

## THE POWER OF LANGUAGE LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM TO ENGLISH MASTERY OF AN EFL LEARNER

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Article Info	Abstract
<b>Article History</b> Received: August 2022 Revised: September 2022 Published: October 2022	<i>Language learners have come to an era in which studying outside the classroom is well-facilitated by technology development. Along with this advancement, there is a wider chance to learn things outside the classroom, including language. In the Indonesian context, many students have done wider explorations to improve their English exposure through various activities. Each of these activities contributes to students' language skills mastery. Despite its potential benefits to language learning, many language learners assume that these beyond the classroom activities have no significant purpose in language learning. Therefore, this case study research was conducted to explore beyond the classroom activities that can be used as a learning strategy for students to improve their English skills. The subject of the research was an Indonesian student who studied at Macquarie University, Australia. The subject was chosen as the representative of a successful EFL learner as she received a full scholarship for her study. The data of this research was collected through an in-depth interview. The interview was analyzed and categorized based on each language skill. The findings showed that online games, e-books, and movies are some of the prominent learning tools of Language Learning Beyond the Classroom (LLBC). These learning tools are powerful in improving the four English skills by enhancing language exposure and learner's autonomy.</i>
<b>Keywords</b> Language learning; Learning strategies; Learner's autonomy;	

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### INTRODUCTION

Technology development has enabled language learners to optimize beyond classroom learning. Language learners have come to an era in which studying outside the classroom is well-facilitated by technology development. Along with this advancement, there is a wider chance to learn things outside the classroom, including language. The development of computer-mediated networks, for example, has enabled people all around the world to collaborate in learning the language beyond the classroom (Kuure, 2011). This development also positively affects the way people learn a language in terms of opening wider opportunities to experience various chances of learning outside the classroom. Instead of having in-class learning as the main ecology of a language learner, out-of-classroom learning appears to be a promising ecology to learn a language. In ecology, there is a dynamic interaction between language users and the environment (Kramsch and Steffensen, 2008) which then creates extensive learning opportunities (Barron, 2006). The key term 'interaction' plays an important role in determining if the learning opportunities provided by a particular environment can be learning resources for a language learner. A learner who can maximally use accessible resources while interacting with the physical and social world owns an affordance (van Lier, 2004). In affordance, an individual holds independent control to take a possible action provided by the environment (McGrenere & Ho, cited in Palfreyman 2014). The awareness that learners have to

be in charge of their learning is called autonomy (Holec, 1981). In building autonomy, a language learner has to be voluntarily engaged in active learning activities even without any supervision (Reinhart, 2022).

In the Indonesian context, the phenomenon of learning a language, English in particular, beyond the classroom is gaining popularity. Learners might have applied the various LLBC strategies, but they might not be fully aware of how these strategies can benefit their learning in the long run. Some studies have evaluated the use of learning management systems and other media as the tool to support student language learning development (e.g. Rahman et al., 2018; Wijayani & Weny, 2017). However, studies looking into LLBC in Indonesian context, especially those focusing on strategies, are rarely found. To fill this gap, therefore, the current study aims to investigate the type of LLBC activities that might be powerful in improving learners' English skills mastery and promoting learner autonomy. Investigating these strategies can be beneficial to support learners to be successful in their English language learning.

### **Ecological Perspective of Language Learning**

As learning context does not automatically emerge to a passive receiver, learners should be active to create meaningful activities together in a particular environment (van Lier, 2000). It means that interaction should happen among learners in an environment so that the learning process can happen. This process does not depend on the amount of available input but on the opportunities taken to create a meaningful activity for learning. What can be an affordance for learners depends on what learners want to achieve and what is useful for them (van Lier, 2000). For instance, as the internet can be useful for some learners in terms of providing learning resources, it can be their affordance. In addition, learners should also figure out their niche, an environment that is "mediated by language" (Novawan et al., 2022) where learners find plenty of support in learning. In a niche, learners belong to a habitat where they can find language affordances. In this environment, learners find plenty of support to learn. This supportive environment provides flexibility for learners in terms of independency so that these learners can be autonomous (Lee, 1998).

