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Thesis

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNER
AUTONOMY AND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY**

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ABSTRACT

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This diploma thesis explains the concepts of learner autonomy and language proficiency, along with their principles and related terms. The theoretical background is intended to serve as a basis for the subsequent practical investigation of the relationship between these two concepts by the means of comparison of students' structure, duration and frequency of English related out-of-class activities against their school grade and self-assessment of their own language proficiency. The research included in this thesis is conducted through the use of a questionnaire and the gathered data are analyzed both separately and in mutual relationships. Comments are provided on individual items and their relationships. Finally, the potential impact of the detected connections and patterns on teaching is discussed.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In modern education, which is what the Czech Republic is currently trying to achieve, learner autonomy is established as one of the main goals of learning, usually perceived as the only way of gaining proficiency in various fields after graduation and thus adapting to the constantly changing social conditions and demands.

The concept of learner autonomy is relatively wide and, therefore, hard to grasp. Though it is a key principle of learning processes, various authors concerned with methodology approach it differently. Some dedicate whole chapters or books to it; some mention it only incidentally or not whatsoever; some do not call this phenomenon “autonomy” at all and use other names for it. They also differ in their view of what exactly belongs to this concept, often integrating it with motivation. Therefore, the first point of the theoretical section of this thesis is to overview and compile the various approaches to learner autonomy as well as give some explanation of its principles and the terms which are most frequently causing confusion over this term.

Another point is any less important to language learning than the previous one - language proficiency. While being a matter often subjected to testing and evaluation, it is not often closely pursued nor explained. For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to express clearly what is exactly meant by this term and in what sense it was operated with; otherwise the intended results may show rather inconclusive. Incorporated are, therefore, also various definitions, descriptions, related terms and principles of language proficiency.

The main and fundamental point is, however, the combination of the above mentioned, since this thesis, above all, aims to study and research the relationship between autonomy and proficiency of English language students. This connection is an issue often denoted by various authors as a field only rarely researched; the practical part of this thesis thus strives for the investigation of this relationship in terms of Czech secondary schools.

In summation, this thesis attempts to explain to the reader the complex concept of learner autonomy as well as its supposed goal within the language education in connection with language proficiency. It also investigates the relation between these two terms, subjecting it to empirical research which is trying to answer the main research

question - to what extent the structure of students' out-of-class activities is related to their school success.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical part of this thesis provides the reader with the basic information necessary for the understanding of the subsequent practical part concerned with learner autonomy. It compiles the various theories and claims, and also serves to explain clearly what is exactly meant by the various applied terms since many of them are perceived differently by some authors; its main purpose is, therefore, to state the facts in order to avoid confusion.

Learner Autonomy

Definition

The intended goal of this thesis aiming to define the learner autonomy may seem quite simple and straightforward but, unfortunately, it is far from easy. The rapidly expanding literature is constantly debating whether learner autonomy should be thought of as ability or behavior; whether it is characterized by learner responsibility or learner control; whether it is a psychological phenomenon with political implications or a political right with psychological implications or whether the development of learner autonomy depends on teacher autonomy as well (Little, 2002).

Despite all the mentioned disputes, we could establish that the most common and widely respected and quoted (in Cotteral, 2000, Dafei, 2007, Fenner, 2000, Wenden, 1987, Smith 2008, Trebbi, 1989, Little, 2007...) definition for the term was created by Holec who explained it as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (1981, p.)¹. Dafei (2007) stresses particularly this definition’s implication that autonomy is not merely the act of learning by yourself but more precisely the ability to do so; it is therefore not as relevant to be independently learning at the given moment as to be capable of doing it eventually. Benson (2006) and Fenner (2000), on the other hand, concentrate above all on the claim that autonomy is more of an attitude or philosophy than a method.

