INDONESIAN LEARNERS' SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING IN ONLINE EAP CLASSES: ITS MANIFESTATIONS AND FACTORS

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Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate online English for Academic Purposes (EAP) learners' manifestations of the levels of their Self-directed Learning (SDL) in English, as well as their views about possible factors influencing their SDL. It used interviews as the method of data collection. Six EAP participants at the university level participated in the study. Through Thematic Analysis of the interview transcripts, the present study found that learners with high SDL (HSDL) adhered to a carefully planned learning agenda and were eager to learn more. In comparison, learners with a low SDL (LSDL) reported having no deliberate planning for learning and making no or little effort to learn English outside English class. The present study further found that perceived relevance of English class increased learners' SDL, and its lack of relevance reduced it. The study also found that LSDL learners' sense of achievement and teachers' support could increase their interest in learning, and so their SDL. Based on the findings, it was suggested that EAP courses increase their relevance to learners' needs and teachers provide the necessary support for LSDL learners to make them more interested in learning and increase their SDL.

Keywords: online learning EAP, factor of SDL, manifestation of SDL, Self-Directed Learning (SDL)

KEMAMPUAN BELAJAR ATAS INISIATIF SENDIRI DARI PEMBELAJAR BAHASA INGGRIS UNTUK TUJUAN AKADEMIK: MANIFESTASI DAN FAKTOR

Abstract

Studi ini dilakukan untuk memperoleh informasi tentang manifestasi tingkat kemampuan belajar atas inisiatif sendiri para pembelajar di kelas Bahasa Inggris untuk Tujuan Akademik (EAP) daring serta faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhinya. Studi ini menggunakan metode wawancara. Enam pembelajar kelas EAP menjadi peserta dalam studi ini. Melalui analisis tema, studi ini menemukan bahwa pembelajar dengan tingkat inisiatif tinggi dalam belajar (HSDL) menyusun rencana belajar dan selalu mau belajar lebih. Sebagai pembanding, pembelajar dengan tingkat inisiatif belajar rendah (LSDL) melaporkan bahwa mereka tidak menyusun rencana belajar sama sekali dan melakukan sedikit usaha dalam belajar Bahasa Inggris. Studi ini lebih jauh menemukan bahwa relevansi materi pembelajaran dengan kebutuhan pembelajar dinilai para peserta dapat meningkatkan inisiatif belajar mereka. Jika

materi dianggap tidak relevan, mereka cenderung kurang tertarik untuk belajar lebih. Selanjutnya, merasakan keberhasilan dan mendapatkan dukungan dari pengajar di kelas Bahasa Inggris penting bagi pembelajar LSDL untuk menjaga motivasi dan semangat mereka di kelas. Berdasarkan hasil studi, disarankan kelas EAP daring meningkatkan relevansi materi dengan kebutuhan pembelajar. Selanjutnya, para pengajar disarankan untuk selalu memberikan dukungan dan menunjukkan sikap positif terutama kepada pembelajar LSDL supaya mereka lebih tertarik dalam belajar bahasa dan meningkatkan inisiatif belajarnya.

Kata kunci: Kemampuan belajar atas inisiatif sendiri, pembelajaran daring, manifestasi, faktor

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language involves continuous practices and this tedious process at times poses challenges to many language learners (Trang, 2012). English classes, in particular, are often reported to be quite challenging for many second language (L2) learners of English, including in the Indonesian context (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Sulistiyo, 2016; Yulia, 2013). This challenge could be even higher due to the Covid 19 pandemic compelling instruction to be moved from the face-to-face mode to the online one (Subekti, 2020a). Learners have to succeed in their learning despite all the possible challenges and limitations such as unfamiliarity with online instruction and limited supporting resources such as gadgets and internet connectivity (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). Online learning mode of instruction is currently implemented worldwide on a scale never seen before due to the pandemic (Czerniewicz, 2020). Ideally speaking, online learning allows learners to learn through electronic devices connected to the internet, allowing them to continue their study without having to physically come to campus (Plaisance, 2018).

Regarding online learning, among various Individual Differences (IDs) which, among others, are anxiety, motivation, aptitudes, learning styles, and strategies, learners' Self-Directed Learning (SDL) could play a major role in affecting learners' success in online learning setting (Zhu, Bonk, & Doo, 2020). Sze-yeng and Hussain (2010) defined learners' SDL as learners' ability to "take initiative, with or without the teacher, in making decisions concerning their learning" (p. 193). That is learners self-direct themselves on what and how they learn (Ayyildiz & Tarhan, 2015; Basereh & Pishkar, 2016a).