### **Language Learning Beyond the Classroom**

Out-of-class activities provide a wider opportunity to overcome the limitation of in-class learning (Nunan and Richard, 2015). Along with the development of technology nowadays, learners achieve more options for learning activities. Some of the language learning tools are movies, books, and games.

#### *Movies*

King (2002) believes that the movie not only gives a refreshing experience for language learners but also a good source of colloquial English in a real-life context. Learners are exposed to native speakers' use of slang and dialects which they cannot get in class. In addition, watching a movie also positively influences learners' listening comprehension if it is exposed in the long run (Danan, 2004).

#### *Books*

Books can be a medium beyond classroom learning because learners can easily read them anywhere, particularly with the rapid development of online books. Reading many books regularly, known as Extensive Reading, is believed as a powerful methodology to gain reading skills. In Extensive Reading, learners are involved in over-learning words which enables them to identify vocabularies in the text automatically (Day and Bramford, 1998). Besides, incidental vocabulary learning also occurs while learners apply Extensive Reading (Huckin and Coady, 1999). A large vocabulary bank helps learners to comprehend the text better.

#### 3. Games

Several researchers put bigger attention to the gaming environment and notice that playing is a potential way to learn L2 (Gee, 2003; Peterson, 2006). A game that has great potency in stimulus language learning is a role-playing game. Role-playing games allow learners to explore their new identity through a unique combination of play and authenticity (Blake, 2011). By playing games, learners' verbal behaviors are influenced by their digital self-presentation (Yee and Baileson, 2007). It explains that learners' way of playing affects the way they learn. Role-playing games allow learners to be confident in their ability to solve a problem.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This research applied a case study approach as the research design. A case study is generally employed in qualitative research due to its ability to capture an in-depth understanding of a participant's experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The characteristics of a case study include: 1) it focuses on a case or a phenomenon; 2) it allows the researcher to get an in-depth understanding of an issue; and 3) it allows various data collection methods such as interviews, observations, and collection of documents (Thomas, 2021). The particular case explored in the current study was language learning beyond the classroom. The researchers were interested in understanding the participant's views on learner autonomy in EFL learning outside the classroom and exploring the key characteristics of the subject's learning style and its implication for her learning success.

### **Participant**

The participant of this research was Dewi (pseudonym), a lecturer in an Indonesian public university. When this research was conducted, Dewi was an international student doing her Master's degree at Macquarie University, Australia. She was chosen in this study as an example of a successful English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner because she could optimize beyond the classroom learning activities. Dewi did this so that she could use English as a medium of interaction and in her academic life. As an EFL learner, Dewi can be categorized as a successful learner as she can implement her English to real-world practices, studying in particular.

### **Instruments**

The data of this research was collected through an unstructured interview with the subject. The researchers used an unstructured interview as it allows for flexibility in terms of questioning. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) argue that an unstructured interview is useful especially when "the researcher does not know enough about a phenomenon" (p.111). Therefore, the questions in an unstructured interview can be generated spontaneously as a result of the conversation with the interviewee (Patton, 2002). The initial questions asked at the beginning of the interview were 'How long have you learned English?' and 'How did you become a successful English language learner?'. As the answers to these two questions progressed, the researcher developed other questions spontaneously during the interview process. The interview was conducted in a natural setting, in Dewi's boarding house for convenience. The interview was recorded using a voice recorder.

### **Data Analysis**

After the interview was transcribed, the researchers began the data analysis. Qualitative data analysis can be done inductively, deductively, or a combination of both. In an inductive analysis, the researcher begins with smaller chunks or units of data which are categorized together according to their similarity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Then a name is assigned to represent each category. On the other hand, in a deductive analysis categories are pre-

determined - a framework or a list of categories is used by the researcher to cluster the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the current study, the researchers analyzed the data deductively. The researcher clustered Dewi's learning strategies based on the four skills of English: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Figure 1 displays how the categories are linked with the data.

