USING AN INDEPENDENT LEARNING LOG FOR LISTENING SKILL LEARNING AMONG FIRST-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract: Students freshly admitted to the English Language and Literature study program has various levels of English proficiency. To maximize their listening skills, independent learning log was administered to the students to support their learning activities outside classroom. This action research was aimed at investigating the benefits of the log for the students' listening skills, and for the students' English learning in general. Data was collected from a listening class comprising 42 students. Each student was given an independent learning log and had to complete the log outside the classroom. Classroom discussions during the log completion were carried out in several meetings throughout the semester. In addition, the independent learning reflection was conducted at the last week of the semester. The findings indicate that the benefits of using the independent learning log for students were self-paced learning, more personalized choices, and more peer collaboration. Specifically, students became more self-directed and autonomous. Furthermore, they shared learning resources, forming a class-based learning community. Collectively, all of these benefit their future learning.

Keywords: Independent learning log, listening skills, self-directed and autonomous learning, learning community

INTRODUCTION

The inaugural year of university education is widely acknowledged as a formidable period for students (Rahayu & Arianti, 2020), marked by an array of challenges arising from the transition to a collegiate environment. New students navigate unfamiliar academic landscapes, including lecture systems, distinct learning methodologies, and more demanding course materials (Sivarajah et al., 2019). The complexity intensifies for those hailing from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Bibi, Wang, Ghaffari, & Iqbal, 2018). Coping with these intricacies necessitates effective methodologies to foster student resilience, independence, and active participation (Magolda, 2020).

Among the foundational skills mandated for first-year students of English Language and Literature is listening proficiency. Mastery of this skill involves comprehension of accents, pronunciation nuances, grammatical structures, and vocabulary interpretation (Listiyaningsih, 2017). Recognized as an efficient learning method throughout the education continuum (Zachary & Fain, 2022), listening skills assume a pivotal role in university-level

studies, encompassing various stages and components (Kayalar & Kayalar, 2017). Success in learning endeavors hinges on the cultivation of these skills, not only in responsive and imitative capacities but also in the ability to answer comprehensive questions.

The contemporary educational landscape has witnessed an upsurge in the popularity of relational listening, emphasizing the importance of the overall learning environment (Rinaldi, 2021). This underscores the significance of effective listening skills as a linchpin for academic development (Hwang et al., 2017). Acknowledging this, the study at hand aims to explore and enhance listening skills through the integration of learning logs, a method employed for independent learning and reflective practice (Haghighi et al., 2019). Learning logs, akin to personalized learning journals, serve as a conduit for students to reflect on their learning experiences and responses to assignments (Hixson, Ravitz, & Whisman, 2012). This approach fosters the development of independent learners who can articulate and comprehend their cognitive processes (Scheer, Noweski, & Meinel, 2012). The success of this method pivots on the active participation of students (Buckley & Doyle, 2016), providing a platform for them to reflect independently on their learning experiences.

This research draws on the findings of various studies related to listening skills and learning logs. Akbar and Sofian's (2020) work, for instance, investigates the improvement of listening comprehension using the Bottom-Up technique, demonstrating enhanced student performance in understanding listening content and vocabulary. Ariani, Arifin, and Riyanti (2019) explore language learning strategies in listening, revealing that successful language learners employ directed/selective attention, planning and evaluation, problem-solving, and mental translation strategies. Haidir et al. (2017) investigate how Junior High School students utilize the internet for independent English learning, emphasizing positive views and effective application of self-directed learning in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary acquisition. Kurniawan, Bunau, and Wardah (2021) focus on the effectiveness of Rosetta Stone Language Learning Software in teaching listening comprehension, highlighting significant differences in pre-test and post-test scores. Setiawati et al. (2023) explore seventh-grade students' self-efficacy in listening to English, emphasizing the importance of high self-efficacy in positively influencing English listening abilities. Wulandari, Susilawati, and Wardah (2022) contribute to the development of listening comprehension materials, supporting the "Bahasa Inggris for the Eleventh-grade" textbook.

Despite the rich body of research on learning logs and diaries, particularly in extensive listening, notable gaps persist, particularly concerning the Indonesian context and sample sizes. Existing studies, such as those by Kemp (2010), Alm (2013), Andini and Burhanuddin (2022), and Mayangsari et al. (2021), while insightful, exhibit limitations in respondent numbers or contextual relevance. This research endeavors to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive study with a significantly larger participant pool from Indonesia, offering a nuanced understanding of the interplay between learning logs, listening skills, and the academic context.

