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**Thesis**  
**DEVELOPING AUTONOMY IN SECONDARY  
SCHOOL LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

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## **Zadání DP**

Prohlašuji, že jsem práci vypracoval/a samostatně s použitím uvedené literatury a zdrojů informací.

*V Plzni dne 24. června 2013*

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## ABSTRACT

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The thesis is focused on learner autonomy. The theoretical part of this thesis deals with the expression autonomy and a wide range of issues connected with it. In the theory, the role of learners and their teachers in autonomy are included. In addition, various learning strategies and styles are introduced in the thesis. The research related to this thesis was realized as an interview with secondary school students. The data were gathered and analyzed separately at first, but significant attention was paid to the comparison of answers given by two different groups of students. The biggest differences between the students with the best marks and the students with the worst marks from English was founded in relation to their attitude towards English, in the preferences of learning strategies or in their dependence on the teacher. Finally, the possible impact of the results on teaching and learning is discussed.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The topic chosen for this thesis is learner autonomy. One of the main reasons for choosing it was that although it is relatively a young concept, it can have a significant role in the learning process. Learner autonomy is based on the learners. It allows them to make their own decisions and at the same time it allows them to realize the responsibility of all decisions they really make. Besides that, learner autonomy includes a lot of issues that can be beneficial for the students, for their teachers and also for the whole learning process.

Learner autonomy can be one of the essential issues concerning students' motivation. It is claimed that an autonomous learner is a motivated learner, mainly because these students are free in making decisions. In addition, they are allowed to choose their own way how to deal with some specific tasks which they have to fulfill to reach required goal. These ways are individual learning styles or learning strategies which are sometimes neglected in the learning process.

It is necessary to deal with learner autonomy in the learning process, because even if it is possible to think that the expression "autonomy" means "alone" or "just on one's own", it is not true. In fact, there is one more person who is linked with learner autonomy – a teacher. Teachers are responsible for presenting and promoting learner autonomy and they act as resource persons and (mainly) counselors.

The thesis is focused on clarification of the most significant issues connected with learner autonomy and setting their importance for learners and the process of learning itself. The thesis introduces the basic theoretical background of the topic and answers the questions regarding positive impact of learner autonomy on all participants of learning.

The thesis is divided into two main parts – the theoretical background and the research (the results of the research). At first, the theoretical part introduces basic information about the term autonomy, gives some definitions and explains significance of learner autonomy. Then, benefits which emerge from learner autonomy are described and types of learner autonomy and autonomous learner are described. The second part of theory deals with the teacher's role in learner autonomy. Firstly teachers of autonomous learner are described and then concrete roles of teachers in learner autonomy are discussed. The third part is concentrated on learning styles and their classifications. The role of a teacher in learning



styles is briefly introduced in this part of the thesis. The last part of the theoretical background deals with language learning strategies – their evaluation, factors that affect them and the classification. A part is focused on motivation as one of the basic pillars of both learning process and learner autonomy.

After the theoretical background, information about the research is given. At first, there is a description of the research methodology which discusses methods chosen for the research. The following chapter introduces the results gained through the research and they are followed by commentaries. The chapter named Implication presents implications for teaching – recommendations and suggestions for teachers or learners according to the results of the research. There are also introduced limitations of the research – why the research and results cannot be considered universal. Last, there are suggestions for further research.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical part of the thesis focuses on issues closely connected with students' autonomy. At first definitions and significance of learner autonomy are introduced. This part also includes approaches to learner autonomy and types of learner autonomy as well as benefits which emerge from learner autonomy. In the next part, the attention is paid to teachers' role in learner autonomy. Even if the teachers' role in learner autonomy could seem as something useless, it is on the contrary – it is fact that is mostly discussed in this section. The next section reflects learning styles which are also important in learner autonomy. The last section presents various strategies which learners could use for their learning and which could be really convenient for them.

The idea of autonomy in language learning originated in the late 1960s and flowed from the social and ideological changes in that period of time (Benson, 2001). Gremo & Rilley (1995 as cited in Benson, 2001) claimed that the rise of autonomy in learning corresponded to an ideological shift away from consumerism and materialism towards emphasis given to the meaning and value of personal experience, personal freedom or quality of life.

**Definition of autonomy.** There exist more than one definition which describes learner autonomy. One of the most known is the definition given by Holec (1981). In his definition, autonomy is “an ability to take charge of one's own learning” (p. 3). Holec (1981) specifies that “to take charge of one's own learning” means to have and hold the responsibility for all decisions concerning all aspects of the learning. Following list of these aspects, Holec (1981) created according to suggestions of Dienneide (1971). These aspects are: concretely determining the objectives, defining the progressions and contents, selecting methods and techniques that will be used. The next are the monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly speaking and evaluating what has been acquired.

To his basic definition, Holec (1981) adds that this “ability” is not unborn matter. In fact, the ability must be acquired by formal learning, which goes through “systematic and deliberate way” (p. 3). Another definition, but quite similar, of learner autonomy was designed by Benson (2001). He characterizes it as “the capacity to take control of one's own learning, largely because the construct of control appears to be more open to investigation than the constructs of ‘charge’ or ‘responsibility’ “ (p. 47).

Little (1991) sees autonomy as a capacity for detachment, critical reflection and making decisions, and independent action. It makes presumptions that learners will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the learning process and the content of one's own learning. In his later work, Little (2007; as cited in Benson). describes learner autonomy in language learning: "Learner autonomy is the product of an interactive process in which the teacher gradually enlarges the scope of her learners' autonomy by gradually allowing them more control of the process and product of their learning" (p. 26).

**Significance of learner autonomy.** According to Little (2008), empirical research in social psychology showed that autonomy is one of the basic human needs. Deci (1995 as cited in Little) an autonomy is also connected with freedom to do actions on a learner's own. Little (2008) adds that autonomy is linked with motivation, mainly the intrinsic. The intrinsic motivation comes out from the acceptance of the responsibility of one's own learning. Autonomy also helps students to learn and develop their abilities in self-management in learning process. Autonomous learners are more motivated. Their learning becomes more effective and efficient. This is important, because in that case, learners will be able to apply their knowledge also in the situations that do not occur only in the class, but learners would use the language also in the real situation (Little, 2008).

**Benefits.** One of the benefits arising from learner autonomy is that autonomy can be used by learners independently on their age. It is necessary to realize that the autonomy could be influenced by the age and also by their previous experiences. Jiao (2005) summarizes four purposes why teachers should pay higher attention to supporting learner autonomy. The first reason is that learner autonomy helps through enhancing learner motivation to make learning process more effective. This reason consents to Little's concept of autonomy and motivation which have been mentioned before.

Learner autonomy also gives learners opportunity to take into account their needs. These "needs" is often connected with learning styles and strategies that learners prefer. Through learner autonomy, learners can use foreign language also in non-native environment (Jiao, 2005). This could be realized for example during searching for appropriate materials or information which their need for their learning. Jiao (2005) also sees benefit that learner autonomy has a lasting influence.

**Types of learner autonomy.** Schwienhorst (2009) designed three types of learner autonomy. These are reflection, interaction and experimentation. It is necessary to realize that all three approaches are interconnected.

**Reflection.** Schwienhorst (2009) demonstrates the importance of the reflection on the example of worker migrants. He claims that also without a teacher is possible to learn foreign language, but only to a certain degree. Moreover there is quite huge risk that learners without any feedback and corrections will learn the language with many mistakes, which would be hard to eliminate. Concerning learning languages, reflection is often associated with the ability to “plan, monitor and evaluate one’s [language] learning as a process and product” (p. 93).

**Interaction.** Interaction is related to improvisation. Schwienhorst (2009) states that “in both language learning and improvisation, one needs to combine existing elements and take risks in putting elements together” (p. 95). Also the environment is very important matter of an interaction, because it is closely linked to the experimentation. Only if the environment is peaceful and without stress, the experimentation could be realized (Schwienhorst, 2009).

**Experimentation.** In language learning is important to experiment. The aim is to get know if learners’ trials and efforts were successful or not. Then it is easier to understand to learners more. The feedback and encouragement is an essential for learners in their experimentation. As important as feedback and encouragement is also learners’ freedom to do experiments. Schwienhorst (2009) claims that: “the learning environment provides a framework for them [learners] to relate their autonomy” (p. 99).

**Approaches to the development of autonomy.** These approaches were designed by Benson (2007) and were divided into six groups. The first is resource-based approach, which is based on and independent interaction with learning materials. The second, technology- based, concerns independence in the field of educational technologies. Learner-based approach is focused on direct production of behavioral and psychological changes of the learner. Another approach is classroom-based, which emphasizes learner to control the planning and evaluating of classroom learning. Curriculum-based approach is connected with the possibility for learner to control the curriculum. Teacher-based approach pays emphasis on the role of teachers and on their education related to the practice and theoretical background of fostering learners autonomy.

**Autonomous learner.** Except the definition of learner autonomy, Holec (1981) also provided definition of an autonomous learner. He described autonomous learner as a person who is able to take a charge of his or her own learning and to take the responsibility of it. It is necessary to add, that Holec (1981) sees autonomy not only as an “ability”, but also as a power or a capacity to do something. Autonomous learners should be able to make their own decisions which flow from the learning process. This learning process could be that in which a person “is or wishes to be involved” (Holec 1981, p. 3).

**Learner development and language learner autonomy.** The development is connected with language strategies that students use (Holec, 1981). According to Chamot & Rubin (1994) the basic components in strategy training of learners are: discovery and discussion of strategies that learners are already using for specific tasks, presentation of new learning strategies by explicitly naming and describing them, modeling of strategies, explaining why and how the strategies can be used, providing extensive practice with authentic tasks and opportunities for students to discuss their own applications of the strategies and their effectiveness.

### **Teachers’ Role in Learner Autonomy**

Learner autonomy is closely connected with a teacher. Although one could think that teachers do not have any role in learner autonomy, it is not true. Teachers’ have quite significant and important position regarding this issue. Roles of teachers in learner autonomy are constantly developing and it is linked to the researches of learner autonomy. Camillieri (1999) states that “teachers unknowingly are already exercising learner autonomy to as smaller or greater degree” (p. 35).

**Teachers of autonomous learners.** As for autonomous students, there exist definitions and characteristics of teachers who teach autonomous learners. According to Camillieri (1999) the most important for teachers of autonomous learners to be aware of self. He conveys that “teacher is aware of her/his own beliefs, attitudes, skills and practices relating to autonomy” (p. 36). The description follows with statement that “she [a teacher] is conscious of her own learning experience and her level of autonomy as learner“ (p. 36).

Another important feature of teachers of autonomous learners is to be able to understand pedagogy and it includes both the practice and the theory. Teachers should be also skilled in management, be able to design classes to make students active in participating. Teachers

should also use various materials, change the activities often and enhance individual learning styles that students prefer (Camilleri, 1999). Last but not least teachers should take care about learning environment and the atmosphere in the class. They should adapt their plans to increase students' motivation (Harmer, 2007).

According to Little (1995) teachers, as well as their learners, have their responsibility in a process of autonomy. He talks about three principles of pedagogy: learner involvement, learner reflection and appropriate language use of target language for the development of learner autonomy.

**Teachers' various roles.** It is important for the learners to know the role of their teacher in their autonomy. As have been stated, autonomous learners take higher responsibility for their work and they are fulfilling their specific needs through choosing various learning strategies, methods, etc. These strategies and methods are also chosen according to their importance to the learners or according to how much are the learners familiar with them. Nevertheless, these facts do not mean that teachers are not needed in the process of learner autonomy.

Because teachers do not fulfill only one, but more different roles in learner autonomy, there are efforts to make their division. Similar distinction of teachers' roles present Camilleri (1999) and Voller (1997). They designed three main roles of teachers of autonomous learners.

