



STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF ENHANCING LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH SELF-INITIATED ENGLISH EXPOSURE

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Abstract:

The objective of this descriptive quantitative study is to explore students' experience in self-initiated English exposure and how they reflect on the effects of such exposure to their English language skills. This approach was chosen because of its features that allow for the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data on students' experiences of accessing and using various media for their English learning. This method provides a powerful framework for examining how students reflect on how self-initiated English exposure affects students' language skills. A close-ended questionnaire was distributed to a class grade 11 at a state senior high school in Sidoarjo and 32 students responded to the questionnaire. The key finding shows that for self-initiated English exposure beyond the classroom, students mainly use digital media such as music and movies. The students also agree that such exposure to the media has a discernible impact on their English language skills. Students confirm that their language skills are being more developed with content or exposure that matches the language skills they want to develop, which each student has a different interest. In summary, students' responses highlight that self-initiated English exposure gives a positive impact in enhancing students' language skills by matching appropriate content with the skills that are needed to develop. The findings imply that in ELT, teachers need to encourage more self-initiated activities by giving them prompts for independent learning adhering to the learning objective but still with a certain degree of flexibility on the types of media or mode students can expose themselves to.

Keywords: *English Exposure, Self-Initiated, Student Experience*

1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching and learning in non-English-speaking countries such as Indonesia mainly rely on the ELT classroom. That is to say that students may not have sufficient exposure to the English language outside the class. Given the limited hours of English teaching and learning in Indonesian ELT classrooms, many students take English courses or do their independent learning of English using various sources to develop their English proficiency. Students' effort to develop their English proficiency outside the formal ELT classroom can be considered as self-initiated activities. Insofar as students' competence in language is involved, some major issues have always emerged, one of which is the contributing factor of the process and one of the most definitive factors of students; language competence is the exposure of the target language (Haryanto, 2019). Self-initiated learning refers to the capacity of a person to manage his or her learning plan or schedule, as well as other learning-related factors (Smith, 1982). Self-directed learning can foster transformational learning and the promotion of emancipatory learning and social action (Merriam, 2001). Hence, self-initiated learning activities done by students can offer solutions to this lack of English exposure of Indonesian students learning English.

In self-initiated learning, students can gain competence in language from exposure in their formal activities or environment going way back, as opposed to the traditional belief that students only learn English from school. For some students, the one that



gives greater influence for the overall language competence is informal learning while classroom learning only works as a stimulant (Macloid & Larson, 2011). A study by Alghamdi (2018) found a significant difference in the learning success between those who have self-directed learning and those who do not. This study confirmed similar findings by Reinders and Loewen (2013). Another study highlights that self-directed learning positively impacts students' cognitive presence in blended learning (Geng et al., 2019). Hill et al. (2020) also found that self-directed learning enhances medical students' ability to collaborate, apply knowledge and their meta cognition. Also, self-initiated learning is correlated to learning satisfaction (Hong & Ahn, 2021) and intrinsic motivation for learning (Altinpulluk et al, 2023; Wahyudi et al, 2024; Tohidi et al, 2019). In the context of English learning, YouTube has been reported as a platform used by Taiwanese students to explore culture and more learning resources in their self-directed learning (Hwang & chen, 2019). Learners also face such challenges of self-initiated learning (Muniarti, 2023). In fact, exploration of existing literature suggests that despite the importance of self-directed or self-initiated learning, not many studies have explored what students have done as their self-initiated learning activities. Existing studies have mainly focused on self-initiated learning in the area of teachers' professional development (see Sak, 2024; Harumi, 2023; Tessema & Belihu, 2023; Simegn, 2014). Findings of these previous studies indicate that further studies exploring what students do in their self-initiated learning in the context of Indonesian EFL need to be conducted.

This study intends to investigate the regularity of students' activities in their self-initiated learning and their opinion on the effectiveness. This research aims to deepen the understanding of self-initiated learning's role in students' English proficiency development. With such focus, this study can provide a more thorough understanding of students' attempts to develop English proficiency independently, which may guide future teaching methods and promote an all-encompassing approach to EFL instructions. Ergo, the central research question guiding this research is as follows: "How does self-initiated exposure to English influence the development of English language competence and skills among high school students?"