There are several notable characteristics of learners' SDL and the lack thereof. Because learners with high SDL believe that learning is a personal responsibility, they are willing to face learning challenges and select learning strategies to best overcome the challenges (Ayyildiz & Tarhan, 2015). Such learners typically have specific learning goals and prioritise what is more important, and thus they have good time

management and can assess their ongoing achievements (Ayyildiz & Tarhan, 2015). Though not in L2 literature, a study in China by Yuan et al. (2011) found that through SDL, learners became familiar with their learning needs, selection of appropriate learning strategies to achieve or fulfil those needs, and evaluation of their learning progress. A recent mixed-method study in an Indonesian ESP university context by Daar and Jemadi (2020) found that even though their participants reported medium SDL level when further investigated in interviews, some participants reported that they did not have their schedule of learning. Instead, they just followed the class schedule provided by their campus, suggesting low SDL in English.

Related to that and specific about adult learners, those studying at the university level tend to strongly believe about what works in their learning and how they want to learn it (Slaouti, Onat-Stelma, & Motteram, 2013). This belief could potentially affect whether or not these learners could achieve optimally in the online learning context (Subekti, 2020a). The issue of relevance could be paramount when dealing with adult learners learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) where learners already have more focused language needs (Prabandari, Aji, & Yulia, 2017). Moreover, English classes offered to non-English major learners at university were often reported to be second-prioritised by many learners, for example, due to the heavy workload of the disciplines and learners' study schedule at their respective departments (Cheng & Lee, 2018).

In an earlier yet still relevant publication, Abdullah (2009) emphasised that ESP classes must be 'real' in terms of subject-specific contents as well as a pedagogical approach to sustain learners' interest and facilitate their optimal learning. As far as online learning is concerned, furthermore, Sumuer (2018) in a study in the Turkish context found that online learning offering a flexible design and opportunities for collaboration could help learners be more autonomous in their learning process provided that they were given adequate supports when needed.

Teachers' attributes could also play a part in influencing learners' SDL in English classes. A study by Subekti (2019) involving 13 Indonesian university teachers of English found that several teacher participants asserted the importance of teachers letting learners know that they cared and paid attention to them. One of the participants in that study stated "I motivate them by saying lovely words and I encourage them by saying that I believe they can be better. I do this several times, if necessary" (Subekti, 2019, p. 35) indicating the necessity to encourage learners and to build "you can do it" atmosphere among learners in class. Previously, a study in Iran by Bahramy and Araghi (2013) found that teacher-related factors accounted for 54.7% of demotivating factors with teachers' perceived negative attitudes towards weaker learners being on top of the list. In line with that, one of the participants in a study by Subekti (2018) in the Indonesian context asserted, "It makes me uncomfortable and anxious when the teachers - their atten-

tion only focuses on those who 'can' (p. 232), suggesting that when learners perceived their teachers to be inattentive to them, they tended to be very anxious and were unlikely to actively participate in class.

In an online learning setting specifically, Ratliff (2018) argued that teacher-learner rapport is essential for the success of instruction in which social presence, the degree of connection between teachers and learners, should be improved. This could be achieved through teachers giving clear explanations, expected goals, and feedback, as well as providing the right amount of challenge, for example through providing an interesting topic for online discussions (Green, 2016). Interestingly, ESP teachers, unlike General English teachers, very often "should act as content experts where they lack specialized knowledge" (Alsharif & Shukri, 2018, p. 844), for example, ESP teachers from English Education major teaching ESP for Biology learners. Thus, if not executed carefully, online ESP classes could be challenging, not only for the teachers but also for learners.

Another factor that may affect learners' SDL is how well they perceive their language capability. Though not specifically in SDL literature, a study in an Indonesian university context found that L2 learners' self-perceived competence was negatively associated with L2 communication apprehension (Subekti, 2020b), suggesting that the lower learners perceived their language capability, the more apprehensive they were in English class, particularly when it came to making communications. A study

in Iran found that English as L2 learners' self-efficacy had a significant positive association with their SDL level (Basereh & Pishkar, 2016b) indicating that the higher learners perceived their language competence, the more likely they were engaged in self-directed learning activities. Zimmerman et al. (2010) argued that learning goals learners set in advance would likely correspond positively with how well they perceive their capability, which may indirectly affect to what extent they self-direct themselves to achieve the goals.