Starting with Camilleri's (1999) description "the teacher as a resource person optimizes learning conditions by helping learners be aware of a wide range of alternative strategies, and by, e. g. helping them develop on awareness of learning strategies" (p. 37). Importance of learning strategies in developing learner autonomy is obvious – but at first is necessary to introduce different strategies to students before learners start to use them.

Quite widespread resources for teaching (and learning) foreign languages are textbooks. Sometimes they could cause obstacles. According to Skinner (1996; as cited in Camilleri) teachers should keep themselves away from over-dependence of textbooks and they should (through using of another resources) create more creative and independent relationship with their students. If teachers use textbook as a source, they should not only study and evaluate them, but also choose appropriate parts or exercises and adapt them if it

is needed. E. g. if some exercises are not enough attractive or if they do not increase motivation of learners (Camilleri, 1999).

The second role of teachers participating in learner autonomy is to be a counselor. It includes not only the ability to help student to solve their problems, but teachers also should take into their consideration students needs. It means also help them with developing learning styles that students are familiar with or which are more convenient for them.

Camilleri (1999) sees counselor as a guide or a referee. However, in that role teachers should not push students somewhere they do not feel comfortable. For example, if they prefer some learning styles, teachers could recommend them others styles they think that might be more effective, but they should not demand students to use them. Role of the teacher as a counselor brings difficulty – teachers must realize where the border between individuality of a student and their help lies. Sometimes is quite difficult to help student and at the same time do not interfere to his or her individuality and independence. Camilleri (1999) adds “The learners should have the freedom to decide which alternatives to adopt or reject” (p. 38). While teachers are fulfilling the role of counselor they also need to know whether their help is sufficient, adequate and effective. To get know about it, teachers can ask students to give them feedback at their work as a guide and a referee.

*Scaffolding.* According to Benson (2007) or Harmer (2007) in learner autonomy also scaffolding has its relevant place. Students at first need to know where they have problems or which weaknesses and strengths do they have. Teachers can help them through the scaffolding. Scaffolding provided by teachers can be realized as a feedback through assessing of e. g. learning strategies that students use. Moreover, teachers could also recommend student some learning strategies that are more appropriate. If students do not know any types strategies, teachers can help them to introduce them various types of learning strategies. Through the increasing of learning strategies awareness, autonomous learning could become more effective.

Teachers in learner autonomy are also mainly managers of the activities. For teachers-managers it is important to have good planning skills and to be able to deal with the organization matters. Moreover, concerning learner autonomy, teachers must develop new procedures for the assessment. According to Camilleri (1999) there are two main reasons for it. The first reason is important for the ability to diagnose problems; the second

reason is for the ability to indicate learners' progress. Furthermore, it is also necessary to set criteria for this assessment.

One of the most significant teachers' duties concerning learner autonomy is to introduce learners what the autonomy is and help them to increase their awareness of learner autonomy. It is important because students may know almost nothing about learner autonomy and if they do, their ideas about this issue could differ from each other. Also each student has a bit different idea about what learning in general or the learning process in general is. It could be a problem, because motivation is one of the key issues in learning processes.

**Promoting learner autonomy.** Except increasing awareness about learning autonomy and scaffolding, teachers must to promote it. According to Harmer (2007) promoting learning autonomy is important because some students still think that teachers are the people, who are responsible for their learning. Teachers should show to these students that they have the responsibility and should be able to work autonomously. There are many ways how teachers can promote learner autonomy.

**Thinking about learning.** For promoting learner autonomy it is essential to students understand the term "learner autonomy". Except it, it is also important to students know their learning – their strengths, weaknesses, what they have already know, where their problems are, etc. This information is important also for teachers to learn more about their students and to be able to help them more effectively.

Harmer (2007) suggests that students can write a list of "can do" in relation to their learning. Each statement on the list starts with "I can", e. g. "I can use the present continuous to talk about the future" (p. 397). This is quite good strategy how to let students to think positively about their learning. They often, talking about their skills in some language, start with things they do not know or cannot do.

Scharle & Szabó (2000) suggests a similar activity on how to get know about students. Teachers can make up a questionnaire. This questionnaire could be designed to ask about responsible attitudes (towards learning the foreign language) and has two parts. The first part is aimed on learners themselves, the second part is focused more generally. In the first part, there could be "Sometimes I learn/read things that the teacher did not give as a task" (p. 19). After reading each statement, student should choose one number from the range one to six to show how much does he or her agree with the statement. Other type



of questionnaire recommended by Scharle & Szabó (2000) is that concerning strengths and weakness analysis. Teachers give students the questionnaire with the beginning of statements which student should complete. Scharle & Szabó (2000) presents an example “In foreign language, I find it difficult to...” (p. 21).

In addition, in promoting learner autonomy note-taking can be included. It could be convenient for students to get know how they can take notes or how to do it more effectively. But because note-taking is to some extent matter of an individual and each student does it in a different way, it is not possible to state only one, right way of taking notes. Harmer (2007) adds that “Rather than telling students how to take notes, we should offer them various possibilities for them to choose from” (p. 399). These “various ways” could be spidergrams, webs, point by point writing, etc. The purpose of it is “to get students to select a strategy so they can take responsibility for their own note-taking method [...]” (p. 399).

Students also could create a kind of journal. Regarding learner autonomy, journals’ asset is in that manner, students would think about what and how are they learning (Harmer, 2007). Journals are another way how to promote and enhance learner autonomy. Harmer (2007) states that it is not the only benefit of writing journals, it also “[...] provides good writing practice and helps to improve the student’s general writing skills” (p. 400). Moreover, during the process of writing, students could be quite free to write about their feelings; sometimes it is easier than to share feelings or opinions orally. Journals also bring benefits for teachers – from the individual approach teachers could learn something new about their students. They can also recognize and realize where their students need help.

Journals and their creation could be adapted according to students needs or wishes. They can be public or private; teachers can set their content or design some topics. Teachers can also let students to write freely about what they want, but there is necessary to always set some rules (Harmer, 2007).

### **Learning styles**

Learning styles could be characterized as a way how students individually learn, or try to learn (Ducket & Tatrkowski, 2004). Ducket and his colleague add that a particular learning style employed by a student “includes how they [students] approach learning, experience learning and utilize information” (Duckett & Tatrkowski, 2004, p. 1). Learning

styles are also described as tendencies how a student gains and primarily processes particular information. It is necessary to state that there does not exist only one definition of learning styles and authors might have more or less different attitudes toward them. Vlčková & Lojová (2001) name for example Skehan (2000), Jelínek (1995/1996) or Richards et al. (1996).

Although definitions of learning styles could be somehow different, all learning styles have their typical features. One of the features is that learning styles express the individuality of students and that they could be dependent or independent on consciousness. Learning styles are often (relatively) permanent and could be considered a predisposition of each person. Predisposition could be understood as a way, how students deal with particular tasks or how they solve some problems. Learning styles are influenced by biological, social and psychical matters. Vlčková & Lojová (2001) claim that in general, learning styles are natural for each person and a certain extent of them are formed during students' life.

**Factors affecting learning styles.** Similarly to learning strategies, learning styles are influenced by some factors. These are divided into three groups – internal factors, external factors and innate dispositions. External factors affect learning styles in which prevails affective and personality constituents (Vlčková & Lojová, 2001). These kinds of learning styles are influenced dependently on the environment (e. g. in social context) or the learning context itself. Vlčková also claims that except for the environment, a particular learning style could be related to a particular subject or a teacher.

Into the external factors, it is possible to include pedagogical conditions such as the conception of teaching (traditional, audiolingual, etc.), the curriculum and its level of difficulty, character, range, etc. Other conditions are: class environment, used teaching styles, the way how students are examined and evaluate. Inconsiderable significance also has a relationship among students or among students and their teachers.

Internal factors that influence learning styles are students' previous experiences, their age or current psychical state. One of the most important internal factors is also motivation which plays significant role throughout the whole learning process.

**Approaches to the classification of learning styles.** In classification of learning styles, various approaches are employed. Vlčková & Lojová (2001) give an example of these approaches: Banner's and Rayner's (2000) analytic and holistic approach and Kolb's

(1984) where he connected two dimensions – concrete and abstract thinking and active and reflexive way, how students process gained pieces of information. In addition, Kolb and his colleagues determined four groups of students according to the learning styles they prefer.

**Kolb's classification of learning styles.** One of the well-known approaches was stated by Kolb (1984) who connected two dimensions of thinking – concrete – abstract and active – reflexive ways of processing information. Kolb and his colleagues determined four types of students according to the learning styles they prefer, these are: divergers, convergers, accommodators and assimilators.

Students called “divergers” like small group discussions and brainstorming. They usually like to watch an activity or situation more than be one of its participants. Emphasis in teaching of “divergers” should be concentrated on active experimentation or on engagement of a student in a project. Students included in the group of convergers usually enjoy tasks where there is only one (alternatively the best) solution and students' interest is focused on theoretical field than social sphere. Students need to see a problem from various perspectives before they try to solve it. Accommodators may enjoy planning and facing new challenges in learning. They often rely on their intuition and improvisation, which they use more frequently than accurate analysis. Students often use inductive methods. Teachers should push them to take an active participation in the activities, which should be more interpersonal to be convenient for “assimilators”. These activities are e.g. role playing, discussion.

**Perception (sensory preferences).** Concerning language learning, there is frequently used distinction of learning styles connected with perception. According to this distinction, it is possible to make three groups of students – a visual type, a kinaesthetic type, an audio type.

Visual type-students give their preference to perceive and gain information visually (by their sight) or from visual impulses which means through e.g. some pictures, drawings, graphs. An acquisition of knowledge at of the visual type could be improved by aids based on the use of sight. For example, when teaching vocabulary about body, a teacher could use a picture of a human body and demonstrate the parts of the body on it. Listening can be also adapted for the visual type, e.g. in the form of pictures, in writing these students might enjoy crosswords. (Ducket & Tatrkowski, 2004).

Students who are in group of kinaesthetics and the process of their learning, which includes gathering or memorizing information, is connected with the motions, or, in other words, with some physical activity. It is manifested, for example, by some notes from the lesson written in student's exercise books. However, the notes do not need to make sense or be used in further learning by the student. The writing itself – the movement that was carried out during the writing process is the most important part of these notes. Students of the kinaesthetic type might like to do presentations of some projects, writing into gaps or writing a magazine. During the listening activities kinaesthetic students could draw pictures, related to the audio, etc.

Audio types tend to use auditory perception for gathering, processing and memorizing information or knowledge. Simply put, these students prefer to use listening in the process of learning. These students often read aloud, mainly during individual activities and verbal communication is the easiest way for them. Listening and repeating or filling in exercises according to some audio might be suitable for these students (Ducket & Tatarkowski, 2004).

**Honey's and Mumford's distinction.** Another division of students according to the learning styles that shape their learning was developed by Honey & Mumford (1984) and is connected with Kolb's (Vlčková & Lojová, 2011).

According to this distinction, the reflectors are the students who rely on observation. To be concrete, these students, usually before they try to do something, need to observe it (Honey & Mumford, 1984). For example, these students could observe the activity of their classmates and then they try it on their own. Theorists could be seemed similar to reflectors. But, theorists do not observe their peers; they are dependent on information gathered before they are going to do an activity. They need theoretical background for their further work.

Activists do not need any theoretical knowledge, nor observe others. They just try to do everything by themselves and they learn through the activity (Honey & Mumford, 1984). Students pragmatists are similar to activists by doing the activities rather than studying theoretical background or observing. The difference is, that whereas activists enjoy this "discovery" together with other people, pragmatists try to find some solution or knowledge on their own.

As it was written, Honey's and Mumford's distinction is connected with Kolb, specifically with his model of learning cycle. The mode shows what learners need to make their learning effective. Honey and Mumford (1984) claimed that there is connection between the Kolb's model and their distinction of students divided into four groups according their preferred learning style (presented above).

