

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes background of study, research problem, research objectives, significance of the study, scope and limitation of this study and definitions of the key terms.

1.1. Background

Independent learning is an educational approach where learners take primary responsibility for managing and progressing their own academic development (Benson, 2017b; Little, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Specifically, it involves learners setting their own objectives, choosing strategies, monitoring their performance, and assessing outcomes independently, without constant teacher supervision (Candy, 1991; Zimmerman, 2002). In language education, autonomous learners engage in activities beyond the classroom, such as reading authentic materials and practicing speaking, that significantly enhance motivation and language performance (Little, 2020; Meyer & others, 2023; Reinders & White, 2016). This aligns with the concept of Self-Regulated Learning (SRL), which emphasizes goal-setting, strategic learning, self-monitoring, and reflection as critical to academic success.

Despite its benefits, fostering independent learning presents challenges, particularly in the digital age. Many learners struggle with self-regulation, time management, and intrinsic motivation amid distractions and the prevalence of instant digital solutions that can discourage effortful engagement (Bjork & Bjork, 2020; Deng et al., 2024). Moreover, Theories like Desirable Difficulties indicate that cognitively demanding tasks improve long-term mastery, whereas Cognitive Load Theory warns that over-reliance on automated aids may reduce motivation and critical engagement (Paas & van Merriënboer, 2020; Skulmowski & Xu, 2022; Sweller, 1988)

Furthermore, Independent learning is especially vital in foreign language acquisition, where proficiency gains depend on sustained, meaningful exposure to comprehensible input and output practice (Krashen 1985; Swain, 1985) For

instance, learners show better outcomes when they frequently initiate learning activities themselves (Indrayani, 2024; Reinders & White, 2016; Ushioda, 2011). Moreover, motivation and metacognitive awareness, understanding one's cognitive strategies are essential to plan, monitor, and evaluate learning effectively (Schraw, 1994). However, excessive dependence on external tools, including digital aids, may inhibit development of critical thinking and memory-based strategies (Risko & Gilbert, 2016; Schmidt, 2023; Sparrow et al., 2011).

In recent years, one of the most significant innovations in education is Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools such as Grammarly and ChatGPT. AI integration in language education offers numerous affordances such as automated grammar correction, instant feedback, and vocabulary assistance (Dwivedi, 2023). These tools can improve writing accuracy, clarity, and learner confidence (Song & Song, 2023). Nonetheless, growing dependency on AI raises concerns about diminishing learners' ability to think critically and learn independently, potentially weakening autonomy (Benson, 2017b; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991). For example, Zhai (2024) categorizes AI dependency into cognitive, decision-making, ethical, and technical types, all of which potentially undermine learner independence.

Recent studies highlight concerns about students' increasing dependency on AI tools in education, emphasizing cognitive risks linked to excessive reliance on AI dialogue systems (Zhai, 2024). Many students accept AI-generated work without reflection, reducing their engagement in critical thinking and independent decision-making. Zhai (2024) further categorizes this dependency into four types: cognitive dependency (using AI for analysis), decision-making dependency (allowing AI to replace judgment), ethical dependency (using AI content without full understanding), and technical dependency (feeling unable to complete tasks without AI). These reveal complex threats to student autonomy.

Other studies, such as Liando (2025), acknowledge AI tools such as ChatGPT and Grammarly enhance motivation, confidence, and academic writing quality for EFL learners but caution that overreliance could impede independent learning. Despite these insights, most prior studies focus on theoretical or cognitive aspects and lack deep exploration of students' actual experiences and perceptions.

This issue becomes increasingly significant under Indonesia's Merdeka Belajar policy, which promotes learner autonomy by encouraging students to become independent, critical, and creative thinkers (Anwar, 2023; Dirgahayu & Rachmawati, 2022; Nugroho, 2021). Since digital skills are very important in today's education, it is essential to examine how students engage with AI, specifically, whether it functions as a meaningful support for their learning, or conversely, leads to a reduction in their autonomy as learners.

Despite the growing emphasis on fostering independence and digital literacy in education, empirical research remains limited regarding how learners perceive their dependence on AI and how such reliance affects their independent learning in English. Gaining insight into students' perceptions is essential for developing informed guidelines that promote responsible and pedagogically sound AI use in educational settings.