Many studies conducted in various learning contexts in pre-Covid 19 pandemic times repeatedly found that the use of technology in English classes positively affected learners' SDL (Park, Sung, & Jo, 2018; Rashid & Asghar, 2016; Uz & Uzun, 2018). A study by Park et al. (2018) in Korea, for instance, found that the more positive learners' attitudes towards technology, the higher their SDL. In line with that, in Turkey, Uz and Uzun (2018) also found that learners receiving instruction in blended learning reported higher SDL than their counterparts receiving face-to-face instruction.

However, many studies conducted during the pandemic repeatedly reported challenges and difficulties in online English classes in various learning contexts (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Lancker & Parolin, 2020; Mondol & Mohiuddin, 2020). Plaisance (2018) mentioned that online learning inherently possesses unique challenges. For example, in a synchronous session through a teleconference, some learners may prefer turning off the camera, making teach-

ers unable to check learners' facial expressions or whether these learners are attending their classes. The temporal, as well as spatial freedom offered in online learning, could at the same time become a weakness (Plaisance, 2018). In an online learning setting where teachers cannot as closely monitor learners' understanding and progress as they do in face-to-face instruction, learners' SDL could potentially play a very important part in their learning.

Based on the aforementioned rationales, the present study seeks to answer two research questions. First, what are the manifestations of learners' SDL level in online English classes? And second, what are the possible factors influencing learners' SDL in online English classes?

METHOD
Research design and participants

The present study employed online interviews as the only method of data collection. The present study was the continuation of two quantitative studies involving learners of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes, a branch of ESP, at a university in Java, Indonesia in a survey investigating the relationship between their SDL and resilience (Subekti, 2021a) and the relationship between these two constructs and L2 achievement (Subekti, 2021b). The EAP classes were offered in the first semester of the 2020/2021 academic year. The present study involved six selected participants of these two previous studies. The selection was based on whether these participants indicated their willingness to be inter-

viewed when filling out the questionnaires in the earlier study (Subekti, 2021a, 2021b) and their SDL levels as measured through their responses in the SDL questionnaires. Three participants with the highest SDL and three participants with the lowest SDL were selected for the present study. Of these six participants, three were female and the other three were male.

The online interviews were conducted from the period of 8 January 2021 up to 25 January 2021, around a month after the EAP classes were completed. Before each online interview was conducted, each participant was asked to fill a *Google Form* consent form detailing the purposes of the study as well as their rights of voluntary participation and the confidentiality of their identity (Israel & Hay, 2006). The online interviews were conducted in the Indonesian language, with which language the participants were very proficient to ensure the quality of the interview data obtained. Each interview lasted for around 25 minutes through *WhatsApp* calls. Each learner participant was given an internet subsidy after each interview as the implementation of the beneficence principle of research ethics to do good to the participants (Israel & Hay, 2006). Throughout this report where several verbatim quotes from the participants were presented, pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' confidentiality (Israel & Hay, 2006). To facilitate reference tracing, the following codes were used after each of the excerpts: "[pseudonym/ HSDL]" or "[pseudonym/LSDL]". For example, "[Bobby/HSDL]" means that

the preceding excerpt was from Bobby, a learner participant with a high SDL level, whilst "[Tika/LSDL]" means that the preceding excerpt was from Tika, a learner with low SDL.

Data analysis

The interview data were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. Next, the English transcripts were analysed using Thematic Analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) conducted through annotating each of the interview transcripts with potential themes concern-