Apple (2009), although generally content and agreeable with Holec’s definition, states also the definition used by some of the mainstream North America educational theorists (for example Buttler, Winne, Carver or Sheier) who perceive autonomy as “a

¹ The source of this quotation is rather old which may lead the reader to the conclusion that it is obsolete; however, many modern authors are still mentioning it today and when there is a newer definition, it looks suspiciously only like a paraphrasing of this one (e.g. Benson’s (2001) definition of autonomy as “the capacity to control one’s own learning” (2001, p. 290) (in Brown, 2000)).

process of adjusting goals, strategies and motivations for general learning”, therefore attributing to it a slightly new view by describing it as a specific procedure.

As for the Czech authors, we could claim that they perceive the concept rather differently. Choděra (2006) defines the autonomous learning as a “modern² term for learning without a teacher” and strictly distinguishes it from study hours in terms of home preparation for school³. Krupka (2007) supports this opinion and further adds to it by pointing out the quote “He travels fastest who travels alone” by Kipling (1889). Though Krupka (2007) labels this quote as an “English proverb”, he uses it concisely to explain and emphasize the fact that autonomous learning is more effective than learning in ordinary classes at school. From this it could be concluded that Czech authors, in general, perceive the term autonomy somewhat differently than the majority of others; they do not define it as an ability to learn but rather as a special kind of learning. According to their definitions, they may speak about what would be named self-study or self-education in other literary resources (Benson, 2006). Otherwise autonomy, as discussed in Czech publications, usually refers to the relatively new competences of Czech schools to control and decide most of their inner affairs.

Many other methodology authors, though concerned with autonomy, avoid stating a clear definition, choosing to address its associated characteristics instead. Among those belong for example Harmer (2007) and Wenden (1987) who prefer to define this term by describing the principles and importance of autonomy and also the autonomous learner.

Autonomous learner

Though Wenden (1987) does not state a definition for autonomy itself, she describes the autonomous language learners as those who, in the course of their studies, “become not only more efficient at learning and using their second language but also more capable of self-directing these endeavors” (1987, p. 8). Holec (1987), speaking of ‘good learners’, characterizes them as “learners who are capable of assuming the role of manager of their learning. They know how to make all the decisions involved. In other words, they know how to learn.” (Holec, p. 147).

² Using the adjective ‘modern’ may sound rather misplaced since I found the term “autonomy” discussed (although in a slightly different connotation) in a book translated into Czech in 1937 (Hessen, S. (1937). *Světový názor a pedagogika: Studie k problému autonomie*. Praha: Dědictví Komenského).

³ Though, strangely enough, later on in the text, Choděra (2006) contradicts himself by claiming that autonomy, in fact, does not exist, since every learning process is – at least to some extent - not autonomous and dependent on something or someone else. My personal opinion is that the author confuses there the learner autonomy with motivation for learning.

There are several other definitions formulated by various authors, most of them describing the autonomous learner through the personal features and activities he or she is capable of performing independently. To give the reader an example, one of the most used and oldest characteristics was compiled by Rubin & Thompson (1982) who stated that the good language learners⁴ should be creative, organized, actively seeking opportunities for practice⁵, able to live with uncertainty, using mnemonics as well as their own mistakes, contextual and first language linguistic knowledge to be able to make intelligent guesses; they also know how to make their speech fluent by using certain tricks to fill in the gaps and , finally, they can accommodate their language outcome to the actual language situation and the current need for certain level of formality.

Principles

To define the learner autonomy accurately, it is necessary to name clearly its principles. Same as with the definition, the most widely recognized set of principles and traits of autonomy was created by Holec (1981) who stated that for developing autonomy the students need to take responsibility for the decisions concerning all the aspects of their learning, meaning they should be able to determine the objectives, define the contents and progressions, select methods and techniques to be used, monitor the procedures of acquisition and evaluate what has been acquired in the course of their studies. Benson (2001) narrows those parts of the learning process into mere three areas at which learner control may be exercised, naming them as control over learning management, control over cognitive process and control over learning content.