These issues are not merely theoretical; they are observable in real educational contexts. To obtain initial insights into how students actually employ AI in their English learning activities, the researcher conducted short interviews with five English Education students at a university in Gresik, aiming to explore real-world practices, identify emerging patterns, and understand students' experiences with AI-enhanced learning (J. W.; C. J. D. Creswell, 2018; Merriam, 2016; Yin, 2018). Student 1 admitted frequent use of Grammarly and ChatGPT to assist with writing, admitting a sense of over-reliance on such tools. In contrast, Student 2, preferred to write independently first, using AI only for feedback and extra ideas, and noted that many peers tend to copy AI output without editing. Student 3 stated that she uses ChatGPT primarily for brainstorming and expanding vocabulary but tries not to rely on it too much so her writing stays authentic. Student 4 said she uses Grammarly only to polish grammar, as she believes constant dependence on AI reduces her learning effort and makes her lazy in vocabulary development. Meanwhile, Student 5 admitted using AI extensively, even for full assignment drafts, as it saves time, though she is aware that it makes her less confident in writing without AI support. These varied responses reveal a variety of student behaviors, from responsible use to over-reliance and highlight the urgent need to investigate students' perceptions

of their dependency on AI, as well as how it affects their independence in learning English.

1.2. Focus of the Research

The main focus of this study is to examine how students' dependency on AI-based tools relates to their level of independent learning. Specifically, the research investigates the ways in which students understand and utilize AI as part of their learning process whether they consider it a supportive resource that enhances their learning or treat it as a replacement for their own cognitive effort and independent engagement.

Furthermore, understanding these perceptions is important because it sheds light on how AI impacts learners' autonomy and self-regulation, which are critical for effective language acquisition. By examining both positive and negative views, the research can help educators balance the benefits and potential drawbacks of AI integration in language education.

The quantitative focus of this study lies in measuring the level of students' dependency on AI and their tendencies toward independent learning. A survey instrument is used to identify AI usage patterns, the types of dependency that emerge (cognitive, decision-making, ethical, and technical as proposed by Zhai (2024), and how these patterns relate to their independent learning behaviors. Moreover, the qualitative focus is directed toward an in-depth exploration of students' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding the use of AI in English language learning. This study also highlights how students utilize AI in their daily academic activities, how they negotiate between AI assistance and their own effort, and how they interpret the potential positive and negative impacts of AI use on their independent learning.

The overall aim of this study is to explore how students' dependence on AI tools influences their behaviors and attitudes toward independent learning in English language education. By integrating quantitative measurements with qualitative insights, this research seeks to present a comprehensive understanding of both the supportive roles and the potential drawbacks of AI use. The findings are

expected to provide meaningful guidance for educators and policymakers in optimizing AI integration while still promoting learner autonomy.

1.3. Scope of The Problem

The scope of this study is focused exclusively on university students enrolled in the English Language Education program at a University of Muhammadiyah Gresik. This research focuses solely on examining students' perceptions regarding the use of AI-based tools such as ChatGPT and Grammarly in their English language learning process.

The investigation is limited to exploring the relationship between students' dependency on AI and their tendencies toward independent learning. The study does not aim to measure learning outcomes or language proficiency development; rather, it concentrates on how students interpret, utilize, and rely on AI tools in completing academic tasks.

Data are limited to what can be obtained through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the depth of information depends on participants' willingness to share their experiences and is subject to the researcher's interpretive perspective. Moreover, the study is bounded by the specific AI tools that students commonly use; consequently, the findings may not be generalizable to other AI technologies or future advancements.

1.4. Research Question

1. To what extent does students' dependence on AI tools significantly affect their independent learning abilities in English language learning?
2. How do university students perceive the benefits and challenges of using AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Grammarly) in enhancing their English learning experiences and autonomy?

1.5. Objective of The Research

1. To investigate the impact of students' dependence on AI tools on their independent learning abilities in English language learning.

2. To explore students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of using AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Grammarly) in enhancing their English learning experiences and autonomy.