ing research questions. The first step was to get familiar with the dataset through reading and rereading the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The next step was searching for reoccurring themes by gathering each potential theme and generating a thematic map (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The excerpts that could best reflect the emerging themes were selected for further analysis in this report. The complete sequence of data collection and analysis could be seen in Figure 1.
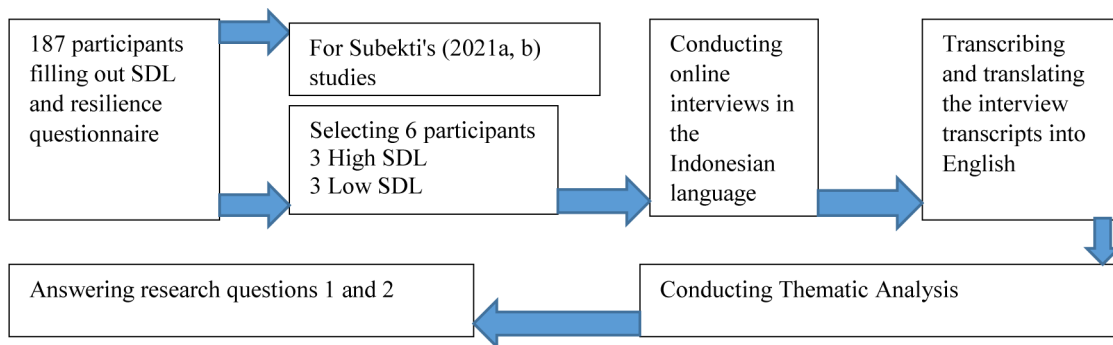
Figure 1. Data collection and data analysis sequence

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results

The present study found four themes on the manifestations of learners' SDL

in online EAP classes and three themes on factors influencing learners' SDL. The summary of these themes could be observed in Table 1.

Table 1. The emerging themes

Manifestations of learners' SDL	
Theme 1.	Learners with high SDL adhered to a carefully planned agenda.
Theme 2.	Learners with high SDL were eager to learn more.
Theme 3.	Learners with low SDL did not have a deliberate plan for learning.
Theme 4.	Learners with low SDL reported minimum efforts in learning.
Factors influencing learners' SDL	
Theme 1.	Perceived relevance increased learners' SDL.
Theme 2.	Perceived lack of relevance decreased learners' SDL.
Theme 3.	Learners' perceived competence level increased learners' SDL and negatively perceived attributes of English teachers decreased learners' SDL.

Manifestations of learners' level of SDL

Theme 1. Learners with high SDL adhered to a carefully planned agenda.

The present study found that all three learners with a high SDL (HSDL) tended to make targets and set their priorities. Triana, for instance, wrote her agenda on her phone and set reminders to ensure that she did not forget to do her planned agenda. She reported:

> Usually, I write all of my agenda that I will do in my notes on the phone. Then, I will set my alarm about five minutes before I start to do these planned activities. So, there is a reminder on my phone. [Triana/HSDL]

Furthermore, it was also found that HSDL learners calculated their learning responsibilities and tried to complete them within the time frame. Bobby, for example, reported that at times he postponed completing his English assignments not because he was lazy. Rather, it was within his calculation. He stated:

> I always have agenda [targets] … For example… I will work on assignments that are more urgent [near the deadline]. I calculate… which one should be done first… so all targets could eventually be completed. … I did not mean to postpone my work because of being lazy. I have my schedule to work on it. [Bobby/HSDL]

It could be stated that the findings on this theme highlighted HSDL learners' deliberation in ensuring all their learning targets were achieved.

Theme 2. Learners with high SDL were eager to learn more.

The present study found that HSDL learners tended to aspire to learn more than what was required in English class. With that particular target in mind, these learners did what was necessary to achieve it. Bobby, for example, acknowledged that he was never afraid of making mistakes through which, he believed, he could learn more and improve his English. He stated:

> We do not have to be afraid of making mistakes. We learn from it and can improve it. [Bobby/HSDL]

In a similar vein, Triana also believed that learners need to do extra efforts outside class to deepen understanding and succeed in learning. She reported:

> … If I do not understand it [the material] then I will search it on *YouTube*… I need to learn how to pronounce some words well through *YouTube*. Then, I practice it in front of a mirror. [Triana/HSDL]

In line with that, another HSDL learner, Jessica, also stated that she never felt satisfied with what she obtained in class. She believed that she needed to study outside class. She stated:

I am always curious and look for English journal articles to fulfil my curiosity... because I never feel satisfied with what I have got. I have to keep learning. [Jessica/HSDL]

In such a strong tone, she added that if English learners were already satisfied with what they obtained in class without any self-directed efforts, they were like "frogs in the shell". She stated:

If we only learn at school, we will not explore more about the lesson that we have learned. It is like "Frogs in the shell". We have to learn more [with own volition]. [Jessica/HSDL]

The findings on this theme generally highlighted HSDL learners' beliefs on the need to learn English more than what had been taught in class. Otherwise, their English skills might not get improved.

