























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PROMOTING INDEPENDENT LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING EFL WORKING LEARNERS

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Abstract: A number of working learners increase significantly today.^[9] Most of employed learners explain that their main reason for working is to pay tuition and living expenses. On average, working learners spend almost 9 hours a day working while enrolled. It means that students spend more hours for working rather than studying.^[53] The state has affected on various aspects of their study especially on the process of teaching and learning. This issue becomes a concern to find out a teaching learning strategy suitable for working learners. Promoting independent learning for EFL working learners is considered to be one of the alternative ways to assist employed learners comprehending materials.^[14] This paper outlines a frame work of independent learning in the context of important issues such as student-teacher roles, the role of information and communications technology (ICT), and student's internal factors in teaching and learning for working learners. This paper also elaborates the impacts of independent learning for working students.

Keywords: independent learning, working learners, information and communication technology, learning process, EFL

1 INTRODUCTION

For decades, the prevalent conception of an undergraduate college student in Indonesia has been the full-time student who enrolls in a four-year college immediately after graduating from high school. However, the fact today that there are greatly outnumbered working learners: students who balance learning in college with earning money.^[9] On average, employed students spend almost 9 hours a day working while enrolled. The rise of working students should become educators' concern as teaching strategies are supposed to be different from the full-time students.

Firstly, most of employed students spend more time at working place rather than at campus. There are some private universities in Indonesia open classes for part-time students. The class usually starts after work hours around 06.30 p.m. and it finishes at 09.30 p.m. On the average, working students only spend three hours at campus.

Secondly, the main issues occurred is working shift schedule. Some of the students often come late for class or skip class due to their working shift. It may give a great effect to their academic performance.

Either to blame their condition or to reduce an academic standard grade is not recommended to solve these issues since it can cause negative effect in the future.^[9] Understanding these issues may help

institution leaders and policy makers craft policies to help students balance their need and desire to work with their academic priorities.

Working learners mostly who are the EFL learners need to expose themselves in English environment as much as possible. This condition cannot be achieved merely using traditional teaching learning. Therefore, lecturers should find creative strategies to cope with the situation.^[17]

This article argues that integrating technology into the EFL classroom may help address the above limitations by providing EFL working learners opportunities to be exposed to the target language in a more authentic and contextualized way and, at the same time, to afford them opportunities to use the target language for real life purposes in limited time (Wiburg & Butler-Pascoe, 2003).

This article outlines the ideas of working learners and their academic performance. It also subsequently discusses about the role of educators and the strategies of independent learning for EFL working students, and lastly this article provide an example of how technology can be integrated into the EFL working learner classroom to overcome limitations identified earlier.

2. EFL WORKING LEARNERS

In the 21st century students need to pursue college to gain a foothold and prosper in the job

market.^[52] Employment during school can have both negative and positive effects on students' academic performance.^[5] Since students spent working might substitute for time spent on academic, social, leisure, or extracurricular activities. This can negatively affect academic performance, social integration, or student well-being.^[5] Hence, Working can aid in the development of soft skills that have value in both academic and vocational settings, such as communication, problem-solving, adaptability, responsibility, organization, and working under pressure.

Working learners are students who balance learning in college with earning money. There are various reasons for being working students. However, the most paramount reason is that these working learners are from lower socioeconomic status. They earn money to support their family as well as to finance their tuition.

EFL working learners are working students who focus their study in learning English as a foreign language. Many of the adult EFL learners lack appropriate basic English skills when they pursue college.^[20] In addition, they tend to face tremendous financial distress that often times prevent them from concentrating on their studies.^[20] Teaching them can be a significant challenge for the teacher and curriculum developer.^[4]

There are several areas of importance that students must gain competence in when learning English^[4] as a second language in an international school. The first two areas of language use were labelled by Cummins (1979) as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), or the language of social interaction, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), or the language required for success in academic disciplines.^[4] BICS is the language of the playground, of talking with one's friends, of shopping, and will usually be acquired in informal settings, e.g. in the playground, school corridors, or with friends.^[4] Teachers need to use different ways of organizing the classroom, designing a curriculum, and presenting lessons to gain these two competences.

3 INDEPENDENT LEARNING

The term of Independent Learning can mean different things to many people.^[0] According to Knight, Independent Learning implies going it alone, unaided (1996).^[0] Independent Learning is also interpreted as an isolated and solitary activity, in practice selfish and self-centred and undertaken without support or the need of tutors (Allan et al, 1996).^[0] While, Academic discourse abounds with synonyms to describe

'independent learning' as 'autonomous learning, independent study, self-directed learning, student initiated learning project orientation, discovery and inquiry, teaching for thinking, learning to learn, self-instruction and lifelong learning' (Kesten, 1987).^[0]

In context adult learning, Canon argues that principles of the andragogical model of adult education are more applicable to higher education practices that seek to promote Independent Learning (2001).^[3] Candy (1991) defines Independent Learning as a process, a method and a philosophy of education in which a student acquires knowledge by his or her own efforts and develops the ability for inquiry and critical evaluation.^[3] It includes freedom of choice in determining those objectives, within the limits of a given project or program and with the aid of a faculty adviser and it places increased educational responsibility on the student for the achieving of objectives and for the value of the goals.^[3]

Based on the definition, it clearly states that the responsibility for learning in higher education is on students aided by teaching staff and defined by the limits and objectives of the programme.