2. METHOD

This research used a quantitative method to explore students' experiences of self-initiated exposure towards English. Quantitative research method can be defined as testing theory by examining the relationship between variables measured using a research instrument, and the obtained data is analyzed using statistical procedures (Creswell, 2014). This approach was chosen because of its features that allow for systematic collection and analysis of numerical data, which allows for the identification of correlations and patterns within a data set. This method provides a powerful framework for examining how self-initiated English exposure affects students' language competences and skills.



The participants in this study were high school students from one of the public schools in Sidoarjo, specifically focusing on 11th grade in Phase F, with a total of 32 students participating. These students responded to a survey exploring their experiences in attempting to gain exposure to English independently, providing valuable insights into the motivations, methods, and outcomes of their effort by filling questionnaires in the provided google form.

The data were collected through a structured questionnaire that was designed to gather comprehensive information on students' experience of self-initiated English exposure. A set of items aimed to understand the frequency, central tendency, and dispersion of perceived effectiveness on self-performed activities of the students. The collected data was then converted in numeric format tools, which in this study the researcher utilizes Microsoft Excel program. The data then were measured in the frequency, center of usual value, variance, and standard deviation to examine the dispersion or variability of the data. The measured data were then summarized in descriptive statistics to provide the understanding of the data' frequency, central tendency, and dispersion (Simpson, 2015).

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research provide an overview of how students responded to different elements of their self-initiated English learning practice, emphasizing their motivation, frequency, and perceived influence on language proficiency. The table below provides a detailed breakdown of each questionnaire item, including the average, median. Standard deviation of the responses. These figures illustrate the diversity of students' experiences and motivations, as well as broad patterns in their participation in self-initiated learning. Higher averages in some items indicate strong participation in particular activities, while the standard deviations indicate the consistency of these behaviors among all students. This response summary serves as the basis for investigating the frequency with which students participated.

In order to interpret these results, it is essential to understand the data scale used in this questionnaire, which range used is from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "never" and 5 representing "always". Higher average points, typically 4 and above, indicate frequent engagement or strong positive perceptions toward a specific self-initiated learning activity, suggesting that students regularly incorporate the activity in their routine. Points around 3 suggest moderate engagement indicate situational or occasional involvement in the activity, while averages 2 and below indicates infrequent engagement, indicating students rarely incorporate the specific activity into their routine. The median, or the middle value in the dataset, provides insight of typical response. A median of 4 means that half of the questionnaire respondents chose a higher score and half chose a lower one, suggesting that the particular activity is often engaged by a significant portion of students. Standard deviation measures the variability of responses: low standard deviation indicates that most students gave similar answers, while higher standard deviation suggests more diverse perception towards particular activity. This framework for interpreting averages, medians, and standard deviation



provides a clearer understanding of how students manage with self-initiated English exposure and its perceived benefits across the students in the group.

The first part of the questionnaire asks about students' exposure to different media in the English language and how often they interact with it. It looks into the frequency of viewing movies, listening to English language music, and reading books, articles, or stories in the language. These are important types of independent language exposure that can have a big impact on students' language skills development. The information is intended to reveal how frequently students engage in these activities as well as how they perceive them to affect their English vocabulary growth, overall confidence in speaking English, and English comprehension. This section also looks at the perceived effect of writing and speaking in English outside the classroom based on students' experience to students' English language skills. The objective is to comprehend how informal, self-initiated learning supports formal education and advances students' overall development of English language proficiency by looking at these habits.