Theme 3. Learners with low SDL did not have a deliberate plan for learning.

The present study found that learners with low SDL (LSDL) did not have a deliberate plan for learning. Two participants commented that planning was not important. Andy, for instance, argued that he had many other things more important than making learning plans. He stated:

I think it [not making learning agenda] is because I have a lot of things to do. [Andy/LSDL]

In a similar tone, Tika considered making a learning plan useless as she often failed to fulfil most of the planning she had done previously. She reported:

I once made planning but most of what I planned did not happen. So, I think it is useless... I had tried to make planning but when I tried, the planning failed. I am not interested anymore in planning something. [Tika/LSDL]

In a rather more positive tone, Cosmas reported that he preferred to learn English "by accident" rather than deliberately. As such, he considered making a learning plan not essential. He commented:

I never make a plan because I prefer facing problems directly then I will learn from them. If I make planning, it does not help me to understand quickly. For example, when I was in senior high school, I preferred to meet some tourists directly and spoke English with them rather than just staying in the classroom to learn pronunciation and vocabulary. For me, learning some theories did not help me to understand. That is why I prefer direct practice. [Cosmas/LSDL]

The findings on this theme highlighted LSDL learners' inclination not to make deliberate attempts to learn English. Whilst Andy and Tika reported no attempt in learning English in the absence of deliberate planning, Cosmas

acknowledged that not making learning planning was attributed to his learning style preferring learning language when only when directly facing real-life situations.

Theme 4. Learners with low SDL reported minimum efforts in learning.

The present study further found that LSDL learners seemed to make minimum efforts to learn English outside class. That was to state that their English learning was largely confined to their English class sessions. Andy, for instance, directly stated that he only learned English when he was in class, and not wanting to retake the class in the next semester seemed to be his only motivation in attending English class. He stated:

> I learn English only when I attend English class… I do not want to retake the English class next semester. [Andy/LSDL]

In line with that, Cosmas also reported that all he did in English class was to make him pass the class, even if he often submitted assignments late. He never made time to study English outside class. He commented:

> I never have a specific time to learn English… I am already in the upper semester … If I can do it [English class assignment], I will do it even though I will submit it late. I keep doing my homework [to pass the English class]… I never prioritize my time for learning except I learn it in the classroom. [Cosmas/LSDL]

Another LSDL learner, Tika, reported that she would only study English when she felt like it, which as she reported, rarely happened. She commented:

> It depends on my mood. If I feel excited to study English then I am willing to study it. [Tika/LSDL]

All in all, the findings on this theme highlighted LSDL learners' reluctance to make extra efforts to learn English. Their exposure to English was largely confined to class sessions and they made not or very little attempt to study English outside class.

Factors influencing learners' SDL in English

Theme 1. Perceived relevance increased learners' SDL.

The present study found that the perceived relevance of English lessons to learners' present or future needs could increase their SDL in English. Jessica, for instance, saw the relevance of English to her needs in writing a thesis and her future needs to pursue postgraduate abroad. She acknowledged:

> I need to read many journal articles in English [for my undergraduate thesis]. So, I spend my four hours only for searching some articles in English and read them… I have a plan to continue my postgraduate abroad. So, I should prepare… improving my English… because it is an international language. Also, I always learn English conversation

by listening to English songs and watching films. [Jessica/HSDL]

Even, two LSDL learners, Andy and Cosmas, commented that when they perceived the English lesson relevant to their needs, they became more interested in investing more time outside class for the English classes. Andy reported his interest when working on a job interview and CV assignments because he knew he would need them in the future. He stated:

... How to do job interview..., it is also good for us [when we are] applying for a job after we finish our bachelor's degree... I like writing a CV because it teaches me how to write a CV appropriately for applying for a job. [Andy/LSDL]

In the same tone, Cosmas was interested in making video assignments because he could assess his pronunciation, which he needed for his part-time job. He stated:

Making a video... I am happy to see myself in that video and I could also assess my pronunciation... I work in the graphic design field. I have to meet customers via *Zoom* and *Skype*. When I have a meeting with my customers, I have to use English. So, to help them understand what I am talking about, I have to improve my pronunciation. [Cosmas/LSDL]

In general, the findings on this theme highlighted that English lessons perceived as relevant to learners' needs

could increase both HSDL and LSDL learners' SDL in English.