**Roles of teacher in learning styles.** Teachers have quite a significant role in impacting students' learning styles as well as they do e.g. in students' motivation. It is necessary to claim that teacher's role in learning styles is not related only to learning (and teaching) foreign languages.

At first, teachers should take into the consideration the existence of different learning styles and acknowledge that not all students prefer only one learning style. Because of this, teachers should, during their preparation for lessons and, of course, during the lessons itself, create appropriate conditions for students to be able to use learning styles that they prefer. Teachers should not force students to use learning strategies that they are not familiar with and that are not convenient for them (Vlčková & Lojová, 2001). It is necessary to help students to use and develop learning styles they already use. Teachers can present and recommend them new learning styles, but as it was written, not to push students to use learning styles inconvenient for them.

It is obvious that it is almost impossible to adapt lessons to individual priorities of each student. What teachers can do is to think out activities that could cover as many learning styles as possible and to change these activities often. Teachers could help themselves by using appropriate textbooks.

Teachers should help students to increase their metacognitive consciousness of using learning styles (Vlčková & Lojová, 2001). It means that teachers should, besides other mentioned things, inform students about learning strategies – how to use them, how many learning styles exist, etc. That may help students to find and choose learning styles they could use also in their individual work. Moreover, when increasing students' awareness of learning styles, teachers can make learning much easier.

## **Language Learning Strategies**

Learning strategies are very important for all learners; moreover, they are essential for learner autonomy. Learning strategies are closely connected with learning styles, but whereas learning styles are dependent on learners' predispositions, learning strategies are acquired. It means that learning styles are learners own ways how to deal with various tasks and learning strategies are ways that are artificially created for learners to help them in dealing with the tasks (Vlčková & Lojová 2011).

The term 'strategy' comes from the Greek word 'strategia', which originally meant 'to be able to wage war'. It is therefore a kind of technique or a method, how to reach a certain goal and realize it. Learner strategies are strategies used by learners to acquire, remember and use knowledge (Vlčková & Lojová 2011).

Learning strategies bring a lot of advantages to students, because they make learning simpler, faster and more enjoyable (Cohen 2007). Moreover, learning strategies encourage learning – in an direct and also in indirect way. Another advantage of learning strategies is that students could use them to compensate their deficiencies in learning.

Through using suitable learning strategies, they could be instrumental in the main aim of foreign language learning – the development of communication competencies (O'Malley & Chamot 1990). In addition, learning strategies help to develop all skills in language learning; listening, reading, speaking, writing. However, not all strategies can help to support all these skills. Vlčková & Lojová (2011) add that because the aim of education is to develop learning competencies and use appropriate learning strategies, it is possible to say that strategies are simultaneously aims of education and tools how to reach these aims. Vlčková & Lojová (2011) see an importance of the development of learning competencies and learning strategies mainly in foreign language learning, because after the end of school attendance or a language course, without practicing, students forget the language very fast, so it is essential to teach students also how to learn, not only what they should learn.

According to Cohen's (2007) research other purposes of learning strategies are performing specific tasks and solving specific problems. Except for these matters, Cohen (2007) claims that learning strategies could help "to compensate for a deficit in learning." One of the last purposes Cohen (2007) presents the use of learning strategies as a tool for enhancement of learning.

Learning strategies are connected with concepts of independent (language) learning, individual (language) learning, self-regulation and self-management (Cohen 2007). In addition, the strategies have a significant role in autonomous learning and self-directed learning (Vlčková & Lojová, 2011; Cohen, 2007). It means that students could use the strategies not only for school purposes, but also in their future life. For example, - regarding language learning, students would use the strategies in communication, during real situations. Students could apply the strategies on their own, without any supervision of teachers. Students can control themselves and they are not depended on a teacher's help. As evidenced by this fact, learning strategies are also linked with students' motivation, because students see the significance of learning strategies, which will help him to use a foreign language in their future life.

**Level of consciousness of language strategies.** Learning strategies are divided into the conscious and unconscious ones. The majority of learning strategies are often conscious – if students realize that they use a strategy. There are also strategies that students are not aware of, the unconscious strategies. Sometimes, in the process of automation, consciousness learning strategies could become unconscious.

In addition, Brown et al. (1983) distinguish so called potentially conscious learning strategies. It means strategies that are normally used by students, but they are unconscious of them at first. Lately, students realize using these strategies and they become conscious.

But, there could raise a problem that was drawn by Cohen (2007). He claims that, in order to be named as strategy, a method, technique or process should be identified by learners – that learners should be able to describe it and explain what the strategy includes. Here comes the discrepancy. At first, this statement is contrary to distinguishing conscious and unconscious learning strategies, because if students do not realize the strategy, they cannot describe it. The second problem is that even if students are aware of strategies that they use, some of them are still not able to describe them or explain how they work.

There may be suggestions that if a student is not able to describe the strategy which he or she uses, maybe a teacher could do it. The problem is that a lot of strategies have mental forms, so there is no chance that a teacher could observe them.

However, some authors believe that it is not necessary how the methods, techniques and procedures leading towards the goals are called, but if they are effective (Vlčková &

Lojová 2011). It has been mentioned, sometimes it is almost impossible to describe the learning strategies that students use.

**Evaluation of learning strategies.** Evaluation is quite important, but it could be done only if the strategies are conscious. Then the evaluation helps to choose or encourage the strategies appropriate for each task, because, sometimes student use strategies that in real are not as useful as they could be.

The evaluation is often carried out by students themselves – they think about the effectiveness of the strategy and about strategies suitable for reaching particular goals depending on the kind of the task (Vlčková & Lojová 2011). Teachers could also realize the evaluation of students' strategies, but as it has been written, the most common method of gaining information about the strategies is observation and not all strategies are possible to be observed.

**Factors affecting learning strategies.** Regarding learning strategies there occur a few factors that are related to learning strategies. These factors affect the choice and use of particular strategies and their further effectiveness.

***Previous experiences and practice with learning strategies.*** Because learning strategies can be learned, teachers can (and should) teach and practice them. Although students do not need to use them immediately, they become familiar with them and use them in the future. It mostly depends on a student which learning strategies she or he will choose and use. The practice is important because only then students find how to choose appropriate strategies according to the type of task, and how to use these strategies effectively. All these abilities come with students' experiences with using various strategies. But it is necessary to say that students are able to realize the effectiveness and the function of learning strategies only of the conscious learning strategies.

***Motivation.*** Learning strategies are also in relation with students' motivation. As it has been written, a strategy is something, which helps to reach the goal of a learning process. And one of the most effective features for motivating students is to tell them the goals or aims of their learning. Students should know the goals, not only for being motivated, but also for choosing appropriate strategies which would lead students towards the goal. Students themselves often want to know what and why they have to learn something. Because if students are not sufficiently familiar with the goals or aims of their learning, they could lose their enthusiasm and interest in the learning itself.



Motivation in learning strategies is related to why a student learns a foreign language. The awareness of the purpose of learning a foreign language (e.g. its use in travelling, in further job) is important, because learning strategies are often being used according to the reason for language learning (Vlčková & Lojová 2011).

It is a teacher who plays quite significant role in foresaid issues. Teachers should spend more time explaining purposes of learning in general and of learning particular subject (e. g. foreign language). Moreover, teachers should be able to explain why an activity or particular topic is important for students to learn (Harmer, 2007). Regarding teaching foreign languages at secondary schools – there teachers have an opportunity to show that learning of a second language is not only a necessary evil, but something students could use in common-life situations and also in their free time, while they are watching movies, seeking information on the Internet, during the travelling, etc.

If teachers mention learning strategies and goals, it is necessary to realize that one goal does not equal one strategy. Often, there are tasks that learners could fulfill only through different strategies and their combinations. There are also strategies which are used more often than others (e. g. use of previously acquisitioned knowledge).

One of the factors that may make students more motivated is pleasant environment in the class, a good relationship with students and an importance of success. Unfortunately, learning foreign languages is often accompanied with students' worries of some difficulties or of a failure. Worries do not affect only students' motivation and the results in their education in general, but also the choice and use of learning strategies. The worries associated with foreign language learning (and using) are called 'language anxiety' defined by MacIntyre (1994b) as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (p. 284). MacIntyre (1994b) adds: "In the past few years, research has shown that language anxiety is the specific type of anxiety most closely associated with second language performance" (p. 284).

Some learners are not as successful as their peers and they could feel underestimated and sometimes would give up their efforts and become unmotivated. One of the best ways, how to prevent students from feeling and being uncomfortable with the learning foreign languages is to provide opportunities so each student is able to achieve his or her own success. Again, it should come out from the teacher. It is not necessary to provide it

directly. It is about choosing appropriated methods, activities and creating situations which are challenging for all students who get the change to be successful.

Motivation is an essential feature of education in general. If students enjoy the process of learning and like the activities, it is easier to engage them and enhance their participating in the lesson. There is also another term which is connected with the students' motivation – the curiosity. According to Harmer (2007) “we [teachers] should not underestimate student's natural curiosity” (p. 99). Actually, curiosity is a feature that might help teachers to gain and develop students' motivation from the first time he or she meet them. Harmer (2007) claims that “when students start English for the first time, most are interested (to some extent) to see what it is like” (p. 99).

**Age.** The difference in using and choosing learning strategies in a particular age is connected with experiences in language learning and also with cognitive capacity of each student (Vlčková & Lojová 2011). At first students adopt simpler learning strategies (e. g. memorizing) and then they learn to work with a more complex range of learning strategies. These differences are mostly evident between small children and teenagers (adults). Griffiths (2003) adds that differences between teenagers and adults are not so noticeable.

**Gender.** Cohen (2007) makes reference to the research of Politzer (1983) who reported that female students use social strategies more often than their male classmates. Cohen (2007) also refers to another research study that dealt with language strategies and gender, realized by Oxford and Nyikos (1989; as cited in Cohen). The research, among things, showed “a greater use of three strategy categories [formal practice, general study, input elicitation] by female students” and that “females made a greater use than males of social/communicative/interactional strategies”.

**Students' attitudes and their personality.** In learning strategies, students' attitudes are very important. The attitudes concern education and learning in general, learning foreign languages, the way how they are taught, etc. It is often linked with students' motivation and if the nature of these attitudes is positive or negative. If the attitude is not positive or burden by prejudice, students often do not use the strategies in a high frequency and there is a lack of coordination in language strategies use (Vlčková & Lojová 2011).

Except for the differences caused by age, the use of language strategies also depends on students' personality. More precisely it means the intelligence of students, their natural ability or talent for learning languages, students' prerequisites. Vlčková (2010) states that

the preferences in learning strategies use are also significantly affected by learning styles. Moreover, learning styles often determine the process of the selection of learning strategies.

**Classification of learning strategies.** There are many types of language strategies and they are organized around various classifications. At first it is necessary to design some criteria for sorting the strategies. These criteria are tied to specific branches as psychology, linguistics, pedagogy, etc. (Vlčková & Lojová 2011) The criteria could be general or specific. As Vlčková & Lojová (2011) state, general criteria in learning strategies classification are for example: complexity of learning tasks (Weinstein & Mayer 1986), learning style or learners' typology (Sutter, 1989; Artelt, 2000).

**Oxford's classification.** One of the classification of learning strategies was also designed by R. L. Oxford (1990). One of the advantages of her division is that it is possible to connect each group of strategies with appropriate learning abilities – reading, listening, speaking and writing. Vlčková (2007) sees the advantages in the fact that Oxford included the group of affective and social strategies into her classification of learning strategies. These strategies are often missing in others classifications. Vlčková (2007) adds that affective and social strategies are also often left out from the learning process itself and neither teachers pay the attention to them.

There are two main groups of learning strategies in the Oxford's classification – **direct and indirect strategies**. Direct strategies are related to the learning process and support it in the direct way. These strategies are divided into cognitive, compensatory and memory. On the other hand, indirect learning strategies endorse the learning indirectly; these are metacognitive, affective and social. It is necessary to point out that all of mentioned strategies do not work separately, but they cooperate and sometimes they are overlapping each other.