Table 1 Frequency of Self-Initiated English Learning Activities

No	Question	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
1.	Frequency of reading books, articles, or stories in English	2.625	3	0.72
2.	Frequency of watching films or videos in English	3.125	3	01.09
3.	Frequency of listening to English songs or podcasts	3.938	4	01.06
4.	Frequency of speaking or practicing English outside the classroom	2.938	3	0.93
5.	Frequency of writing in English outside school assignments	2.5	2	0.82

1. Frequency of reading English books, articles, or stories

Students generally read English materials quite frequently, with an average frequency score of 2.625, indicating a regular habit for most participants. The median score of 3 indicates that half of the students read at least as often as the average, indicating that reading is a common habit among the group. There is no significant difference in reading frequency among students, meaning that most engage with English texts regularly. This suggests that reading is seen as a valuable activity for improving their language skills, especially given the relatively consistent reading habits across the groups. The frequency distribution highlights that a large number of students view reading English texts as an important part of their self-initiated learning, with only few students reporting lower engagement.

2. Frequency of watching English-language films or videos

Students reported frequently watching movies or videos in English which is reflected in the relatively high average score of 3.125. The median of 3 indicates



that most students engage with English audiovisual content regularly, with half of the participants watching as much or more than their peers. This suggests that while many students actively use movies and videos as learning tools, some may engage less frequently. The majority of students use these exposure methods to improve their listening skills, comprehension with conversational English, which is often informal and more natural compared to textbook learning.

3. Frequency of listening to English audio such as songs

Listening to English language songs is another common activity, with data showing high frequency of engagement with a score of 3.938. The median score of 4 indicates that many students frequently listen to English language media and the median supports further that most students do so just as often or more often. While most students listen frequently, there is some variation in how often they do so. This suggests that although English music is widely used in the activity, some students may not engage with English songs as consistently as others.

4. Frequency of speaking English outside of class

In terms of speaking English outside of class, with an average score of 2.938, students reported more moderate levels of engagement. Median score of 3, shows that many students practiced speaking, but not as often as other activities such as listening or watching videos. Students also vary in how often they practice speaking English outside of school. Some students may have more opportunities or confidence to engage in conversation, while others may be more reserved or have less opportunity to practice. This trend highlights the need for more real-world opportunities to use English in conversation, as speaking practice is essential for improving fluency and confidence.

5. Frequency of writing in English outside of school assignments

Students also engaged in English writing outside of school, although somewhat less frequently than other activities such as listening and watching English media, as reflected by the average score of 2.5. The median score of 3 shows that half of the students engage in writing as often as the other students, and there is an indicator that writing activities are relatively consistent across the group. This suggests that many students find value in using English in informal settings such as social media. Although writing activities may be less frequent than listening and watching activities, it still plays an important role in strengthening grammar and building vocabulary.

Data on students' self-initiate exposure above provides evidence of a strong desire to engage with the English language through activities such as reading, film viewing, and audio media consumption. These activities facilitate their acquisition and comprehension of the language. This is consistent with the findings of Alghamdi (2018), who discovered that self-directed learners tend to achieve greater success as a result of their proactive engagement with language materials. These students believe that regular, independent exposure to English-language content enhances their proficiency, particularly in reading and listening comprehension. The finding aligns with the conclusions of Reinders and Loewen (2013), who emphasized the value of



autonomy in improving language competence. The majority of students perceive informal speaking practice to be advantageous, despite fluctuations in their confidence in speaking outside the classroom. This is also asserted by Macloid & Larson (2011) that informal learning environments often have a more pronounced impact on language competence than classroom learning. Additionally, writing outside the classroom is regarded as a valuable exercise, further emphasizing the significance of self-initiated learning in developing language skills beyond formal instruction.

The focus of the questionnaire's second section is on how students' academic performance and language comprehension in the classroom are impacted by their self-initiated exposure to English. It investigates how much students believe listening to English-language media, such as songs or videos, improves their comprehension of spoken English and academic texts. This section also examines the impact of speaking practices outside the classroom on students' confidence in their ability to use the English language, which is a crucial component of language learning. This section also aims to find out how students feel that writing in English for non-academic purposes, such as social media, affects their writing abilities. In general, this section explores the advantages and difficulties of how students' independent learning activities support their practical application of English.