This study contributes to the broader body of research on the use of learning logs or diaries for extensive listening, particularly within the Indonesian context. Existing studies often feature limited sample sizes, whereas this research addresses this gap by including a significantly larger participant pool (Andini & Burhanuddin, 2022; Mayangsari et al., 2021). Furthermore, the utilization of independent learning logs as a pedagogical tool is a noteworthy addition to the literature on language education. The scalability of this methodology, as evidenced by its successful implementation with a larger cohort, suggests its applicability beyond individual contexts. This expansion of research with a considerable

participant pool offers valuable insights into the generalizability and effectiveness of independent learning logs.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach to ascertain the advantages of integrating independent learning logs in augmenting students' listening proficiency. The research adopted a classroom-based methodology, which involves intervening in students' learning within a classroom context to optimize learning outcomes (Park et al., 2022). The intervention, in this instance, was facilitated by the instructor responsible for the listening course. The study encompassed 42 first-year students enrolled in the English Language and Literature study program, all of whom were undertaking a listening skills course titled "Factual and Dialogic Listening" – the initial segment of the three-part listening skills curriculum within the study program.

The investigation spanned the odd semester of the academic year 2021/2022 and encompassed three key stages: instrument preparation, implementation, and reflection. The process of preparing and executing the independent learning log involved various stages conducted over a single semester spanning 14 weeks. The timeline detailing the design, implementation, and reflection phases of the independent learning log is presented in the table below, adapted from Cazan (2012).

Table 1. The Timeline for the Classroom-based Research

Stages	Week
Designing the independent learning log	Before semester starts
Implementing the learning log	
Disseminating the independent learning log	Week 1
Classroom discussion	Week 4, 6, 10, 13
Recommended listening list development	Week 2 -13
Independent learning log submission	Week 7 and Week 14
Reflection	Week 14

The independent learning log was designed to monitor students' listening practices outside the classroom. The learning log consists of several parts: the topic or theme and the focus of the listening materials; the sources where the listening materials are obtained which can be both online or printed sources; students' learning evidence where students write the language points they have learned; and the recommendation section where students write their suggestion to other students whether to use the source. The full parts of the log are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Parts of the learning Log

Column	Part	Remarks
1	Day/Date	The date when the independent learning takes place
2	Topic	The general theme of the learning, e.g. students can write "Holiday" if the listening material is related to holidaying
3	Personal aims	What the student wants to achieve by listening or learning the material
4	Materials used	The name of the material, e.g. the title of the YouTube video and the link, or the title of the book whose recording is used by the student

Column	Part	Remarks
5	Evidence of learning	What student knows or can do as a result of accessing the material

Guidelines

Prior to the implementation of the learning log, a discussion of those components was conducted, ensuring that students know precisely what to do independently. During the discussion, a model of filling out the log was given and then the final version of the independent learning log is then agreed.

The students were encouraged to complete the log gradually throughout the semester. The minimum number of entries was twice a week or 26 in total for a semester. To reduce the burden of finding the listening materials, the students were allowed to exchange materials which could be selected from the recommended list made by the class. The list was added by the students based on their personal recommendation given in the log. The independent learning log was collected once every four weeks to monitor the progress of each student. The four-week term is also used to identify students' possible difficulties encountered during the independent listening practice. The difficulties are shared in the classroom and the possible solutions are offered. In addition, this term is also used to modify some parts of the independent log to suit the learning needs of the students. The final log is in the end submitted with the complete independent learning practice for the whole semester.

The very last stage is the reflection stage. In this stage students are required to recall all the process by answering the questions in the reflection form. The questions cover about the feeling towards the task, the challenges they face, the learning development they have made, and future implementation of this task. The students described the changes of their feeling at the beginning of accomplishing the task and at the end of the task. The data collected from classroom activities and the form and then were analyzed concerning the benefits for the students, and particularly the advancement of their listening skills and their future learning.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the outcomes of the research aimed at investigating the efficacy of employing an independent learning log to enhance listening skills among first-year university students enrolled in the English Language and Literature program. The study was conducted at a state university in Surabaya, focusing on 42 students who exhibited varying levels of English proficiency upon admission. The primary objective was to explore the impact of the independent learning log on students' listening skills and their broader English language learning experiences.

Result

A total of 42 students actively participated in the research, engaging in weekly classroom discussions, and submitting reflective logs at the conclusion of the semester. The analysis of the data derived from these activities revealed three noteworthy benefits perceived by the participants: self-paced learning, personalized learning materials and activities, and collaborative learning opportunities.

Self-Paced Learning Activity

The utilization of the independent learning log empowered students to dictate the timing of their listening practice, fostering a self-paced learning environment. Participants reported engaging with listening materials at their convenience, with some choosing weekends, nights, or intervals between classes. Remarkably, students exceeded the minimum reported entries, showcasing an enthusiasm for self-directed learning beyond the specified requirements.

Personalized Learning Activities

The independent learning log facilitated personalized learning experiences by affording each participant the autonomy to select listening material topics, language levels, and recording lengths. The diverse range of chosen topics spanned daily life issues, success stories, language-related subjects, and sports. Additionally, students freely choose their preferred language proficiency levels, demonstrating flexibility and adaptability in their learning preferences.