**Direct learning strategies.** In language learning, the direct strategies acquire the language itself. All strategies included in this group require particular mental processes for being involved in the processing of the language, but not all the strategies work with the language in the same way. However, direct learning strategies help students to understand the information, to remember them and then call them to their mind again (Vlčková, 2007).

The biggest importance concerning the process of remembering and recalling pieces of information have **memory strategies**. With this strategies also dealt Wenden & Rubin

(1987) in their taxonomy and they claim that, “In the case of memorization, attention is paid to the storage and retrieval process” (p. 24). They also state that, “strategies such as drill and repetition, used for practice are the same as memorization strategies” (p. 24). Although it may seem that memory strategies are focused only on vocabulary, their range is much wider. It is mainly because the fact that words are often connected with some associations. Students do not need only to learn the vocabulary, but also connect the word with these mental structures they have already had. This then leads to the automatization and lower risk of forgetting the new words (Vlčková, 2007).

Into memory strategies is possible to include e.g. grouping. During the grouping students avoid the matters which are not linked to each other and make groups according to some criteria. It could be according to a type of word – what part of speech it is (adjective, noun, etc.), what topic it connects with (school, travelling, food, etc.), what function do the words have (complaint, request, disagreement, etc.)

Other example of memory strategies is repetition – structural repetition which is based on forgetting curve. It comes out from the necessity of the repeating the issues in the right time intervals. In this process students should firstly return to what they have learnt before they are going to learn new things.

Student could also use mechanical techniques – tactile techniques which are based on the touching. It means moving or shifting. For example, a student writes some words that he or she has to learn on pieces of paper and then divides them into two groups – words that he or she has already known and the words that he has not learnt yet. After the student remembers a word, he or she puts a piece of paper with the word written on it into the group of words he or she has already learnt. Students could also create something like card index or play memory games with paper cards with particular vocabulary.

**Cognitive strategies** have the essential significance in the learning strategies. Majority of cognitive strategies is based on the use of the language itself, on its processing and its transformation provided by students themselves. In the group of cognitive strategies there are included e. g. deduction and induction. The process of deduction is following – at first students are given by an explanation or some rule in the language and then they make up sentences and structures on which the rules or explanations are applied. In induction, students at first see concrete examples and then they try to think out the rules or explanations on their own (Harmer, 2007). In Rubin’s (1981) classification of cognitive

strategies occur inductive referencing (guessing) and deductive reasoning. Both strategies enable students to use their previous knowledge, but during deductive reasoning they are searching for more general rules or meanings. In inductive referencing students focus their attention on the detail and more specific information. Inductive referencing refers to strategies in which students could use their previous knowledge; deductive reasoning is focused more generally.

Except induction and deduction, students can use the translation which also belongs to the group of cognitive strategies. Translation strategies include translation from the native language to foreign language and vice versa. It is used for understanding and development in all abilities – reading, writing, speaking and listening. Translation is the most useful in the beginning of acquiring and learning foreign language, but it also takes a risk of misapprehensions because of incorrect interpretation of the language or of literal translation. Vlčková (2007) gives an example of confusing phrases for translation into Czech language: You are right; brother-in-law.

Other cognitive strategies are taking notes and summarization. **Summarization** helps to form both output and input in the language and shows if student really understood the point. Lower level students can just design the heading from some article or a text or they can match paragraphs with pictures. Intermediate students can think up the main ideas of the text or single paragraphs on their own. Taking notes is quite an individual matter and one of the basic strategies that students use. This strategy includes writing down the main ideas, short sentence structures or points, semantic maps etc. The advantage is that through taking notes students organize their ideas on their own and it leads into better memorizing and understanding. It also helps to form and strengthen relationship between new knowledge and knowledge that had been already acquired. Vlčková (2007) claims that the problem with taking notes is that a lot of students are not accustomed to it or they do not know, how to do it. Making notes includes writing down the main ideas, short sentence structures or point. She points out the fact that making notes is often realized on higher levels, although it is necessary to develop these strategies also with lower-level students. She suggests that at first (concerning foreign language learning) students can write the notes in their native language or to combine it with foreign language before they become comfortable in taking notes in the foreign language.

The third group in Oxford's (1990) classification is **compensatory strategies**. The most significant pros of compensatory strategies is that they enables students to use foreign language even though they do not have sufficient knowledge of the language. These strategies compensate the lack of knowledge, e.g. in grammar or vocabulary and are suitable for all students regardless their level or abilities in the particular language. Compensatory strategies help students to gain new knowledge, improve their skills and enhance and develop the knowledge they have had. Vlčková (2007) adds that students who often use compensatory strategies in the learning process often communicate and interact better than students who have better knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and do not need to use these strategies.

**Estimating** is one of the compensatory strategies. It is useful mainly during listening and reading activities. Students could estimate the meaning of unknown words, because they are able to identify the meaning of the message or understand other words in the sentence. Or, even though students do not know each word in the message, they are still able to estimate the general meaning or the main information in the message.

Except estimating, the group of compensatory strategies includes also strategies that overcome the lack of students' knowledge and eliminate some limitations which students could have in their language skills. Quite obvious strategy is **asking for help** – usually in speaking, conversation. If students do not know something, they ask for help. Sometimes they need clarification, explanation or a clue. Students can ask teacher, but also their classmates. Students can use mime or gesticulation. Other strategy is **code switching** – if students have a lack of knowledge in some language, they use other language they know better (mainly it is their native language). If a student does not know or is not able to recall a word, he or she replaces it by the word with the same meaning in the other language (Vlčková, 2007).

Regarding the words which students do not know it is possible to use **description** or characterization of the term. For example – a student does not know (or does not remember it) the word “horse”, but he or she needs it for his or her communication purposes. The student could formulate a relative clause to describe it: “it is an animal which has four legs, a tail and eats grass and vegetable”.

One of compensatory strategies is **avoiding the communication**. It is used when students have problems in communication or they are expecting them. Avoiding the

communication is a possibility, how students often deal with their problems in foreign language learning. They evade a topic, an answer or they just give up the whole communication (Vlčková, 2007). But through this strategy, they do not solve their problem in real – because of this fact, avoiding communication strategy is one of the least useful strategies; however, students prefer it to the other strategies. From that reason they should be forced to use other strategies which provide more opportunities to get and develop their knowledge and abilities.

**Indirect learning strategies.** Oxford (1990) claims that indirect learning strategies support and operate the learning and they should be involved in the learning management. Vlčková (2007) adds that indirect strategies do not require the involvement of foreign language, even though they are used in the language learning. According to Bimmel & Rampillon (2000; as cited in Vlčková 2007), indirect strategies go beyond individual branches and support the learning process in general; their function is to regulate the learning process itself. Indirect strategies include metacognitive, social and affective strategies.

Průcha, Walterová, Mareš (2003) characterize metacognition as an ability to plan, to monitor and to evaluate ways, which are used in the learning process and usually lead to achieve goal of the learning process. **Metacognitive strategies** are conscious – it means that students realize the activity while they are using particular strategy and are able to realize, how they learn new things. Wenden & Rubin (1987) characterize metacognitive strategies as strategies that are, “used to oversee, regulate or self-direct language learning” (p. 25).

One of metacognitive strategies, which are aimed on the learning process, is to begin from the more general issues and then to focus on detailed matters. At first, students can make up a scheme of the issue in general, then – during the proceeding of the learning process - complete it with the details. Through this strategy students use knowledge they have already had or they had learnt recently to acquire new knowledge (Vlčková, 2007). Some metacognitive strategies are focused on evaluation of learning. It could be realized through self-assessment. Students usually do it after their own observation and they think about their progress and the extent of the progress which they have achieved during a period of time. Although **self-assessment** is quite useful strategy, it is not always easy for student to assess themselves on their own. In this case, students could be helped by

achievement test. Its purpose is to reflect the progress of students skills according to the syllabus that they have been following (Harmer, 2007). Harmer (2007) adds that these tests, “are often written by teachers and give to students every few weeks to see how well they are doing” (p. 380).

Metacognitive strategies include also the planning of the learning. Because in the learning process of foreign languages, students should keep and respect the conditions of the learning and adapt themselves (and their plans) to a learning plan or a schedule (Vlčková, 2007). Other strategy is connected with the goals. Students can set the goals on their own according to the plan or they can set a number of partial goals to achieve one main goal, e. g. given by their teacher. This is one of the reason why designing the goals in the learning process is so important for students.

**Social strategies** are important part of metacognitive strategies. They are related to the relationships in the class and they have quite significant function in learning languages. It comes from the fact that the language is in fact one of the form of the social interaction (Vlčková, 2007). Social strategies are affected are influenced by the class environment and students´ motivation. With the class environment is connected the **questioning** – asking for help, explanation, translation, repeating etc. Questioning is important for the feedback, which students want to achieve through this strategy. Similar is asking for the correcting – and not only during speaking activities but in connection with use of other skills.

To the social strategies belongs also student´s **cooperation** with the classmates or a teacher. The cooperation is good opportunity how to intensify the relationships in the classroom and to practise the language during particular activities and interaction among students. Also the cooperation among students with different abilities is useful, because the students, who are on the higher level of the language than others, could be good source of knowledge for the others.

The last group which is included in Oxford´s (1990) distinction of strategies (concretely in the metacognitive) are **affective strategies**. They are connected with students´ emotions, opinions, stands and motivation and their effect on the language learning. That effect quite be quite significant, because affective strategies are based on the positive feelings and avoiding negative feelings (as frustration, fear etc.) from the learning process. Students can be helped e. g. by instilling their confidence through positive statements or rewards which need not be only material, but could be realized by compliments or commendations after



student's success or achievement of some goal etc. The help can be realized in the class for all students or individually according to specific needs of each student.

Learner autonomy could bring a lot of benefits to students. However, students are not able to adopt it only on their own. Because of this, it is necessary to give students a helping hand. It should be realized by teachers who have a significant role in learner autonomy. The role is a counselor or a guide. Students do not need any strict directions (given by their teacher) how to achieve some goals; they just need to be acquainted to a number of ways, how to achieve the goal. Then they should have a possibility to choose from the ways the one which would be the most convenient for them.

The "ways" that lead to achieving the goals are realized by learning styles and learning strategies. The styles are specific to each individual and closely connected with one's predispositions. Teachers have no possibility to affect them (meant in a positive way). The area of learning strategies offers more opportunities for teachers to promote learner autonomy through introducing various learning strategies to their students.

Finally, motivation is also closely connected with the issue of learner autonomy, learning styles and learning strategies. The relationship between motivation and learner autonomy is mutual. Autonomy is linked with (mainly) the intrinsic motivation, because both are based on the ability to accept the responsibility of one's own learning and it is considered that autonomous learner are more motivated. All the mentioned issues are essential for learner autonomy because their interconnectedness helps students to become more aware of the learning process and of their own needs, strengths and weaknesses. At the same time it allows them to meet their goal more effectively and more easily.

The following parts are focused on the research realized for purposes of the thesis. The purpose of the research, its participants and the procedure is described there. Also the implications, suggestions are discussed in this part.

### III. METHODS

This chapter includes general description of the research that was carried out. The first part is focused on presenting the purpose of the research and main information about the participants of the research. The second part describes the process of data collecting and treatment.

#### **Purpose of the research**

The research, mainly focused on issues which were discussed in the theoretical part of the thesis, was divided into five main parts. They were connected with learners themselves, their motivation, their teacher and language learning strategies. The research was done to find out what relationship students have towards English as a foreign language, why they learn English and their opinion on the way how they study the language. Then the research also focused on what aspects of English lessons are the most motivating for them and what aspects are not so important for their learning. Because in the theoretical part of the thesis it is said that teachers are significant for autonomous learner, questions regarding students' teachers were also included in the research. The aim was to find out which activities or characteristics of English teachers students appreciate and what matters students do not consider crucial for their learning. The last part of the research dealt with concrete strategies that students use during their learning (classification of this strategies was the same as described in the theoretical background). The general aim of the thesis was not only to collect these pieces of information, but also to compare the answers between two groups of students – students who have the best marks in English at school and students whose marks in English are the worst.