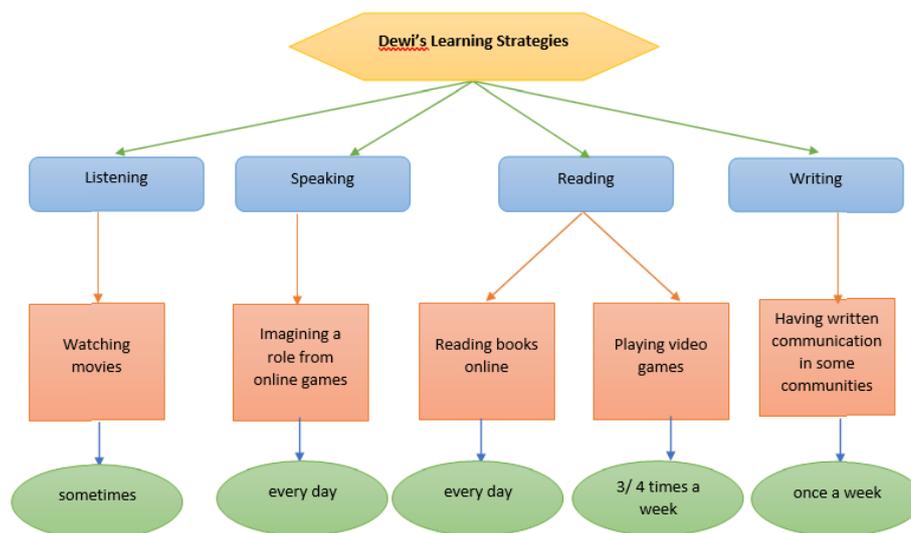


Figure 1. Categories of learning strategies

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings showed that Dewi applied various learning strategies for learning beyond the classroom. Most of these strategies were done regularly. While Dewi believed that “*watching movies [helped her] practice [her] listening*” which was in line with what Danan (2004) had previously found. Watching movies allows learners to be exposed to spoken input. Her way of gaining the second skill, speaking, was closely related to her interest in reading books and playing online games. The type of game she believed to affect her English mastery is a role-playing game. The joy of playing the games did not necessarily stop when she finished the game. A similar thing happened with the book she read. That made her imagination keep going in her everyday life. She loved imagining herself being a certain role in the game or the book. That imagination encouraged her to use English, just like the scenes in the play or book.

### Extract 1

*Dewi: Because all books and game that I read are English, somehow, I just felt it's wrong to play a character in my head. I play a story in my head I felt it wrong creating a story in other language my case it's Indonesian. Because all the books and the original story that I took inspiration from they are English. So somehow when I create a character it's stick in my head when I somehow play their dialogue in English. That's how I started. Before I go to sleep or usually when I am walking from my boarding house to university, it took 30 minutes. It's boring 30 minutes without imagining and in my head. I play a lot of character in my books and my games I have played. I am playing character when I speak English in that character. Now you can say it's game little opera little kid here in my head.*

From extract 1, Dewi explained that she applied two learning strategies: reading books and playing online games. She read online books every day and played online games three-four

times a week. Dewi explained that she always read three to four books every day. It was easy for her to get the books online because they were widely available so that she could easily download and then read them. By looking at the frequency and number of books she read, Dewi applied Extensive Reading (ER) in her daily routine. Learners who applied to ER technique, read an abundant amount of books based on their language level for general purposes (Day and Bramford, 2004). By implementing this reading technique, learners can improve their vocabulary, sentence structure, word meaning, and word forms (Delfi & Yamat, 2017).

Dewi's interest in playing online games also gave a positive influence on her reading skill. In a role-playing game, for example, she needed to understand some readings and analyze the readings to win a game. The previous researchers that investigated the power of the game text in language learning are Sylvén and Sundqvist. Through their research on L2 learning in out-of-class contexts, they concluded that game text has the potential to be a learning facilitator in L2 learning (Sylvén and Sundqvist, 2012). In Dewi's case, these game texts are helping her in learning English as well.