Table 2 Perceived Impact of Self-Initiated English Learning Activities

No	Question	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
1.	Perception of reading English materials on reading skill improvement	3.875	4	0.81
2.	Perception of listening to English on comprehension ease	4.25	4	0.77
3.	Confidence from practicing speaking English outside the classroom	3.625	3.5	0.89
4.	Impact of writing in English on writing skill improvement	3.625	3.5	0.72
5.	Self-directed English exposure's impact on understanding school material	3.875	4	0.72

1. Improvement in reading skills due to independent English reading

Most students feel that reading independently can improve their reading ability, as reflected in a high average score of 3.875, strongly believe in the benefits of self-initiated reading with low variation in responses by 0.82 score of deviation. This suggests that students consistently see independent reading as a key factor in improving their reading comprehension and vocabulary. Few students reported little or no benefit, indicating that reading is widely regarded as an effective method for skills enhancement.



2. Improvement in understanding English conversations through media
Students show strong belief that listening to English media such as songs and videos can help them to understand conversations better. Most students find media exposure is useful for improving listening and comprehension skills, indicated by high average scores of 4.25. Median and deviation scores of 4 and 0.77, showed that more than half of the students believe that media can improve their understanding in English conversation. This shows that audiovisual resources are not just entertaining, but it also effectively helps students in language learning and offers such practical exposure to English conversation.
3. Confidence gained from speaking English outside of class
Students feel that speaking in English outside the classroom can help boost their confidence moderately. While many students feel the benefit from speaking practice, not all students can feel the same confidence gains, as indicated by the average score of 3.625. Further confidence improvements in speaking English could be through by increasing opportunities for conversing in English.
4. Improvement in writing skills through independent practice
Students report that writing in English outside of school assignments, such as in social media, can help them improve their writing skills. The average score of 3.625 reflects positive sentiment towards the practice of independent writing, and the median shows that half of the students find it helpful as the others. The data also indicate that writing in informal settings is generally regarded as a useful utility for improving English proficiency. This kind of activity allows students to practice grammar and vocabulary and also provide creative space for self-expression in English, making it a valuable component of self-initiated learning.
5. Better understanding of school material due to Independent English exposure
Students generally agree that self-initiated learning such as reading or listening to English media can help them understand materials taught better. With a high average score of 3.875 showing that most students find connection between their performance in formal education and their independent learning. Supported by a median of 4, which shows that half of students reported similar or greater benefit. It is also indicated that this belief is widely shared, suggesting that students that engaged in independent learning were more likely in their classroom studies to excel.
The motivation of students to engage in independent English language learning is largely driven by a sense of autonomy and the relaxed atmosphere they experience outside the classroom. This enhances their motivation and comfort, which in turn encourages them to take the initiative to learn. This is consistent with the findings of Merriam (2001), who emphasized that self-directed learning is conducive to transformational growth and autonomy in learners. Furthermore, students' positive responses to the high impact of self-directed learning toward their improved language skills show their satisfaction toward self-directed learning activities. This is consistent with the findings of Hong and Ahn (2021), which demonstrated a positive correlation between self-directed learning and learning satisfaction. These findings also align with



those of Geng et al. (2019), who observed that self-directed learning has a positive impact on cognitive presence and self-management. These findings collectively illustrate how students' proactive pursuit of learning opportunities outside the confines of formal instruction contributes to both personal satisfaction and the advancement of their English proficiency.

Students perceive that self-directed learning can facilitate the enhancement of their overall English skills. However, they demonstrate a proclivity for teacher-guided learning, which suggests a nuanced perspective on independent learning. This finding is consistent with the results of Hong and Ahn (2021), who discovered a correlation between self-directed learning and learning satisfaction. This suggests that students recognize the value of self-directed learning, but may feel more secure with structured guidance. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with those of Alghamdi (2018) and Reinders & Loewen (2013), who underscored the substantial influence of self-directed learning on academic achievement. Although students recognize the potential of self-directed learning, integrating teacher support and independent strategies could enhance their proficiency and satisfaction even further.