Theme 2. Perceived lack of relevance decreased learners' SDL.

The present study further found that perceived lack of relevance of English materials decreased learners' SDL. This was particularly prevalent among LSDL learners. Andy, who was a Product Design learner, seemed to prioritise his hobby on graphic design more than English as he saw little direct and specific benefit of learning English for the success of his future career in design. He stated:

The main factor is there are many other things in my mind. The second factor is my hobby [graphic design]. That makes me spend no time studying English. [Andy/LSDL]

In a stronger tone, Cosmas believed that English lessons seemed to be repetitive ever since he was in junior high school, and as such, it did not draw much of his interest. He commented:

I have observed since I was in junior high school that we only learn some repetitive materials [in English classes]. It does not improve my ability, so when I finish my English class I do not think about it any longer. [Cosmas/LSDL]

These findings on this second theme highlighted that LSDL learners perceived English to generally have little relevance to their life, further reducing

their SDL and motivation in learning English.

Theme 3. Learners' perceived competence level increased learners' SDL and negatively perceived attributes of English teachers decreased learners' SDL.

The present study also found that learners' perceived level of competence and their teachers' attributes affected their SDL either positively or negatively. Specifically, a sense of achievement and supportive teachers increased learners' interest whilst perceived lack of competence and perceived teachers' lack of capability decreased their interest, and so SDL in English.

Andy, an LSDL learner, reported his increased interest due to his sense of achievement and supportive teacher. He commented:

> I think it [my increased interest in English] is because I have understood the materials. Moreover, the materials are interesting for me. The teacher also really helps me so much when I ask her some questions. [Andy/LSDL]

Whilst a sense of achievement increased learners' SDL, a sense of incompetence reduced it. It was reported by another LSDL learner, Tika. She stated:

> I felt lazy when I did not understand the content of the materials. [Tika/ LSDL]

Besides, teachers showing favouritism was also reported to be a factor making learners lose interest in learning. Bobby reported this, stating:

> We had done our best in making videos and paper assignments but the teacher did not grade learners objectively [so my grade is not optimal]. This did not only happen to me only but also to many of my friends. [Bobby/HSDL]

Furthermore, other than teachers showing favouritism, teachers' poor instructional planning could also decrease learners' interest. Triana, an HSDL learner, highlighted her teacher's slightly monotonous way of teaching, stating:

> Learning online does not have to use *Google Meet* [synchronous explanations] all the time. [The teacher] could use other methods such as *Quizzes* and *Kahoot*, for example. We feel so bored if we only *use Google Meet* every day. [Triana/HSDL]

In line with that, Cosmas commented on his team-teaching teachers who seemed not to consider class effectiveness by teaching in two separate *Zoom* rooms sequentially. He stated:

> There was no problem with the material but I think it was not effective for us if we left one *[Zoom]* meeting [with one teacher] and joined a different *[Zoom]* meeting [with the other teacher]. Why didn't they make it one *[Zoom]* room? [Cosmas/LSDL]

All in all, the findings on the third theme indicated that learners' sense of achievement was necessary particularly among LSDL learners to keep them motivated in learning English. In comparison, teachers' attributes seemed to affect learners irrespective of their SDL level.

Discussion
Manifestations of learners' level of SDL

The present study found that HSDL learners adhered to their carefully planned agenda and were eager to learn more than required by their English classes. These HSDL learners reported that they ensured their learning targets could be achieved and their English skills improved. This finding was in line with many authors' reiteration about the characteristics of learners with high SDL (Ayyildiz & Tarhan, 2015; Basereh & Pishkar, 2016b, 2016a; Sze-yeng & Hussain, 2010; Zhu et al., 2020). In the present study, HSDL learners, without any instructions from their teachers, had the initiative to do some actions, for example, setting a reminder, making plans to ensure their learning targets were achieved, suggesting decision-making ability concerning their learning (Sze-yeng & Hussain, 2010). Interestingly, one of the HSDL learners, Bobby, mentioned at times he postponed working on English tasks because he calculated the amount of time he had and all the tasks he had to complete. In his estimation, he could still complete his English tasks even if it was done later than other tasks or assignments. This finding is worth further commenting on. On one hand, it indi-

cated that this participant could prioritise which tasks should be completed first for all tasks to be completed in due time, suggesting his SDL skills (Ayyildiz & Tarhan, 2015; Yuan et al., 2011). On the other hand, however, this result may also be alarming in the way that ESP learners tended to put their needs or tasks in English class after their tasks in discipline-related content classes. This finding was slightly similar to the finding of a study in Hong Kong by Cheng and Lee (2018) in which some learners, especially low motivated ones, considered learning English a lower priority compared to their discipline. What could be interesting from the present study was that even an HSDL learner seemed to slightly second-prioritise language learning. One possible reason was that English use was largely confined to the classroom context, so some learners may find it difficult to see the equal relevance of studying English with studying their respective discipline-related materials.