#### Extract 2

*Dewi: Aa basically there are a lot of things you can learn from games. Especially there are many kinds of games. Usually unknown for non-gamers but however there are many games you can call it as role playing game. Basically you play the game where you are a character in the game. So it's not like when you just shoot whatever it is on screen or you just whatever action games it's like it is game you play a story so it's like reading a book but not just reading, you become a character in the book, in the story so because it's a story oriented games, it's there are lot of text or reading required and analysis required and in order to success in this game you have to read carefully, you have to analyze and not just reading because without that, without reading and analyzing you can't finish the game so basically they are the ways I learn English after all.*

Different from action games, the type of games played by Dewi provided stimulus for her to improve her reading skill. By playing a role-playing game, she acquired many vocabularies from the readings and practiced her reading comprehension by analyzing the readings. As a dedicated game player, Dewi tried to finish the game she played. Dewi highlighted the importance of analyzing the text, not just reading it. Through these activities, Dewi claimed that she has learned English. It shows that the comprehensive understanding through reading and analyzing the text is essential for the gamer to finish the game. At the same time, they have trained themselves to boost their reading skill through game text comprehension. Games are the combination of images, actions, goals, and dialogue (Gee, 2012). Players need to understand all of these elements as a context.

Dewi's exercise to improve her writing skill was closely related to books and games. By joining some communities on social media, Dewi had an opportunity to communicate with other people to discuss the book or the movie. Most of the time, she had great discussions with these people because they shared the same joy and excitement of the book they had read or the game they had played. She mentioned that sometimes she got tips to win the game from this community. Apperly & Walsh (2012) use the term "paratexts" to refer to these game-related texts. By reading and writing these texts, gamers are enriched with literacy experiences that will bring some positive impact for their intellectual growth (Gee & Hayes, 2011).

#### Extract 3

*Dewi : I join some group in Facebook basically groups like us who love some kinds of games uhm...basically in that group in website, it's like a game and book sometimes. Community, it's like when we are discussing for example for books a comic every week a*

*new chapter in a comic new chapter of comic was released on internet and we are discussing it like crazy. Hahaha discussing theory and any kind of discussion and also it movie, I also join aaa join community and movie and we are like discussing like for example new episodes of Game of Throne, discussing all the theory all the craziness beside the episodes like that and also like game, we are discussing we are discussing the methods the ways it's cheat the way success in the game. So...yes, there is. There are many community I join.*

Besides having fun in the LLBC activities, Dewi was active in taking part in the communities related to the game she played, the book she read, and the movie she watched. Murray and Fujishima (2013) claim that learner's autonomy can be built with the help of a supportive social environment. Through the communities she joined, Dewi seemed to have some exciting activities together. Dewi also said that she even joined some different communities to be able to join the discussions that were related to her interest. Communicating with people in these communities helped Dewi to write in English. Nevertheless, Dewi thought that this activity was not much affecting her academic writing skill. These stress-free conversations in the communities only helped her sharpen her general English writing.

#### Extract 4

*Dewi : I want to good in writing and not just in writing but in academic writing because it's difficult in my opinion. Just normal writing I think I can do this but when academic writing it's different and I think that's my next in learning that's my current goal right now.*

In short, Dewi had three affordances in learning the language: movies, games, and books. Her niche was the community she joined based on books she read and games she played, and movies she watched. Through her communities, she belonged to a place where she could connect with people with similar interests. Murray and Fujiyama (2013) explains that in a learning community, people gather to accomplish a specific goal. In Dewi's context, she and other gamers, book readers, and movie enthusiasts are involved in the communities in which their autonomies were developed. In these community-based activities, the autonomous learning involved is also community-based (Chik, 2014). In addition, Dewi also expanded her affordance and niche by creating an imaginary world inside her head where she could freely be the character she wanted. In this activity, she also showed that she had done autonomous learning to improve her speaking skill as in the imaginary world, she also spoke in English.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, LLBC provides many alternatives for learners to learn a language. Learners have the control to determine which activities can be their affordance and which environment can be their niche. Dewi for example used movies, games, and books as mediums to learn the language. She was successful in building her ecology to learn a language. The interaction that she built was not necessarily limited by the mediums. She broadened it by actively joining some different communities and using English to communicate within those communities. Dewi also built an ecology inside her head by using imagination. LLBC may offer plenty of learning opportunities, but it does not give any guarantees that everyone can use it. It mainly depends on the language learners' ability to find their affordance and niche to build their learning ecology. Once learners can maximize their affordance and niche, they automatically become autonomous learners.

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