Apple (2009) claims that the learner's progress to autonomy include five steps; setting goals, determining learning content, choosing appropriate methods, monitoring learning progress and reflecting on what has been learned. Dafei (2007) paraphrases and summarizes the various sets of principles and states that “there is a consensus that the practice of learner autonomy requires insight, a positive attitude, a capacity for reflection, and a readiness to be proactive in self-management and in interaction with others” (Dafei, p. 6).

Though Lamb (2009) confesses that scientists “know relatively little about how autonomy ‘develops’” (in Paran and Sercu, p. 85), Dam (1995) mentions that autonomy

⁴ In this case it is clear that the authors are indeed speaking of ‘autonomous learners’ as well, since as the first thing they assigned to the ‘good language learners’ the ability to “find their own way and take charge of their learning“. For further explanation of the varying terminology, see the section called ‘Related terms’.

⁵ This point is strongly connected to the issue investigated in the section named “Out-of-class language learning activities”.

‘entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others as a socially responsible person’, therefore emphasizing the fact that autonomy is not a solitary matter to be achieved independently and without some assistance from others (in Fenner, 2000). Wenden (1987) defines autonomy (respectively the ‘desire for autonomy’) as a natural occurrence which is innate to every person and needs just to be ‘released’, not forced or trained by anyone, which is in opposition to Fenner’s (2000) claim that “autonomous learning describes a fairly complex process, and one which does not come naturally to the learner. It has to be learnt (...)” (Fenner, p. 79). To what extent could the development of autonomy considered intrinsic or dependent on others is therefore fairly unclear.

The next section is intended to provide a survey of the main reasons for attempting to cultivate autonomy in learners, and also arguments against this practice; both is considered important in light of stating a clear definition and explaining to the reader the importance of the discussed concept.

Pros and Cons

As already mentioned in the introduction, most authors currently agree upon the notion that learner autonomy is a useful concept that should be at least attempted to be installed into the learning process. Dafei (2007) does not perceive autonomy only as an ability to reach other skills; she denotes it as a goal of the learning and one of the most important issues that determine whether an individual reaches his or her potential or falls short of that potential. Cotterall (2000) indicates this issue similarly, stressing out the fact that autonomy is not only a goal for the highly committed students, but for all of them.

Little (2002) states two main reasons why autonomy deserves its position as a prominent theme; firstly, the students are engaged with their learning and therefore more likely to be effective, since it become more personal, and secondly, if learners are proactively committed to their learning, the problem of motivation is ultimately solved, because autonomous learners have developed the reflective and attitudinal resources to overcome temporary motivational setbacks (in Dafei, 2007). In the same vein, Littlewood (1999) claims that autonomy is an incontrovertible goal for learners everywhere, since it is obvious that no students will have their teachers to accompany them throughout their whole life (in Cotterall, 2000).

In Czech (and generally European) circumstances, the ideas of autonomy are specified and required in the demands to attain the key competencies; the part especially

connected to autonomy is specified within the competence for learning in Framework Education Programme for Secondary General Education (Grammar Schools) (2007) as a requirement for the grammar-school graduates to “plans and organizes his/her learning and work activity himself/herself, using them as a means for self-fulfillment and personal development” (RVP, p.9). Similarly, the European Commission (2002) indicates that “self-initiated, self-regulated, intentional learning at all stages of life has become the key to personal and professional advancement. Within this context, much attention is now focused on the critical role of metacognitive competence, the capacity to understand and control one’s own thinking and learning processes” (European Commission, p. 16). As a practical result of this statement, schools should i.e. strive to ensure that all pupils: develop a sense of curiosity and the desire to learn; develop their own individual way of learning, develop confidence in their own ability, reflect on experiences and strengthen the habit of independently formulation points of view based not only on knowledge but also on rational and ethical considerations.

Whereas majority of voices claim the autonomy to be beneficial, there are still some who perceive and pinpoint the disadvantages of that idea. Trebbi (1996) argues that the Holec’s definition (as stated above) is a tautology since no learning takes place unless the learner is in charge, because it is a prerequisite of learning (quoted in Fenner, 2000). On the other hand, Ellis and Sinclair (1991) describe autonomy critically as an ‘ideal rarely attained in any sphere of life’⁶. Little (1991) criticizes, above all, the over-use of this term, claiming it became the ‘buzz-word’⁷ of the 1990s, which is frequently used but rarely understood (in Dafei, 2007).