1.6. Significance of The Research

This research is significant both theoretically and practically in the field of English language learning in the digital era. Theoretically, it adds to the existing research by focusing on students' views about their dependence on AI, an issue that has not been widely studied through real student experiences. Understanding how students see AI as either helping or limiting their independence can support further research on learner autonomy in EFL contexts.

Practically, the results of this study can help teachers, curriculum developers, and education stakeholders create better strategies that encourage critical thinking and responsible AI use. By identifying the types and causes of AI dependency, such as cognitive, ethical, technical, or decision-making. This study supports efforts to improve digital literacy and self-directed learning. It also supports the goals of Indonesia's *Merdeka Belajar* program, which promotes creativity, independence, and 21st-century skills. Finally, this research provides preliminary data that can inform future studies exploring the long-term effects of AI on learner autonomy, metacognitive development, and classroom practices.

1.7. Definition of The Key Term

This section provides the operational definitions of several key terms used in this study to ensure clarity and consistency throughout the thesis.

a. AI Dependency

Refers to the degree to which students rely on artificial intelligence applications to support various stages of their learning process. In the context of this study, such dependency includes four main domains as described by Zhai (2024): the cognitive, decision-making, ethical, technical, and motivational domains. Cognitive dependency arises when students use AI to understand materials, generate ideas, or complete academic tasks. Decision-making dependency occurs when students use AI as the basis for determining learning choices, such

as selecting strategies, answers, or task structures. Ethical dependency is related to the inappropriate use of AI, for example when students bypass the process of independent learning. Technical dependency refers to students' reliance on AI's technological capabilities, which are perceived as faster or more accurate than their own learning efforts. Meanwhile, motivational dependency emerges when students feel unmotivated to engage in academic tasks without AI assistance, reducing intrinsic motivation and perseverance. These five aspects form the basis for assessing how AI influences students' learning patterns and their level of autonomy.

b. Independent Learning

Refers to the learner's capacity to manage, regulate, and evaluate their learning process independently. This concept includes the ability to plan learning activities, choose appropriate strategies, monitor progress, and reflect on learning outcomes (Benson, 2017; Little, 1991). In the context of this study, independent learning is viewed not only as a technical ability but also as an indicator of students' awareness and responsibility in the English learning process. Independent learning becomes an important aspect to consider when students use AI, because such technology may strengthen or reduce their initiative in managing their own learning.

c. AI Tools

Refer to a range of digital applications and platforms such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, QuillBot, and similar tools that provide automatic support in the form of feedback, linguistic assistance, material explanation, or content generation. These tools function as automated systems that assist learners in improving linguistic accuracy, developing ideas, and refining written or spoken output (Li & Vuono, 2019). In this study, these tools are understood as technologies that can accelerate access to information, assist language production, and facilitate comprehension. However, AI tools may also influence students' learning patterns, particularly in how they process information, complete assignments, and make decisions in academic activities. Therefore,

understanding the role of AI tools is essential to assess how they contribute to students' independent learning.

d. Students' Perception

Refers to the way learners interpret, evaluate, and give meaning to the use of AI in English language learning. This perception includes students' views regarding the benefits, functions, ease of use, risks, and impact of AI on their learning process. Students' perception is a fundamental construct within the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), particularly concerning *perceived usefulness* and *perceived ease of use*, which directly influence learners' acceptance and behavioral intention to use educational technologies (Davis, 1989). In this study, students' perception covers their subjective experiences when using AI, both positive such as improved understanding and efficiency and negative such as feelings of dependency, reduced learning effort, or ethical concerns. Students' perception is key to understanding how AI shapes their learning process and level of independence.

e. EFL Learners

Refers to students who study English as a foreign language in educational settings where English is not used as a medium of daily communication. In the Indonesian context, EFL learners are university students who study English for academic, professional, and communication purposes, but are not naturally exposed to English in everyday life. According to Brown (2014) and Richards (2015), such learners typically rely on instructional support and additional resources to compensate for limited natural exposure to the target language. This condition positions AI as an additional resource that may help or even change the way they learn. Therefore, understanding the characteristics of EFL learners is important to assess how they respond to AI use and how such technology affects their independent learning.