The third section of the questionnaire investigates why students are learning English and how they feel about it, especially in relation to their goals for the future. It delves into how much pressure there is on students to get better at English so they can take advantage of future opportunities, like moving up their careers or going to college. This section also looks at their interest in English-language media, such as books, music, and movies, which can be used as informal language study aids and sources of entertainment. The information also shows how much students prefer independent study over teacher-guided instruction, with an emphasis on how at ease or pressured they feel in each of these settings. It also explores the difficulties students face in scheduling English study time outside of regular school hours, which may play a significant role in their overall language development.

Table 3 Motivations for Self-Initiated English Learning

No	Question	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
1.	Desire to enhance English skills for future opportunities	4.063	4.5	1.18
2.	Interest in English-speaking cultures and entertainment	3.938	4	0.93
3.	Desire to communicate in English with friends or others	3.75	3	0.93
4.	Relaxation in self-directed English learning without teacher pressure	3.25	3	0.77

1. Desire to improve English for future opportunities

With an average score of 4.063, suggest that students were highly motivated to improve their language skills in order to achieve academic success or career



advancements. While some students are strongly driven by this desire or reasoning, the overall sentiment is factual that English proficiency is a critical asset for future opportunities such as applying for scholarships. Most students believe that working on their skill in gaining proficiency in English would open doors of opportunities in the future, as shown by the high median score of 4.5.

2. Interest in English-language entertainment

Reflected by an average score of 3.938, students show high interest in English language culture and entertainment, such as films, songs, and books or novels. English language media is a major factor in students' engagement with the language, likely because it makes more enjoyable and immersive learning, as reflected in high scores or average. The median of 4 supports this by showing that more than half of the students are equally or more interested in using English as an entertainment purpose. It is also indicated that some students may engage less frequently or feel less connected to English media, while the overall interest is widespread.

3. Desire to communicate with others in English

Many students reported a communication desire with peers in English. As reflected by the average score of 3.75, which indicates that English is not just a tool for academic success, but also useful for social interaction. As shown by the median of 3, half of the students feel just as strongly or more about using English to interact with others. Suggested by standard deviation of 0.93, students differ somewhat in their willingness or confidence to communicate using English, with some students possibly feeling more self-conscious about speaking. Nonetheless, the data shows that English is seen as a valuable skill for students to broaden social interaction.

4. Relaxation during self-study compared to teacher-guided learning

Students generally feel more relaxed when they are studying English independently compared to learning in teacher-guided settings, indicated by an average score of 3.25. Most students prefer the flexibility and pressureless associated with self-initiated learning. As reflected by the median score of 3, and deviation score of 0.77, half of the students feel equally or more relaxed than their peers in regarding independent studying, it is also fairly consistent across the students with few students being particularly stressed by independent study. This suggests that self-initiated learning environments allow students to engage with English at their own pace, resulting in a comfortable and perhaps more effective way to learn for many students.

Data also show positive motivation toward self-directed learning. This section aligns with studies conducted by Altinpulluk et al (2023), Wahyudi et al (2024), Tohidi et al (2019) who found that self-directed learning has consistently been shown to foster better learner motivation. Highlights that self-directed learning encourages students to take control of their own learning, leading to increased motivation, creativity, and effective engagement. Students collectively emphasize, when learners are empowered to control their own learning, they tend to develop greater motivation and achieve more bright learning outcomes.



Despite the aforementioned positive impacts of self-initiated learning, students also reported on their difficulties, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Challenges in Self-Initiated English Learning

No	Question	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
1.	Difficulty in finding time for English study outside school	3.063	3	0.77
2.	Lack of confidence in practicing English with others	3.438	3	0.63
3.	Insufficient resources for independent English study	3	3	0.89

1. Difficulty finding time for self-study

Students reported moderate difficulty in finding time for self-study, as reflected by the average score of 3.063. Half of the students experience this challenge as frequently as others. The data also show that this is a common issue faced by most students, with relatively low variation in the data indicated deviation score of 0.77. This states that time management as the potential barrier for students to achieve more effective self-learning, which highlights the need for strategies that help students on their schedules integrated with English practice.