3.1 Characteristics of Independent Learning

Gardner et al. (2007) highlight how independent learning areas bring together students with different abilities or those who are at different stages in their education.^[6] This is reminiscent of Jackson and Montgomery's (2008) discovery that independent learning areas can provide students with the opportunity to meet others who are studying the same subject but are in a different year group. In a similar vein, Christie and Everitt (2007) draw attention to the way in which their Learning-Zone can bring together students from different colleges and make them 'feel part of a university community'. Frequently, those seated at computers are either working individually or in their own peer group consisting of a small number of tightly-knit friends. In short the characteristics of independent learning are:

- a. focusing on the process and not simply the goal.
- b. more flexible for different levels of intelligence.
- c. encouraging students to be responsible for own learning.

3.2 Strategy in Developing Independent Learning for Working Learners^[16]

As working increasingly becomes commonplace among college students, the relationship between working and college educational outcomes have potentially important implications for the design and implementation of academic programs. Gardner et al. (2007) laud independent learning areas as environments that reinforce 'productive attitudes to work, lifelong learning and social inclusion' and the achievement of goals that result from 'social collaboration on many levels'.

Jackson (2005) suggests that 'ICT gives students access to a much wider variety of resources and this is both a blessing and a curse'. Most students use the Web extensively, rely on search engines (especially Google) and often ignore subject gateways and databases. Some students lack evaluative and critical skills and accept as accurate and reliable whatever they see on the Web. Some of the Web may not be appropriate resource to meet the need and relevant material for papers.

Therefore, the role of teachers and academics is not only to facilitate familiarity with technology, but there is also a need to formulate a method to gain the teaching learning goal. Related to the conditions of working learners who have a little time spends at campus, teachers can take advantage of ICT. ICT is a good environment for EFL learners to expose themselves as frequent as possible to English. The following strategy summarizes the activities to structure learning as described by Kesten and identifies the teacher's role in this process.

Table 1. Activities to Structured Learning Mapped to Student and Teacher Responsibilities

Activities to Structure Learning	Student Learner	Teacher
Diagnose Needs	Understand own values	Help student identify Values
Set Objectives	Describe learning outcomes	Help student identify potential learning outcomes
Identify learning style	Identify preferred learning style	Help student determine their learning style. Know your teaching style
Use resources	Choose appropriate resources	Help student identify resources
Assess learning	Provide honest assessment	Facilitate assessment process

It is noted here that Kesten points out that teacher's role to diagnose needs, set objectives of a course, identify learning style, and learning resources. Students can participate in discussing with the teacher about the preferred learning style and kinds of assessments. These two components are important to motivate students' independent learning. It is also necessary that teachers know instructional strategies or inputs such as inquiry, discovery, cooperative learning, etc. in order to impart independent learning in their subject area.

4 THE ROLE OF ICT FOR WORKING LEARNERS

As technology becomes more and more embedded in people life, it is imperative to provide learners with relevant and contemporary experiences that allow them to successfully engage with technology to support their educational life. Technology becomes one of important aspects for working learners for it can be a tool to assist them who have a limited time at campus.

However, there are some issues related to the use of technology that need to be considered for teachers. Walker and Moen (2000) said that young people 'gravitate towards the World Wide Web . . . as a primary source to resolve their information problems or for other purposes' and concluded that, for the 'networked generation', it has become 'the desired method of locating information'. It is true that more and more students only rely on one Website to find information and do not have enough information about the quality of sources they visit. It can be a teacher as a facilitator to give sufficient information to their students about the reputable sources.

A number of studies believe that ICT plays a helpful role in independent learning mostly for working learners because it:

- a. As put by (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, 1999) cited in Volman (2005), there is a common belief that the use of ICTs in education contributes to a more constructivist learning and an increase in activity and greater responsibility of students. This limits the role of the teacher to supporting, advising, and coaching students rather than merely transmitting knowledge.

- b. Butler's (2012) definition: "a wide array of web-based applications which allow users to collaboratively build content and communicate with others across the world." Moreover, these

emerging technologies can help students become engaged learners and active contributors to the learning process (Shihab, 2008).

4 CONCLUSIONS

Working students have become commonplace on college campuses. Working while studying can improve soft skills, such as: time efficiency, communication, problem solving ability, and personal responsibility. On the other hand, time spent working may crowd out time spent on studies. Either to blame their condition or to reduce an academic standard grade is not recommended to solve these issues since it can cause negative effect in the future.

Promoting independent learning and using technology effectively will profoundly increase the learner's capacity to access learning without depending on anyone. Students have to work by themselves independently. Many students are following this principle and also getting success, but some students are not able to cope up with independent learning and they need a little extra support. Therefore, the role of teachers and academics is not only to facilitate familiarity with technology, but there is also a need to formulate a method to gain the teaching learning goals.

Kesten (1987) describes activities to structure learning mapped to student and teacher responsibilities. Based on the activities described teacher can be a facilitator for their students to conduct independent learning. It is also necessary that teachers know instructional strategies or inputs such as inquiry, discovery, cooperative learning, etc. in order to impart independent learning in their subject area.

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