Furthermore, as the present study found, learners with low SDL did not have a deliberate plan for learning and demonstrated minimum efforts to learn with own volition. This finding was in line with a recent study conducted by Daar and Jemadi (2020) in an Indonesian English for Nursing context in which some university learners did not have their schedule of learning, just received whatever their English classes offered and 'learned' English only during class time. The similarity between these two findings in the Indonesian EAP context at the university level could indicate that EAP instruction at

universities in Indonesia was, to a certain extent, second-prioritised if not ignored by learners as they prioritised their discipline classes. One LSDL participant in the present study mentioned that he preferred learning English 'by accident', for example by directly conversing with foreigners, rather than deliberately through planning, accounting his preference to his learning style. His remark could confirm a statement by Slaouti et al. (2013) that adult learners studying at university are likely to have a strong belief about what works in their learning and how they want to learn. This inclination could potentially influence learning (Subekti, 2020a), either negatively or positively. Interestingly, this LSDL participant claimed to prefer directly practicing the language when having the chance, but he did not seem to make any efforts to obtain this chance, indicating that his preference was not accompanied by efforts, thus suggesting his low SDL level.

Factors influencing learners' SDL in English

The present study found that perceived relevance increased learners' SDL whilst perceived lack of relevance was reported to decrease the SDL level of learners, especially the LSDL ones. Regarding these findings, it could be stated that HSDL learners were even more eager to learn, whilst LSDL learners could be encouraged to participate more actively in learning when they saw that what was being taught would be useful for their future needs, for examples study abroad plans, getting a job, and being more successful in workplaces in the future. This finding may confirm the reiteration of several authors that the issue of relevance is paramount in ESP instructions (Abdullah, 2009; Prabandari et al., 2017). Abdullah (2009) mentioned that to sustain learners' interest, ESP classes should maintain their relevance to learners' needs. Specific in the case of EAP context like the one in the present study, learners' needs may be closely related to their discipline or majors. However, it is also important to note that the perceived lack of relevance more greatly influenced LSDL learners than it did HSDL learners, suggesting that LSDL learners, more than HSDL learners, needed to see the relevance of what they learned in ESP classes with their needs to keep them motivated enough to learn English. This could be a challenge for ESP/EAP teachers to solve or remedy especially because there was a tendency for EAP learners at the university level to focus more on their content classes (Cheng & Lee, 2018). In the context of online learning, such as the one in the present study, Sumuer (2018) based on his study in Turkey proposed that teachers should offer flexible design allowing learners to, at the same time, be autonomous and ask them for supports when they need. For this reason, materials that were perceived by learners as 'repetitive' and 'always the same', as seen in one of the participants' excerpts, could be delivered in such a way that is more relevant for learners. For example, materials on Simple Present Tense, especially S-V Agreement in *English for Architecture* could be taught

through materials on describing major styles of architecture in Indonesia.

Furthermore, the present study also found that learners' perceived competence level increased their SDL, and perceived lack of it decreased their SDL. This finding was particularly prevalent among LSDL learners. Regarding this finding, several points could be mentioned. A quantitative study in Iran by Basereh and Pishkar (2016b) found that L2 learners' self-efficacy positively correlated with their SDL level. Hence, the lower these L2 learners' self-efficacy, the lower their SDL level tended to be. Hence, the present study's qualitative finding on learners' low perception of competence affecting their SDL negatively could offer some kind of qualitative confirmation of the quantitative study by Basereh and Pishkar (2016b) in the same Asian context where English was widely constrained to classroom uses. Furthermore, in the present study, LSDL learners seemed to need some kind of sense of achievement in learning English to keep them continue learning. They would more likely abandon it if they considered themselves not sufficiently capable of learning it. This finding may be related to earlier research finding by Subekti (2020b) in an Indonesian General English context university context which found that if learners perceived themselves as not capable of communicating in English they tended to be more apprehensive in language classes. Though not in SDL literature and focusing on speaking, the study by Subekti (2020b) may give some kind of support to the idea that weaker learners need all kinds of sup-

