be achieved through digital technology because it provides broad and in-depth access to learning resources. Students have the opportunity to seek out materials tailored to their needs, which is a key characteristic of self-directed learning. When asked by lecturer to independently search for learning materials, students tend to use platforms that provide audiovisual explanations, such as YouTube. This platform has become a

favorite medium for students to understand and study English language materials as supplementary resources to improve their language skills and foster independent learning.

Students can access YouTube to learn everything from grammar to English listening skills. Learning through YouTube can also be done anytime and anywhere, without any limitations of time or place. On the other hand, the use of technology also has its drawbacks and limitations. One of the main challenges is students' digital literacy. Not all students are able to select high-quality learning resources or those relevant to their needs. This can lead to misunderstandings of concepts or even the dissemination of inaccurate information (Siddiq et al., 2021). In addition, the unguided use of technology can also be a source of distraction. Instead of focusing on their learning topic, Students are often tempted to view content that is unrelated to the course material they are about to study; therefore, they need specific skills to use technology appropriately and purposefully, even though there are ample opportunities for independent exploration of the material. From the perspective of Self-Regulated Learning (SRL), technology can provide effective benefits for students in exploring learning resources and knowledge, provided they are able to manage their learning goals, track their progress, and evaluate their learning outcomes (Panadero, 2017). These skills are essential for learners to use technology as an active tool that can positively impact the improvement of their English learning abilities.

Furthermore, lecturer should support the integration of technology into English learning by providing guidance and recommendations for reliable learning resources so that learners can develop their language competencies independently and refine their learning strategies in a structured manner.

Collaborative Learning

The learner's statement "*Learning together with peers in a group makes it easier to understand the English material*" (P4) indicated that social communication has an important role in helping learners of the agricultural technology study program and the law study program overcome barriers and difficulties in English learning. Collaborative learning is one of the most effective strategies for improving English understanding, especially when learners encounter difficulties they cannot overcome on their own. According to the social constructivist perspective, learning occurs through communication with others. The emphasis on social interaction suggests that effective learning takes place when individuals interact with others who have different levels of knowledge. For example, students in the agricultural technology study program will study alongside students in the law study program; they will certainly have varying levels of knowledge.

Through the process of interaction among them, they will provide each other with corrections and feedback based on what they know and understand as they learn together in the same space and time. Dillenbourg (2021) demonstrated that conceptual understanding, motivation to continue learning, and communication skills can be enhanced through collaborative learning. A concrete example is when students in the agricultural technology program and law program study English together in a class. They interact with each other to understand and find solutions, when they encounter a problem and they are unfamiliar with, other students will help to find solutions or answers. This is what is known as collaborative learning, where each student expresses their ideas and opinions based on their individual knowledge.

Collaborative learning can also make the learning experience enjoyable and comfortable, and reduce students' anxiety because interactions take place among peers, with lecturer serves as facilitators during these interactions. The learning nuance feels more relaxed and less tense, allowing learners to freely express their difficulty in English material without fear. Such learning activities are able to increase learners' participation and boost their self-confidence throughout the learning process. However, the effectiveness of collaborative learning depended heavily on group dynamics. When collaborative learning was practiced, some students were more active while others tend to be passive. This can diminish the benefits of collaboration and even lead to dependence on more competent group members. In this context, lecturer were responsible for designing collaborative activities to ensure that the instruction provided was focused and aligned with the learning objectives. In practice, collaborative learning does not conflict with independent learning; rather, the two approaches complement one another. Collaboration serves as a means of developing students' self-regulation skills such as the ability to manage their time, interact effectively with other students, and evaluate their progress and contributions to the learning process. It can therefore be concluded that collaborative learning can serve as a stepping stone toward more mature independent learning.

Contextual English Learning Materials

The provision of contextual English learning materials is also a strategy that can be implemented in the teaching of English courses for students in the Agricultural Product Technology and Law study programs to address the challenges and obstacles they faced in self-directed learning. Students of the Agricultural Product Technology and Law study programs found it easier to understand English materials that related to the real life experiences they encountered. This demonstrated that the relevance of the material was a crucial factor in improving learning effectiveness. Furthermore, material directly related to their academic fields was essential for deepening their expertise in those fields, particularly when such implementation required the use of English. For example, students in the Agricultural Technology program might engaged with reading texts related to agricultural processing or food production, while for students in the law program, they might naturally chose reading topics related to legal studies and legislation applied in daily life.

In Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), knowledge is more easily understood and retained when linked to real life experiences (Johnson, 2019). In English language learning, the use of relevant contexts such as everyday situations, workplace scenarios, local culture, or professional needed in the industry helped students gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and usage of the English language. Recent research shows that contextualized material can enhance students' motivation and engagement in the learning process (Derakhshan et al., 2020). When students of agricultural product technology and law study programs in English courses were given the material relevant to their real lives, they were more motivated to learn and explore it independently. This contrasts with the presentation of material that was abstract or did not have direct connection to their experiences, which tended to be difficult to understand and less engaging for students in English language learning. In addition, contextual materials also supported the development of communicative language skills. In English language learning, the primary goal was not only to know English grammar but also students were able to use it in real-life situations. By using contextual materials, students learned how to use English in appropriate contexts.

However, there were challenges in implementing contextually-based English learning materials. One of these was the limited resources and time available for designing materials that are relevant to students' daily lives. Lecturer often relied on standard textbooks that did not always align with students' local contexts or the academic fields of learners. Therefore, creativity and innovation were needed to develop contextual learning materials that were relevant to students' real-life experiences and the academic fields of learners. Flexible and diverse learning approaches needed to be implemented and integrated, as not all students had the same level of ability and experience in understanding the English learning material. Therefore, the use of contextual English learning materials must be balanced with a deep understanding. Context and concepts work in synergy to achieve effective learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the obstacles and difficulties experienced by students in the Agricultural Technology and Law programs in their independent English language learning are influenced by linguistic, psychological, and strategic factors. The linguistic factors that students consistently cite are the limited English vocabulary and difficulty in understanding English grammar. As for psychological factors, students feel shy when asked to practice communicating or speaking English. They are embarrassed if they do not speak English correctly. Next, regarding learning strategy, students have not yet found the right and focused self-directed learning strategies. They are still confused about where to start learning and what strategies to use. This requires the role of lecturers to help provide direction and guidance to students so that they can practice learning independently. Obstacles and difficulties faced by students in learning English independently have a negative impact on their motivation. They should attempt to learn and train English skills independently. Students struggle to understand the English material, which ultimately leads to a decline in their motivation to learn. Independent English learning can be integrated with technology as an appropriate strategy for student self-directed learning. Furthermore, collaboration in learning among students can also improve students' motivation to interact and be active in the classroom activities. The presence of contextual English materials, meaning the material discusses topics related to students' daily activities, also facilitate students' understanding of the learning material.

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