#### **Participants**

The participants chosen for this research were students of SOUE Vejprnická in Plzeň. All students were male and were in their third year of their studies. However, the age was not same – the youngest respondent was 18 years old and the oldest was 22 years old. All students had four lessons of English per week and would end their studies by taking “státní maturita”. None of the respondents student has not decided yet if he would choose English as one of subject demanded for “státní maturita”.

For the research, eight students were chosen. To fulfill the purpose of the research

properly, students were chosen according to their marks they have in English. Half of participants had one or two and the second half consisted of students that had four or five at the end of their second year and in the middle of their third year of their studies.

All eight respondents started to learn English in the third class at a primary school. Now, none of these students is attending any course of English language or taking tutoring lessons. Students learn English only at school; some of them use English also in their free time (e.g. if chatting with their friends from foreign countries), but really consciousness learning they undertake just at school.

### **Research Instrument**

The research was done through a structured interview. The structured interview was chosen because the topic required quite wide range of questions that could be given to students. Sometimes it was also necessary to add some other questions that had not been prepared to understand students' ideas clearly and well.

The interview was realized in Czech, because it helped students to feel more comfortable; it avoided prevented problems which could arise from using non-native language (e. g. searching suitable expressions, thinking what a student would like to say and how). The study also included students whose abilities in English were not sufficient enough to realize the interview in a foreign language.

The interview consisted of four main parts according to the theory analyzed in the thesis. The first part was called Learner and there were questions concerning the learners themselves, e.g. why they study English and what their strengths and weaknesses are. The second part was focused on students' motivation, they should have assess given statements. They should have choose one grade from scale which were introduced to them: 1 – very important, 2 – important, 3 – not so important, 4 – not important at all. The full version of structured interview as well as way of assessing of particular question is embedded in the Appendix. The third part, named Teacher of Autonomous Learner, was based on the same principle. The last and also the most extensive part was connected with language learning strategies. There was a list of strategies for each group of strategies (e. g. memory strategies, compensatory strategies) presented to the students and they were asked to decide if they use the concrete strategy or not. Then they were asked to specify the use of

the strategy – how often they use it, what the most preferred one is etc. The whole structure of the interview is enclosed in Appendix.

### **Procedure**

**Data collecting procedure.** The research was realized at SOUE Vejprnická in Plzeň in the participants' teacher's room. All students were questioned in one day, but individually without presence of their classmates. Also their teacher was not observing the interviews, because there was an assumption that in this case students' answers would not be really true.

The students were chosen by their English teacher. For the purpose of this study, it was not important whether the students had a similar teacher or what year of their studies they were in. The most important determinant was their marks in English. As it was mentioned above, the main purpose of the study was to compare answers of students with the best marks (it means 1 or 2) and students with the worst marks (it means 4 or 5) that they gained at their second year of studies and this year in the midterm. Students with the best marks in English were named Group A and the second group of students with the worst marks in English was named Group B (this marking will be used in following parts of the research).

At first, each student was assured that the research is anonymous and his name would not be included anywhere in the thesis. Students were informed that their answers would not be showed to their teacher, because for the study it was essential that students were opened and answered honestly without fear of problems they thought could arise from their answers. The necessity of spontaneous answers was also pointed out as well as request to describe directly what they really feel, not to give the answer they think it is expected to be said. Then students were assured that the whole interview was going to be realized in their native language to prevent some possible obstacles.

As it has been mentioned, the interview was divided into four parts – before each part students were given an explanation how they should answer – if they were free to speak or if they, at first, should assess the statements. In case of prepared statements, these statements were read to the participants and explained when necessary.

**Data analysis process.** Firstly, all results from each interview were revised individually. Then individual answers were reviewed and if there were students' answers that often repeated it was noted down. The same method was used if some answers seemed completely different. Regarding questions that should have been assessed by chosen one grade from given scale – all grades were also noted down. If there was some answer which was frequented (it means the same or similar answer given by more participants) or, on the other hand, if there was answer that completely differed from others, there was taken a note and then included into the following chapter of this thesis. In parts that primarily required assessing the statements, all marks that participants chose for each statement were written down.

After that procedure, all interviews (all answers) were divided into two groups according to the students' results. It means Group A with marks 1 or 2 and Group B with marks 4 or 5. Then all answers of Group A and all answers of Group B were carefully compared. If there occurred differences in answers of both groups, it was noticed down and then it was used in analysis of the results.

In this section, the purpose of the research was introduced. Then the participants of the research were described as well as how they were chosen. Further, the main information about the data collection process and the consequent analysis is given. In the following section of the thesis, the results are shown and then discussed in additional commentaries.

## IV. RESULTS AND COMMENTARIES

The aim of this chapter is to present results which were found out during the interview with secondary school students presented in the previous chapter. The results are introduced mainly through the narration, because the interview itself and the width and character of students' answers require the written form. As it was stated in the previous parts of the thesis, the interview was divided into four parts (Learner, Motivation, Teacher of autonomous learner, Language learning strategies) and all of them were discussed with students from Group A and from Group B (as explained in Methodology). Because the main purpose of the interview was to compare preferences, needs, reflections or requirements of students from both groups, the main differences are described in this chapter. On the other hand, if the results showed some interesting similarities in students' answers, it is also included there.

### **Learner**

The first question concerning the reason why respondents are learning English showed the first difference between Group A and Group B. Whereas students from Group A said that they were learning English because they liked the language itself, they enjoyed communication in English (one student claimed that he liked English because he thought it is a simple language), students included in Group B stated that they were learning English because they had to; they described it as necessary evil. They conceded that if English (or any other foreign language) was not obligatory they would not attend the classes. However, it seems quite interesting that whole Group B admitted that English is, in their opinion, important language for their future life and career.

After that, each student should have chosen skill(s) that he thought he was good at and then he had to say which skill was the most problematic for him. The results did not show any considerable differences between Group A and Group B. But, generally, the skill which students considered the most problematic for them was speaking. They mostly added that the reason why they had problems with it was not that they would be shy or feel uncomfortable to speak in front of their classmates. These students claimed that their worries had emerged because they were unable to form sentences correctly or they did not know how to express their idea in English to achieve the purpose of their communication.

As it was mentioned this was said by students from Group A as well as by students from the second group. In opposite, reading was the skill that students most often assessed as the one they were able to manage well. They explained that they thought it is easier than e.g. speaking, because they did not have to think out something on their own. Then, throughout the groups, listening and writing got the same number of positive and negative answers. The results showed no great differences throughout the groups, but similarities in their preferences.

The next question was to find out when students really study English for purposes of their English lessons at school. All students answered that if they knew they would not take a test or oral examination they would not study anything at all. They claimed that they study only if they know that they are going to take a test or their teacher will examine them. One student from Group B added that he studied only at the end of the school year if he was threatened by failing the class and he would have to take re-testing during his summer holidays.

The last matter discussed in this part of the research was focused on the effectiveness of students' learning. The concrete questions were: Do you think that your learning is effective? Do you usually achieve the goal you want through your learning? The answers could be seemed quite surprising, because almost all students, even if their mark from English is usually four or five, stated that they thought they learning was effective. One student (from Group A) said that he was not able to say whether his learning was effective or not. Only one respondent (a member of Group B) said that he was sure his learning was not effective at all. He got additional question: "Why do you think your learning is not effective?". His answer was: "Because it doesn't matter if I learn or not. I always get the worst marks."

**Comments.** During this part of interview, I expected that the results would be more individual. However, the majority of the answers was not so surprising to me. The results showed that students with better marks have more positive attitudes to English and they also use it in their free time. The respondents of the second group confirmed my assumption that their learning comes out of necessity. At first, they learn English because it is obligatory and because they think English is important (if not essential) for their life. But I am not sure if they really believe t it or they are just adopting some general opinions.

Concerning the discussion about skills, I was quite sure that speaking would be the least favorite. I think it is a matter of almost all students of English, because often it is hard to get used to produce the language which is non-native. There could be a lot of reasons for it – students could be afraid to speak in front of a higher number of people, they could think their pronunciation is not good, they could feel they are not able to express exactly what they want to say etc.

The answers to the third question were not surprising at all. Because SOUE Vejprnická is particularly focused on technical matters, a lot of students pay their attention mainly to these subjects and they do not care about learning foreign languages so much. Because “státní maturita” allows them to choose between taking an exam in a foreign language or math, they usually choose the subject that is closer to their branch of studies, which is math. From that reason the student’s answers that he learns only if he faces failing at the end of school year was not shocking for me.

In my opinion, the last question was quite difficult to answer, because it is not easy to define what “effective learning” really is. It occurred that students usually assess the effectiveness according to the mark they will get on e. g. test. But in this case it would not be corresponding with the claim of students from Group B. Although they stated that they thought their learning had been effective, they have worst marks. I asked them: “If your learning is effective, why do you always get the worst grades in English?” They answered that they had the lowest marks because they were usually too lazy to learn or they did not expect they would take a test or would be examined.

### **Motivation**

Because motivation has a quite significant role in learning process in general as well as in students’ autonomy, it is not possible to omit it in the research. A list of statements concerning motivation was presented to the students and they had to decide how much a concrete action described in the statement is important to them.

This part showed that the most important activity for all students, regardless their abilities in English or marks in this subject, is that their teacher helps them to find out their weaknesses in the language. This was even more important than if the teacher points out their strengths in the language. When I further asked them why they seemed to be more interested in their weaknesses than in their strengths, students reacted that they were



usually able to find out their strengths on their own, but to realize e.g. where they make mistakes was much more difficult for them.

The second issue that was of great importance was an interesting lesson. They were asked how they would describe or characterize what “interesting lesson” meant to them. According to them, “interesting lesson” was a lesson that allows e.g. to deal with a topic they are interested in (topic that is closed to their interests), to do activities they enjoy or to change the activities (organizational forms) often – not to spend the whole lesson doing just grammar exercises etc.

Feedback was also an issue that students considered important. Again no matter if their mark in English is one, two or four, five, students claimed that feedback should have been given to them after each activity, because it helped them to realize their mistakes and their weaknesses. It confirmed that students prefer to know their weaknesses to be certain about their strengths.

A great difference between Group A and Group B was around the importance of knowing, at the beginning of each lesson, what content the lesson would have, e. g. what the topic of the lesson would be, what grammar point would be discussed. Students from Group A considered this point not so important or found it unimportant.. In opposite, students from Group B said that it is one of the most important pieces of information for them.

**Comments.** The first fact that surprised me was that for students from Group A their weaknesses are more significant than their strengths. I expected that these two points would have the same meaning for them, because (according to their abilities in English) they have no problems to differ what they are good at and what they are bad at on their own. But, on the other hand, I think that it is quite normal and in general students prefer to know their weakness to be able to work on them and to get rid of them.

I think each student wishes to spend language lessons doing activities he or she likes. Moreover if the topic of the lesson is interesting for students they become more motivated, more active and they enjoy the lesson more. On the other hand, it is quite difficult to make up all lessons interesting enough for a whole class. At first it is because the more students in one class the widest range of interest or personal preferences. The second problem is that it is not possible to do only the activities or exercises that students like because of

some requirements (e.g. from “RVP”, “ŠVP”) or aims that have to be fulfilled regardless students’ interests..

The question connected with feedback just beard out that feedback is really important to students. I think that it is not a matter concerning only secondary school students but all students and also people who do some jobs. It is important to be acknowledged about things we do well, but it is also necessary to know our mistakes to be able to correct them.