2. Confidence when practicing English with others

Students often feel a lack of confidence when practicing English activities with others, as reflected in the moderate average score of 3.438. Half of the students feel similarly or less confident, as shown by the median score of 3. The low standard deviation of 0.63 also suggests that this feeling is consistent across most of the students, which indicates that lack of confidence is a common issue. Hence, it points to the need for supportive environments where students are able to practice English without worrying of judgment for making mistakes. Increased practice chances and peer feedback support could help alleviate this confidence gap.

3. Lack of resources for self-initiated English learning

Many students reported that they do not have enough resources for self-initiated English learning, such as English books, internet access, or other educational materials. The data average score of 3 shows a moderate level of resource deficiency. The median of 3 suggests that half of the students face the same issue to a similar extent. It is also shown by 0.89 deviation score, that this problem is widespread among students, which highlights the need for better access to learning tools. Students need to be introduced to engaging and interactive gamification learning media that can be found on the internet, so that they can utilize it for more effective independent study.

Students reported common challenges in engaging self-initiated learning, such as difficulty in finding time, lack of confidence and also lack of resources for self-initiated learning. Study conducted by Muniarti (2023) revealed different challenges, such as



distractions from social media, time constraints, and difficulty in maintaining consistency. Despite differences mentioned, it still concluded the fact that challenges for students in engaging self-initiated learning is inevitable. Hence teacher or guardian guidance remains important as a support to motivate students.

Students actively participate in a variety of English-language exposure activities, like reading, watching videos, and listening to music, all of which greatly enhance their language and comprehension abilities. Self-initiated learning is seen favorably by many students, especially when it comes to enhancing their writing, speaking, and listening abilities. However, students' comfort levels when speaking English outside the classroom vary. Even though they understand the importance of self-initiated learning, obstacles like time restraints and resource shortages frequently impede their advancement. Students have a strong interest in English-language media, are driven to get better at the language for upcoming opportunities, and prefer a more laid-back, self-initiated learning atmosphere. Many students still value teacher guidance, though, and believe that the best way to improve language skills is to combine formal instruction with independent learning. Time management, resource accessibility, and confidence continue to be important variables affecting the effectiveness of self-initiated English learning.

The findings provide valuable insights of how self-initiated exposure to English influences students' language competence and skills. Overall, the data show that students who are actively engaged in English language activities outside the classroom such as reading, listening, speaking, and writing perceive these experiences to be beneficial to their English proficiency development. This is consistent with the notion that self-initiated learning takes a transformative role in language acquisition (Macloid & Larson, 2011; Merriam, 2001) because it fosters both skills improvement and confidence through real-world practice.

In responses to the research question, the result demonstrates that self-initiated exposure to English does, in fact, enhance students' language proficiency, which addresses the research question. For instance, students indicate that writing in English, even on social media, enhanced their writing fluency, while watching videos and listening to English-language music augmented their comprehension and conversational abilities. Additionally, students reported feeling more confident speaking English outside the classroom, which is pivotal for improving language proficiency.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on questionnaire data points, students generally indicated that they were motivated to learn English independently because of a mix of practical benefits, personal interests, and future aspirations. Many students recognized that engaging in English language learning outside of school, such as reading, listening, and writing, had a positive impact on their language skills and confidence. However, while some students are comfortable with and motivated by the flexibility of independent study, others prefer structured instruction from a teacher. Challenges such as limited resources,



time constraints, and lack of confidence in talking to others also affected independent study efforts. Overall, there is a strong desire among students to improve their English language skills, driven by personal goals, enjoyment of English-speaking cultures, and academic success.

This research, however, highlights challenges, such as limited resources and time constraints, which may hinder students' self-initiated learning efforts. Despite the aforementioned challenges, students' self-motivation and enjoyment of English-language media appear to facilitate their independence.

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