ports to make them continue learning. In comparison with LSDL learners, HSDL learners did not seem to see a sense of achievement in English class very crucial aspect to affect their interest. Regarding this, Zimmerman et al. (2010) posited that learners with high SDL tend to be those who perceived their capability to be good, and these learners usually set learning goals in advance per their perceived competence. Though stating that learners with high SDL are typically high-achieving learners could be quite tempting, this possible speculation should be treated with caution. Learners may at first need a sense of achievement to build a positive perception of competence and this positive perception may, in turn, build their SDL skills. When learners have successfully developed their SDL skills, thus being learners with a higher SDL level, they will no longer be very prone to negative experiences in the language class, have less apprehension, and could continue learning regardless.

Last but not least, the present study also found that teacher factors influenced learners' SDL. First, negative attitudes of teachers, such as perceived favouritism, were reported to be attributed to lower SDL among LSDL learners. This particular finding was slightly the same as a finding in the study by Bahramy and Araghi (2013) in Iran. They found that teacher-related factors became the highest demotivating factors among others with perceived negative attitudes of teachers towards low-achieving learners being on the top. In a similar vein, though not specifically in SDL literature, a study by (Subekti,

2018) in Indonesia also found lower-achieving learners reported feeling uncomfortable and anxious because they perceived their teachers' attention to only focus on higher achieving learners. The relatively uniformed findings among these three studies conducted in different contexts could suggest that teachers' perceived negative attitudes would give more profound impacts on weaker learners. Specifically in an online learning setting such as the one in the present study, teacher-learner rapport is paramount (Ratliff, 2018). This, according to Green (2016), could be achieved through clear guidelines, expected goals, and feedback as well as a right amount of challenge, not too difficult making learners feel overwhelmed, not too easy making learners get bored (Green, 2016). This could be related to the present study's other finding related to teachers' factors where some teachers' lack of pedagogical skills in managing online instruction was attributed to learners' low SDL. For example, teachers used synchronous meetings repeatedly without any variations, making learners get bored and tired. Regarding this, Alsharif and Shukri (2018) stated that teaching ESP was already challenging for teachers due to the discipline-related materials. The challenge in managing online classes at the time of the pandemic possibly severed the issue where learners should learn very specific discipline-related materials in English in an online class conducted by teachers who might not sufficiently be equipped with knowledge on the effective use of instructional technology due to the sudden change from the face-to-face instruction to online instruction. In addition to that, learners may also experience technology fatigue, for example, due to the large-scale use of teleconference applications across most of their classes, during the pandemic. This could provide some kind of explanation why unlike many studies reporting positive effects of the uses of technology in L2 classes before the pandemic (e.g.: Park et al., 2018; Rashid & Asghar, 2016; Uz & Uzun, 2018), several studies (e.g.: Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Lancker & Parolin, 2020; Mondol & Mohiuddin, 2020) including the present study reported that technology uses during the pandemic, if not well executed, could pose potential negative impacts on learners.

CONCLUSION

Several findings of the present study offer implications. First, the perceived relevance of the materials is paramount especially to keep the interest of LSDL learners. As these learners reported to perceive their competence to be low, teachers are also to pay extra attention to such learners and consistently give them encouragement and support because they need teachers' constant assurance that they have what it takes to learn English. Variations in online English classes delivery, for instance varying the learning applications used, could also be very important to sustain their interest especially because learners likely have many other classes using the same applications.

The limitation of the study may largely be attributed to the timing of the interviews. The interviews were

conducted after the online EAP classes had been completed. Hence, their responses in the interviews may at times be influenced by not only their experiences in the online EAP classes but also previous English classes they had so far joined. This possibly reduced the quality of the interview data intended to focus on the online EAP classes.

Last but not least, there are two suggested directions for future studies concerning the present study's findings. The first is to investigate the possible interactions between perceived teacher factors and the interest and autonomy of Indonesian learners of English. Secondly, a corpus study could investigate the occurrence of English class-related keywords in learners' agendas, manually written or online, to see the extent to which these learners invest time for English classes or to learn English among other schedules.

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