I think the last result from this part showed the students’ attitude and relation to English quite noticeably. Maybe the students from Group B want to know what they will do during the lesson because they need to “get ready” for tasks they are going to face. And probably it helps them to feel more secure, because they would know what they should expect. In opposite, students from Group B seemed to be more self-confident about their English, so maybe that could be the reason why they did not care about the content of the lesson so much.

### **Teacher of autonomous learner**

Because some questions in this part were quite similar to the previous ones (in Motivation), the results were similar too. Again, for all students it was essential that their teacher is able to notice to their weaknesses and to help uncover them to the students; and it was more important than finding out their strengths. Another essential issue was that the students’ teacher gave them appropriate feedback. Students appreciate not only feedback in a form of marks or assessment during their oral examination, but they also like commentaries from their teacher, e.g. if they do some speaking activities they want mistakes to be pointed out to them. Naturally, they enjoy positive feedback too; for example if their teacher commends them. For both groups it is very important if their teacher is able to notice and respect their needs. It means that he or she speaks more slowly, repeats questions if it is necessary etc.

Students from both groups also appreciate if teachers give them advice. Similarly, giving freedom to students is also important. It is necessary to let students make their own decisions. This is closely connected with learner autonomy because as it his written in the theoretical part – one of the definitions of learner autonomy states that autonomy is an ability to take a responsibility for making decisions.

Different opinions of students from Group A and Group B occurred regarding the tips (e.g. where they could find pieces of information that could help them with their learning – concrete recommendations of textbooks, websites) which were given to them by their teacher. Students from Group A did not consider it being crucial for their learning. They stated that they did not need these tips, because they had already known where to seek the information they needed. They usually have their favorite resources which they use if they need to. Almost all students from this group claimed that if they had some problems in English (e.g. if they did not understand some specific grammar point) they usually did not ask their teacher to explain it, but they – at first – try to solve it on their own with the help of a textbook or a website. Then, if they realize that the problem is too difficult to solve without advice of a more experienced person, they ask their friends or relatives, but they do not speak to their teacher. In opposite, students from Group B attached bigger importance to getting information from their teacher. They said that if they had some problem concerning English and were not able to solve it on their own – mainly because they did not know how to search for what they needed. Also if they do not understand something, it is their teacher who they usually ask.

**Comments.** This part showed that the feedback is the most important activity that teachers (according to students) should do. In my opinion it is not just to be sure about one's strengths and weaknesses, but it also affects the relationship between teachers and students. Feedback given by a teacher shows to students that the teacher is interested in their work. If they do e.g. homework and it is not assessed or at least corrected, students could feel that their work was useless and that it only wasted their time. Students need to feel that everything they do have some purpose. We can rejoin that the reason why students have to learn, why they have to do some work or fulfill some tasks is to acquire a second language properly which could be beneficial for their life. But I think that this reason, unfortunately, is not sufficient for all students at secondary schools. As it was presented above, some students realize that learning a foreign language could offer them a lot of advantages. On the other hand, there are still a lot of students who find learning a second language as something they simply have to undergo.

Students that have better marks seemed to be more autonomous than their classmates with worse marks. Maybe it could arise from the answers that students from Group A gave

in the first part of the interview. They use English not only at school but also in their free time (chatting with friends, watching movies in English etc.) and, in addition, they enjoy it. It means they are motivated by the language itself and are able to solve some problems on their own which includes finding out information that is necessary for them. It is also connected with their claim that they often do not ask their teacher for help. Because they use the language also out of school they need to solve obstacles that could emerge from the use of English in their free time and they need to solve the problems immediately. Probably that is why they learned to help themselves and do not rely just on their teacher, because they feel to be more independent; and maybe they are more self-confident and they believe they are able to manage the particular task on their own, without any help. These students also said that they usually do not ask their teacher due to distrust or mistrust in teacher's knowledge.

Students from Group B usually use English just at school and in cases they have to. That means that students are exposed to the language in a limited extent. In addition the students said that they learned only if they knew they were going to take a test or examination. They do not use English in their common life as students from Group A do. Maybe that is the reason why they still feel a necessity to get tips for sources connected with their learning, because for them English is closely connected with their teacher who is the only provider of the language – which includes advice for appropriate resources. It is also possible that because of more negative stance to the language, these students just do not want to be concerned with English in their free time either.

From the results mentioned above, it seems that students with worse marks and negative relationship to English need bigger attention and help of their teacher – not only in matters concerning concrete language points (e.g. grammar, vocabulary), but also in the whole learning process; giving them advice how to learn, where to find information etc. On the contrary, it is possible to see features of autonomous learner in the group of students with marks 1 or 2.

### **Strategies**

**Memory strategies.** This part regarding the use of memory strategies showed quite significant differences between Group A and Group B. The main question was what

students do if they learn new vocabulary. The list of ways how to learn vocabulary was presented to them and they had to choose the point(s) that they use most frequently.

Students from Group A mostly learn new vocabulary through putting words that are new for them to a context. It means e.g. to create a sentence which includes the new word, not to learn it by heart separately like in a drill. These students use rarely other ways of learning vocabulary, but most of the time they do not use them at all.

Students in Group B do not practice new vocabulary in context; they prefer to use drill for learning it. These students also like to use visual aids, e.g. to write a new word or phrase on a card; they also like to sort vocabulary according to similar features (the topic, part of speech etc.). Students from Group B also chose to make connections between the words that are new for them and words that they have already known.

**Comments.** The results showed that students from Group A learn new vocabulary by using/practicing the words or phrases in context. In opposite students from Group B use more various memory strategies for acquiring new vocabulary, but it is a question if it is possible to assess their strategies as less effective. According to the results compared to students' mark, it could seem that a strategy of learning new vocabulary chosen by Group A brings better results than the strategy picked by Group B. It is not possible to say which strategy is better, because students' vocabulary is not the only matter that affects their mark. However, I think that it is quite interesting to see the differences of strategies used in learning vocabulary. Maybe it could emerge from the repeated fact that students from Group A are exposed to English also in movies or talking with friends, so they are used to acquire the vocabulary from the context and they understand words or phrases as a part of a bigger system (sentence, statement etc.)

**Cognitive strategies.** All respondents claimed that they preferred deductive method to inductive method. Each respondent stated that it was convenient for him to get know the rules of e.g. some grammar point at first and to see examples of it. For example if students' teacher introduces present simple tense, she explains how to form it and then in what cases it is possible to use it. On the basis of this introduction students try to form their own sentences using the rules they were presented to them. None of the students (both Group A and Group B) said that he would prefer the opposite inductive method. Students were also

asked what method did their teachers (including all teachers that they have met in their whole studying life) use. They said that all teachers used only deductive method for teaching their students.

**Comments.** During my teaching practise I realized that deductive method is the most used method how to present new issue (including grammatical rules, topic etc.) to students. I think inductive method is usually missed out, because teachers are not sure if their students are able to manage it or maybe they think that it is time-consuming. However, I think that inductive method should be also included in the lessons. It is not necessary to exaggerate it, but I think that using it from time to time could be a positive change and it could make the lesson more interesting for students.

**Compensatory strategies.** Concerning the question: If you are talking in English and you cannot think of a word or phrase, what do you usually do?, answers of the students from both groups were quite similar. All of them use mime (e.g. they shake they head to express “no”) and also try to replace the word or phrase by another one. Student from Group A said that besides replacing the word or phrase by another one, they try to explain their idea in another way.

Group A and Group B claimed that they solved this situation by asking for help or advice too. They usually ask their teacher or their classmates. They added that they firstly asked their classmates and if they did not know or were not sure, they usually asked to their teacher. This part showed one significant difference between the two groups. While students from Group A ask for help or advice in English (or at least their try to), students from Group B always use Czech, their native language.

The second part of the interview regarding compensatory strategies was focused on listening. Students were asked what they did if they did not understand something when speaking with classmates or their teacher. The results were very similar to the previous ones. Students from both groups chose the same – they usually ask for expressions being repeated, explained or they try to reckon the main idea from mime of their partner or to guess the message from what they were talking about before. Students also try to pay their attention to things they understood and try to get the idea. Students added that they usually did not prefer any of mentioned methods, because it always depends on the situation and

they often use a combination of these methods, not just one. But the first – asking for expressions being repeated, explained is used more often. And again students from Group A claimed that they asked in English. Students from Group B use Czech all the time.

**Comments.** I think that this part showed the real interconnection of students and the English language. Students from Group A try to really work with their English – they try to use it as often as it is possible not for the purposes of English lessons, but also for their own development and progress. This proved previous answers – students always try to communicate in English even if they just want to ask for/about something. They seek solutions; they try to reach the goal in various ways and in every situation they make effort to use English.

Students from Group B on the other hand seemed (again) that their use of English is realized only as a kind of their “duty” as school. If they did not have to, they would not use English at all. I was interested in this problem and asked these students what they thought it was caused by. The reasons given by the students were varied. They confessed that they are just too lazy to make some efforts; that they do not care about English, because they have to deal with subjects which are more important for their studies. Some of them also said that they just do not like English because they are bad at it and they have given up trying to improve their skills. One student responded that he has had negative stance towards English in general since the very beginning of his studies at secondary schools because he had big problems with his teacher of English who were teaching him for a year. But he did not want to specify these problems, so it is difficult to make some conclusions without more detailed information. Another student said that he does not try to improve his English because he is stressed by the language itself. He was not able to say what cause it, but his teacher said that she think this student is stressed because he does not learn enough (or he does not learn at all) and does not understand that without any effort it is not possible to learn a second language successfully.

**Metacognitive strategies.** At first students were asked about their self-assessment. Students from both groups stated that they do not think about their learning so often. And if they do, they usually focus their thinking on things they cannot do (or they are bad at) more than on things they can do (they are good at).

If students find out some weakness regarding their knowledge of English, they mostly ask for help. Students from Group A mostly rely on more experienced friends or relatives, but – as written above – they do not ask their teacher. These students also claimed that they usually try to solve their problems on their own at first and then ask for help.

Students from Group B claimed that if they have some problems they usually do not try to solve them on their own and if they see they are not going to succeed they ask for help. It is mainly because they think their skills and abilities are not sufficient enough. They also ask their friends or relatives for help, but they also discuss it with their teacher.

Whereas students from Group B said that they often try to assess themselves (e.g. after writing a test they think what mark they would give themselves), students from the second group claimed that they usually did not try to assess their performance on their own. Respondents from Group B were then asked if their tips correspond with marks they get from their teacher. They answered that they are often right because they are able to reckon the mark in accordance with their performance in the test or during oral examination.

**Social strategies.** Another issue which comes under metacognitive strategies are social strategies. Students from Group A claimed that the organization form which was most convenient for them was individual work. Students stated that they liked it because they enjoyed working on their own. They added that they did not like pair work or group work (one student use the expression “hate”) because often they were the only one who were trying to fulfill the task. Students said that they also did not enjoy communication with classmates who were not on the same level of English as they are. They added that besides the person who they should do the task with; it always depends on the activity or type of exercises they should do together. Wholeclass organization method is accepted in a positive way. Just one student said that he did not like this organizational form because there was always too much noise and chaos. He claimed that his classmates were not able to keep silence during the lesson and they were still talking although they were not asked by teacher to say anything.

All respondents from Group B, on the other hand, agreed that they really disliked if they had to work on their own. The reasons are: they are not able to fulfill the task on their own (without any help), they feel more comfortable with a classmate(s) in a pair or in a group. They see the convenience in it because of possibility to share ideas and help each other.



These students prefer pair work and group work, but also mentioned (as students from Group A) that always depends on concrete classmates that they should cooperate with.

**Comments.** The most significant difference between the two groups was in the organizational form which they prefer. I think the results are as expected. During my secondary-school learning I also got the best marks and I loved to do tasks individually and I did not enjoy pair work and group work. I never felt comfortable to cooperate with my classmates because I was nervous if they also fulfill their part of work or they would be just watching me fulfilling it on my own. As students from Group A and Group B said it always depended on the people who I had to cooperate with. When a teacher told me to do a task with a student who was not able to communicate or fulfill some exercises at all, I felt confused because it had no sense for me. I thought that there was no difference in doing the tasks on my own and in doing it with a classmate whose English was of a lower level.