Collaborative Learning

A collaborative learning environment emerged as students exchanged listening materials and collectively developed a recommended list of resources. Collaborative efforts extended to addressing challenges faced by peers with weaker listening skills, fostering mutual support and shared learning experiences. Notably, the collaborative dynamics outside the classroom positively influenced the overall learning process within the class.

Discussion

The resonance between the findings of this research and existing literature emphasizes the transformative impact of self-directed and autonomous learning, aligning with the works of Ferede and Gorfu (2008) and Magolda (2020). Participants demonstrated a heightened ability to delineate and pursue their learning objectives, particularly within the sphere of listening skills. The self-paced nature of the independent learning log echoes sentiments expressed in studies emphasizing the pivotal role of personalized and flexible learning environments, as highlighted by Cook and Artino (2016).

Moreover, the participants' newfound self-directedness correlates with the notion that fostering independence in higher education is paramount (Hussin, 2018). The ability to tailor their listening practice schedules to individual preferences, whether during weekends, nights, or between classes, showcases a multifaceted approach to self-regulated learning (SRL). Students not only adhered to the minimum reporting requirements but exceeded expectations, showcasing an intrinsic enthusiasm for self-directed learning beyond the prescribed parameters.

The organic emergence of resource sharing and community building echoes collaborative learning principles advocated by researchers such as Haghighi et al. (2019) and Andini & Burhanuddin (2022). The creation of a recommended listening list and collaborative efforts in addressing challenges contribute to the establishment of a dynamic, class-based learning community. This collaborative dynamic aligns with literature

underscoring the significance of peer support and shared learning experiences, as highlighted by Kemp (2010) and Alm (2013).

Furthermore, the exchange of listening materials and the development of a recommended list underscore the social nature of learning (Wenger, 1998). The collaborative approach, extending beyond the classroom, showcases the communal aspect of knowledge creation and sharing, fostering a learning environment where collective wisdom augments individual efforts. This communal dynamic aligns with the principles of a social constructivist approach to learning, emphasizing the importance of collaboration in knowledge construction (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

The observed positive dynamics within the class-based learning community resonate with research emphasizing the role of community in effective learning environments (Mayangsari et al., 2021). The reduction of fear and anxiety, particularly among students with diverse language levels, mirrors the positive outcomes documented in studies focused on building supportive learning communities (Scheer et al., 2012).

Moreover, the establishment of a class-based learning community can be seen through the lens of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1994). The students' ability to transcend initial apprehensions, engage in collaborative practices, and contribute to shared knowledge reflects transformative learning experiences. The positive atmosphere within the community serves as a catalyst for meaningful dialogue, reflective discourse, and collective growth.

The successful integration of the learning log methodology aligns with previous research showcasing the efficacy of learning logs in promoting independent learning and reflective practices (Box, Box, & Vernikova, 2019; Hussin, 2018). This study further underscores the relevance of learning logs as a tool for identifying and addressing students' learning needs independently. Moreover, the guided discussion and model log filling sessions prior to the implementation of the learning log add a layer of pedagogical scaffolding. This aligns with literature emphasizing the importance of structured guidance in fostering successful implementation of independent learning practices (Boud & Lee, 2005). The deliberate attention to ensuring that students comprehend and adhere to the components of the log contributes to the methodological rigor of the study.

For educators and language instructors, the successful integration of independent learning logs in this study suggests pedagogical implications worth considering. Providing structured guidance and model log-filling sessions, as demonstrated in this research, can enhance the effectiveness of independent learning log implementation. Clear instructions and scaffolding can help students navigate the reflective process and derive maximum benefit from this self-directed learning tool.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In conclusion, this research has shed light on the transformative impact of integrating an independent learning log in enhancing listening skills among first-year university students. The observed positive outcomes, including heightened self-directedness, collaborative learning, and the establishment of a class-based learning community, align with existing literature on effective pedagogical practices. The success of the independent learning log methodology underscores its potential as a scalable and adaptable tool for language educators seeking to enrich the learning experiences of their students. This study suggests

valuable insights into independent learning logs, but future research can enhance our understanding. Long-term effects and sustainability should be explored through longitudinal studies, extending beyond the immediate semester. Investigating the applicability across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts and conducting comparative studies among universities can provide a broader perspective. A mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data with qualitative insights, would offer a comprehensive understanding. Educators may consider personalization within the log framework to cater to different learning preferences and styles. In conclusion, while this study contributes to the evolving discourse on independent learning methodologies, there is ample room for further exploration and refinement. The suggestions provided aim to inspire future research endeavors and guide educators in optimizing the integration of independent learning logs to foster holistic and enduring positive transformations in language learning.

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