I also understood the students from Group B because they do not feel comfortable if they should do something on their own. I think it is caused that they are less autonomous than students from Group A, maybe less self-confident (they think they are not able to fulfill the task correctly on their own) and they always rely on help from other people. Probably that is why they enjoy group work and pair work more than individual work.

It is in question how teachers should organize the lessons, because students in the same class are not always of the same level. If a teacher makes up a pair of one more experienced and one lower experienced student, more experienced student would not probably enjoy the activity, but students with low experiences would be happy because he or she expects that the better student will help him with the task (or do the task for him or her). If a teacher creates a pair or a group of students with lower abilities, they would have a lot of problems to fulfill the task. If a teacher forms a group or a pair from more experienced students, they will be happy, but the other students would not like it, because they will have to cooperate with students of the same (low) level as they are. I think that teachers should respect students' needs, but I am not sure if it is possible to satisfy all students' requirements at the same time..

**Affective strategies.** Questions connected with affective strategies were the last from metacognitive strategies included in the interview. Students should describe how they feel

before taking a test or oral examination. Respondents from Group A said that they are not afraid or they just do not care. One student also claimed that he is always looking forward to it because he can use his knowledge and show what he has learnt.

Students included in Group B confessed that they were always stressed by tests or examinations. As the most common reason which causes their stress was lack of preparation. Some students also added that even if they were studying for the test, they were still afraid that they would do something wrong and failed the test. Group B got an additional question – students were asked to describe what they thinking are before a test or oral examination. They usually try to be positive and encourage themselves or they try to avoid thinking about the test. At the same time students confessed that sometimes they are not successful in thinking positively and think about a possible failure.

**Comments.** The interview in general showed significant differences between the two groups mainly in their relationship to English. While students from Group A enjoy using English and use it not only at school, students from Group B do not feel so comfortable and they seem to often underestimate themselves. I think that it does not depend only on the marks that students get, but it is closely connected with students' self-confidence. Because students from Group A have better skills and are used to use English also in the real life situations, their feelings are more positive and they are not afraid of it. Students from Group B do not have enough self-confidence and they have English connected with school and school often means duty for them. It will be difficult to eliminate their negative feelings but it is not impossible. But I think that it is not necessary to feel sorry for these students. The lack of knowledge is often caused by their stolid and sometimes irresponsible attitude towards this subject. Teachers could help these students by motivating them, but I think if students do not want to work on their own, the efforts of teachers could be without effect.

The questions to be answered by the results of the research were these: Do students with better marks have different relationship towards English than students with lower marks?, Is it possible to find out features of autonomous learners in the students with the best marks?, Are there any differences between students' preferences of particular learning strategies, favorite activities etc.? At first, the results really showed differences concerning

different attitude (e. g. if they like this subject, which feelings are connected with English, if they use English in their free time) towards English – the attitude of students with better marks is much more positive than the attitude of students with the worst marks.

Based on the results of the interview, it can be suggested that students with the best marks seems to be autonomous than students from the second group. It is related to their ability to make their own decisions, to choose their own way of learning English, to find out resources they need. Students with the lower marks, on the other hand, are more dependent on their teacher; they are not able to make their own decisions without any help and they seems to be less motivated than students whose marks are better.

The research uncovered quite significant differences in learning strategies used and preferred by all respondents of the research. In general it is possible to state that students with better marks prefer doing the activities or fulfilling the tasks on their own, they try to use English whenever possible and rely on their own. On the contrary, students with the worst marks like to fulfill the tasks with other classmates, because it is easier and more comfortable for them. They rely on their teacher more and often use more Czech than English during their lessons.

This chapter presented the results of structured interview. The main aim of both the interview and the results was to uncover differences in opinions, stances and preferences of students who have the best marks and who have the worst marks from English. This chapter also included commentaries on the findings. The next chapter introduces implications of the interview and suggestions following from the processing of the interview.

## IV. IMPLICATIONS

This chapter reflects the previous one. It deals with implications that emerge from the results of the research. It consists of three parts: Implications for Teaching, Limitation of the Research and Suggestions for Further Research. These parts include recommendations, suggestions and implications based on the results which emerged from the interview.

### **Implications for Teaching**

The results of the interview showed a lot of interesting facts regarding secondary-school learners of English. The main goal of the interview was to point out the differences between two groups of students – students with marks 1 or 2 and students their marks range from 4 to 5 – in relation with the topic of learner autonomy. Obviously, students with better marks are more experienced and their English is usually on the higher level than English of their classmates with the worst marks. The results also uncovered that there are matters similar to all students.

One of the most important things regarding learning English at school is students' attitude to the subject itself. I think it often depends on the type of school. There is a difference between stance of students studying grammar school and studying general secondary school and it also depends on the branch of their study. It is not possible to suppose that students of a secondary school which is technically focused would prefer learning a foreign language to learning subjects more connected to the branch of their study. During the interviews realized SOUE Vejprnická students often said that they pay more attention to subjects as math, electronics etc. I think it is necessary to adapt the lessons towards the type of school as well to students themselves. It does not mean to give up the efforts to support students to learn English just because their main branch of study is completely different. It is important to find the way how to teach students a second language without exaggerated requirements but still helping them to acquire at least basis of the language which would be useful in their future life.

Not just because of the mentioned facts, but for whole learning process, motivation is essential and all teachers should try to motivate their students as often as it is possible although sometimes it could be quite difficult. The results of the interviews showed that

students always appreciate if the lesson is interesting for them. Because of it, teachers should try to get know their students well to be able to include activities, exercises, topics etc. that catch students' attention.

Moreover it is necessary to admit that teachers play quite a significant role in students' lives. They could affect students in both ways positive and negative. Students like the feeling that their teachers really care about them, that they want to get to know their students not just as learners but also as people. In accordance to the theoretical part of this thesis and the results of the interviews, teachers should be counselors and resource persons, not just providers of knowledge.

One of the biggest problems of students is their learning. Students often say that they do not know how to learn. Teachers should help them by giving advice and tips for learning strategies for concrete purposes. All students are individuals, so it is necessary to present them with various strategies and let them choose. Students use some strategies (and usually they do not know that it is a strategy) naturally, but it is possible that they use them because they do not know other strategies. If more strategies were showed to them, they would be able to choose the most convenient for them.

Generally, learning languages is always related to the relationship between the student and the language itself. As the research showed, students with better marks have a quite positive attitude towards English and moreover they use the language in their real life not just at school. Then they are less afraid of testing and enjoy the lessons. On the other hand, students with lower marks have a more negative relationship to English – they learn it because they have to and do not try to improve their skills voluntarily. This attitude also leads to their worries of testing. And it does not concern only testing; these students do not feel comfortable during the lessons and they do not enjoy it irrespective of the content of the lesson. Teachers should help these students by motivating them or trying to remove their negative feelings. But as it was written above, it also depends on the students' efforts.

### **Limitation of the Research**

It is necessary to add that the results gained through the interviews cannot be generalized too much although it is possible to find useful information there. The first problem has already been stated above. Because the interview was realized at SOUE – secondary school that is mainly focused on electronics and technologies, English has a

position that is quite different from its position at e.g. grammar school. Students pay their attention mainly to the subjects concerning their branch of studies (which means mentioned electronics and technologies) and English is usually considered not as important as other subjects although a lot of students realize that English is important for their future life.

Of course it is possible to find students that are really interested in English and have pretty good knowledge of it. But the number of these students is quite limited. From this emerges the second point of limitations of the research. Four students with marks one or two and four students with marks four or five were included in the research – it means a half of good students and a half of bad students. But in real the classes at SOUE do not consist of this ration of students; students with lower marks (3, 4 or 5) prevail. Just a small sample of all students was chosen for the interviews.

Moreover, all students that were interviewed were male. It is a question how the results would be influenced if the research was realized with females. It is possible to find out some differences between boys and girls (e.g. in opinions, behavior, stances, way of thinking, level of their maturity, relationship to learning) and it could be interesting to compare their answers.

The last problem that occurred during the realization of the interviews was the formulation of the questions. The questions reflected the theoretical part of the thesis, but sometimes it was quite hard to form them to gain just the information that was desired. During the interview, from time to time it was necessary to give more detailed explanation of the questions to the students.

It was also difficult to ask students additional questions, because it was necessary to apply one's mind not to foist the students. Because if students being asked some additional questions, it seemed that they started thinking about what answer was expected from them. They had to be often reminded that there is no any "right" answer and they should speak in all sincerity.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

I think that to realize the research through a structured interview was the best way how to find out required information. The biggest advantage of an interview is that it is always possible to ask additional questions that could help to get (and to understand) the shared

main ideas well. Furthermore, a structured interview enables to explain points that students do not understand well. Although the interview method is more time-consuming, a questionnaire would not have been a better solution. It is too limited for this kind of research and does not give the opportunity to discuss particular questions or tasks in details.

On the other hand concrete questions could be improved by better wording for students to be able to understand them more easily. Regarding the statements that students assessed with grades it could be tried out differently. I mean instead of telling them to choose something from a list, they could be asked directly. For example in the third part of the interview, there was a statement: How important is for you that your teacher of English... Then there were some points e.g. gives you useful tips where you can find information that you need for your learning; helps you to deal your problems connected to learning English. Then these points were assessed by the students, but maybe it would have been more convenient before presenting the list to them, to ask e.g. What features of your teacher is the most important for you? What is your ideal teacher like? What do you appreciate on your teacher? Students should answer these questions and just after that they could assess the statements on the list. It could help to get more information and gain their wider background knowledge. I also realize that the interview could be longer and could include more questions.

It could be convenient also to discuss students' answers with their teacher. Teachers usually know their students quite well. It could help to evaluate students' answers from another point of view. Teachers should also know each student individually, so they should be able to give the background of concrete student's learning; they can add some reflections that are not easy to recognize for an observer who does not know the respondents well. The students' teacher could be really helpful person and could help us to understand students' answers better.

This chapter was focused on the implications that emerged from the research and further results. The process of realizing the research was evaluated and some suggestions connected with it were proposed. The next chapter is the conclusion of the whole thesis. It is a summarization of both theoretical and practical part of the thesis dealing with learner autonomy and issues linked with it.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The main topic which was discussed in this thesis was learner autonomy. There were given various definitions of the expression “autonomy” and also autonomy in connection with learners. The types of learner autonomy are also described in the thesis. One of the main purposes of the thesis was to find out and present significance of learner autonomy and also introduce benefits of it. Learner autonomy could be very beneficial not for students themselves, but also for their teachers and the overall learning process.

Learner autonomy is closely related to motivation. It is well known that motivation is one of the essential matters of education in general. Motivation should be a part of each lesson and should not be underestimated. From literature used for the thesis it emerges that autonomous learners are highly motivated.

Also the role of the teacher is essential for learner autonomy. Although the term “autonomy” seemed to suppose complete independence and freedom in students learning, teachers are necessary people in the students’ process of learning autonomy. And it is necessary to add that teachers’ role is not just one. They should introduce learner autonomy, promote it and support students’ efforts. Moreover teachers’ function is to be a counselor and a resource person. During the development of the thesis, it occurred that learner autonomy really is in students hands, but it is not possible to let them all alone. There should always be teachers to support and secure the students even in their autonomy.

Quite a big part of the thesis focused on learning styles and learning strategies, which are both important issues regarding (not only) learner autonomy. It is difficult to deal with learning styles, because each student can use different ones individually. It is not possible to influence students’ learning styles, because students are unconscious of using them. Learning strategies are, on the other hand, acquired consciously and students can learn them. But it is necessary to introduce the strategies to the students, because they usually use some strategies (and sometimes they do not know that they are using them), but they are not often effective enough. This task should be also realized by teachers - promoting learning strategies and recommending the most effective ones (of course dependently on the aim that should be fulfilled with them). Learning strategies were included in the research which reflected all issues discussed in the theoretical part of the thesis.



The research realized through structured interviews with students from a secondary school was aimed not only on learning strategies, but dealt with motivation, teachers or learners themselves (their needs, requirements, proposal, feelings connected with learning English etc.). The results of the research showed significant differences in answers of students with the best marks and students whose marks were the worst in their class, especially regarding some parts of learning. Research also showed similar opinion of the students irrespective of their marks. In general, the research found out that one of the most important aspects of learning English is the relationship between the students and the language itself. Also their feelings (both positive and negative) have strong influence on their performance and outcome.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A - Strukturovaný rozhovor

#### 1. Learner – I. část.

- Věk:
- Pohlaví:
- Jak dlouho se učíte anglicky?
- Učíte se anglicky i jinde než ve škole? (např. v nějakém kurzu)
- Jaké máte známky? Vloni na konci pololetí, na konci roku a letos v pololetí?

#### 1. Learner – II. část

- Proč se učíte angličtinu?
- Která dovednost v angličtině (mluvení, poslech, psaní, čtení) vám podle vás jde nejlépe? Která vám naopak nejde?
- Jak se připravujete na výuku? Učíte se ještě nad rámec toho?
- Myslíte si, že je vaše učení efektivní?

#### 2. Motivation

Následující výroky oznámkujte od 1 do 4 – 1 je pro mě velmi důležité, 2 spíše důležité, 3 spíše nedůležité, 4 nedůležité.

Jak moc je pro vás v hodině anglického jazyka důležité:

- mít zpětnou vazbu (např. když napíšete domácí úkol, učitel jej opraví a máte tak možnost dozvědět se, co se vám povedlo, co ne)
- vědět, na co se bude hodina zaměřovat – tzn. hned na začátku se dozvíte, co se v hodině bude probírat, např. jaké téma, jaká oblast v gramatice
- aby pro vás byla hodina zajímavá, např. téma, které vás zajímá; aktivity, které vás baví
- že vám učitel pomáhá odhalit, co vám v angličtině jde
- že vám učitel pomáhá odhalit vaše nedostatky v angličtině

#### 3. Teacher of autonomous learner

Následující výroky oznámkujte od 1 do 4 – 1 je pro mě velmi důležité, 2 spíše důležité, 3 spíše nedůležité, 4 nedůležité.

Jak moc je pro vás důležité, že váš učitel angličtiny:

- vás upozorní na to, co vám v angličtině jde
- vás upozorní na to, co vám v angličtině nejde
- vás ohodnotí, čili dá zpětnou vazbu na vaši práci (ať už je to zkoušení nebo práce v hodině)
- vám dává tipy na to, kde vyhledávat informace, které potřebuji ke studiu
- vám pomáhá řešit vaše problémy spojené s učením se angličtiny
- respektuje vaše potřeby (např. když potřebujete, zpomalí řeč, zopakuje otázku)
- dává vám rady, ale přesto vám nechává určitou volnost v rozhodování

## 4. Strategies

### a) Memory strategies

Jak postupujete, když si potřebujete zapamatovat nová slovíčka?

- snažíte se najít mezi slovíčky vztahy nebo propojení
- z podobně znějících slovíček (nových nebo v kombinaci nových s těmi, co už znám) si vytvoříte rým – např. boat, coat, float
- slovíčka se učíte v kontextu, tj. neučíte se každé odděleně, ale zasadíte si je např. do věty: *An elephant is an animal which has a long trunk.*
- slovíčka si několikrát přečtete, potom si je několikrát opakujete
- slovíčka si rozdělíte do skupin podle nějakého kritéria – např. podle slovních druhů, tématu, ke kterému se vztahují
- napíšete si slovíčka na kartičky

### b) Cognitive strategies

Pokud se učíte gramatiku (např. nějaký čas), co vám více vyhovuje?

- když vám učitel nejdříve vysvětlí pravidla, potom si je ukážete na příkladech (příkladových větách) – a na základě toho potom sám sestavujete věty
- když vám učitel nejdříve dá příklady a teprve potom vás nechává vymyslet pravidla
- *Jakým způsobem postupuje vaše učitelka?*

### c) Compensatory strategies

Když si při mluvení v angličtině nemůžete vzpomenout na nějaké slovíčko nebo frázi, co děláte?:

- řeknete slovíčko/frázi v češtině
- zeptáte se někoho nebo poprosíte o pomoc (zeptáte se anglicky nebo česky?)
- použijete mimiku (např. pokrčíte rameny „nevím“)
- slovíčko nahradíte jiným (v angličtině) nebo se svoji myšlenku snažíte vyjádřit jiným způsobem

Když něčemu v mluveném projevu v hodině angličtiny (např. při hovoru s učitelem, spolužákem) neporozumíte, jak to řešíte?:

- požádáte o zopakování, případně vysvětlení (použijete k tomu angličtinu nebo češtinu?)
- požádáte dotyčného, aby zpomalil (použijete k tomu angličtinu nebo češtinu?)
- snažíte se odhadnout smysl sdělení, např. podle tónu hlasu nebo podle pohybů či mimiky partnera v rozhovoru
- snažíte se odhadnout smysl sdělení podle toho, o čem jste se bavili předtím
- zaměříte se na to, čemu jste rozuměl a podle toho se pokusíte odhadnout smysl sdělení

### d) Metacognitive strategies (self-assessment)

- Přemýšlíte nad tím, co vám v angličtině jde a co ne? Co si myslíte, že vám tedy jde a co naopak ne?
- Když zjistíte, že vám něco nejde, řešíte to nějak? Jak?
- Přemýšlíte někdy nad tím, jak byste si sám svoji práci (např. domácí úkol, test, zkoušení) ohodnotil? Nechá vás pí učitelka, abyste se sám ohodnotil (např. při zkoušení se vás zeptá, co byste si dal za známku)?

**e) Metacognitive strategies** (social strategies)

Jaká práce vám v hodinách angličtiny nejvíce vyhovuje?

- když pracujete sám
- když pracujete ve skupině
- když pracujete ve dvojici
- když spolupracujete s celou třídou a učitelem

*Proč vám práce, kterou jste zvolil, vyhovuje? Např. proč nerad pracujete v xy, proč preferujete práci v yz?*

**f) Metacognitive strategies** (affective strategies)

Jaké pocity míváte před testem nebo před zkoušením? (jste ve stresu, je vám to jedno, máte strach...)

Co děláte?

- snažíte se sám sebe nějak povzbudit, myslet pozitivně
- snažíte se na to příliš nemyslet
- myslíte na to, že se vám to nepovede
- neřešíte to

Když se dozvíte, že budete psát test nebo budete zkoušený, co děláte? Připravujete se/učíte se na to (jak dlouho?), neučíte se (nechcete nebo na to zapomenete?).

## Appendix B - Structured interview

### 1. Learner – Part I.

- Age:
- Gender:
- How long have you been learning English?
- Do you attend any course of English?
- Which marks (from English) did you have in the middle and at the end of the previous school year? Which mark did you have in the middle of this school year?

### 1. Learner – Part II.

- Why do you learn English?
- What skill (speaking, reading, writing, listening) do you think is the one which can you use well? And, on the other hand, which skill do you think is the worst for you?
- Describe your preparation for English classes.
- Do you think that your way of studying is effective?

### 2. Motivation

Assess following statements from 1 to 4. 1 means – it is very important for you, 2 – it is important for you, 3 – it is not so important, 4 – it is not important at all.

How important (in English classes) is:

- to get a feedback (e.g. if you do your homework, a teacher will correct it)
- to know the content of the lesson – it means that you will get know what will be going on in the very beginning of the lesson (e.g. the topic, the grammar point)
- that the lesson is important for you – e.g. the topic you are interested in, activities you enjoy...
- that your teacher helps you to discover your weaknesses in English
- that your teacher helps you to discover your strengths in English

### 3. Teacher of autonomuous learner

Assess following statements from 1 to 4. 1 means – it is very important for you, 2 – it is important for you, 3 – it is not so important, 4 – it is not important at all.

How important is that your English teacher:

- points out your strengths in English
- points out your weaknesses in English
- gives you a feedback (concerning some testing, examinations etc.)
- gives you tips of sources where you can find pieces of information that you need for your studying
- helps you solve your problems connected with (learning) English
- respects your needs (e.g. if you need, he or she speaks slowly or repeats the question)

- gives you pieces of advice, however he or she let you to decide on your own

#### 4. Strategies

##### *a) Memory strategies*

What do you do, if you need to learn new vocabulary?

- try to find out some connections or relations among new words
- make a rhythm from the words (from just new words or from combination of new words and words that you have already known) which sound similarly – e.g. boat, coat, float
- put the new word in some context – it means you do not learn each word separately, but you use it in some sentence, e.g. An elephant is an animal which has a long trunk.
- read new vocabulary for several times and then you repeat them over and over again
- divide the new words into a number of groups according to some criterion – e.g. according to part of speech it belongs to, according to the topic they are connected with
- write the words on the cards

##### *b) Cognitive strategies*

If you are learning grammar (e.g. a tense), what suits you more?

- if your teacher explains the rules at first, then he or she shows you examples -) and then you make up your own sentences
- if your teacher gives you examples at first and then he or she let you think about the rules of a grammar point?
- *Which of these does your teacher do (more often)?*

##### *c) Compensatory strategies*

If you are speaking in English and you cannot remember a word or a phrase, what do you usually do?

- say the word or the phrase in Czech
- ask somebody or ask somebody for help (do you ask in English or in Czech?)
- use mime (e.g. shrug your shoulders “I don’t know”)
- replace the word or the phrase by another one (in English) or try to explain the idea in other way

If you do not understand to your teacher or classmate speaking, how do you solve it?

- ask for repeating/explaining (do you use English or Czech?)
- ask the person to slow down (do you use English or Czech?)
- try to reckon the meaning according to the mime, movements of your partner etc.
- try to reckon the meaning according to the things you were talking about before that
- focus on what you understood and according to it you would try to reckon the meaning

##### *d) Metacognitive strategies* (self-assessment)

- Do you think about your strengths and weaknesses in English? (what the strengths and the weaknesses are?)
- If you find out that you have some problem in English, do you solve it? How?



- Do you sometimes think about assessment of your work – e.g. how would you assess your homework or test?
- Does your teacher let you to assess your performance (e.g. during the oral examination he or she asks what mark would you give to you)?

*e) Metacognitive strategies* (social strategies)

What organizational form do you like the most?

- individual work
- group work
- pair work
- whole class work

*Try to explain why the concrete organizational form is the best for you? Why do not like xy, why do you prefer yz?*

*f) Metacognitive strategies* (affective strategies)

Describe your feelings before taking a test or oral examination. (are you stressed? are you afraid of it? or you just do not care?)

What do you usually do before taking a test or oral examination:

- try to think positive, to cheer yourself up
- try to do not think about it
- think that you are not going to be successful
- do not care about it

If you get know that you are going to write a test or you are going to be examined orally, what do you usually do? Do you prepare for it? Do you learn it (how long)? Or not? (because you do not want to learn it or just forget about it?)

## SHRNUTÍ

Diplomová práce je zaměřena na problematiku autonomie studenta. Teoretická část se zabývá pojmem autonomie a množstvím témat, které s autonomií souvisí. V teorii je brán v potaz jak student, tak učitel. Kromě toho jsou v práci představeny i styly učení a různé typy strategií k učení. Výzkum byl realizován pomocí strukturovaného rozhovoru se středoškolskými studenty. Data byla nejdříve zpracována a zhodnocena samostatně, ale velká pozornost byla věnována i porovnání odpovědí mezi dvěma skupinami studentů. Výsledky jsou popsány a doplněny o doplňující komentáře. Závěrem je diskutován možný dopad zjištěných výsledků na učení i učení se.