Affined Concepts

Another element, which is making the attempts to define autonomy rather difficult and confusing, is the fact that throughout the various methodology publications and resources we may encounter many terms which are later on defined as a phenomenon similar or even identical to the learner autonomy; and, vice versa, some authors, who speaks directly of autonomy (e.g. the above mentioned Choděra (2006) and Krupka (2007)), explain this term in such a way that makes it clear that they speak of a slightly different issue than the majority of others.

⁶ This discrepancy may be explained perhaps by different comprehension of autonomy (narrower or wider) of those authors.

⁷ For similar reasons, Apple (2009) calls autonomy ‘a catch phrase’.

Smith (2008) claims that the term autonomy commenced its frequent appearances throughout various publications only after the SIG (Special Interest Group) assigned this name to the phenomenon previously called 'individualization' or 'learner independence'; therefore it is possible that, when encountered with these terms in some older source, they may show to contain matter identical to the one pursued in this thesis.

Benson (2006) and Dafei (2007) state that the majority of authors nowadays agree on the opinion that learner autonomy is not synonymous of the terms 'self-instruction'⁸, 'self-access', 'self-study', 'self-education', or 'distance learning' since these are describing the various ways and degrees of learning by yourself, whereas autonomy refers to abilities and attitudes (or whatever we think the capacity to control your own learning consists of) (Benson, 2006).

Scrivener (2005) and Ellis and Sinclair (1991) operate with the term 'learner training' or 'learning to learn' which they denote as similar but not identical to autonomy; according to these authors, both represent abilities and both encourage responsibility, but learner training is only supposed to prepare the learners for independence. From their description it could be deduced that learner training is a method to achieve learner autonomy which is, however, considered only an ideal, not the actual goal (Ellis, Sinclair, p. 3).⁹ Harmer (2007) as well describes learner training as "a first step on the road to self-directed learning" (Harmer, p. 396) Similarly, Brandes and Ginnis (1991) discuss the notion of student-centered learning as a way to reach the learner autonomy.

The terms 'independent learning' and 'self-directed learning' (used by e.g. Wenden (1987), Harmer (2007) and Smith (2008)) also refer to the various ways of learning by yourself but, simultaneously, are also frequently used as synonyms for autonomy. Though Smith (2008) states that the generally accepted distinction between those are (as formulated by Holec) that 'self-directed learning' is a desirable learning behaviour or situation whereas autonomy is the capacity for such learning¹⁰, Dafei (2007) recommends that in case of encountering any of these terms, it is necessary for the reader to check what the writer means by them exactly lest he or she be misled.

The term 'autonomous learner' as well is by some authors (e.g. Ellis and Sinclair, (1991), Holec (1987) and Harmer (2007)) replaced; most often by 'good language

⁸ Little (2002) emphasizes that this term especially tends to be confused with autonomy

⁹ According to me, using this term could be perceived as an attempt to avoid the critique accompanying the concept of learner autonomy (as listed above), making the process sound less complex and demanding to reach than the actual result.

¹⁰ Apple (2009) even defines autonomy through this term as "a capacity for self-directed learning".

learner', less often by 'good studier' or 'good acquirer', which are subsequently defined to denote an identical phenomenon. Dafei (2007) also mentions that nowadays the term autonomous learning is

regarded as more or less equivalent to effective learning, though originally it meant only its predisposition.

The last of autonomy related terms¹¹ is simultaneously the most important one for this thesis - the out-of-class language learning activities¹²; a separate section would be, therefore, dedicated to the investigation of this concept.

Out-of-class language learning activities

Benson (2001) characterizes this concept broadly as "any kind of learning that takes place outside the classroom and involves self-instruction, naturalistic learning or self-directed naturalistic learning" (Benson 2001, p. 62). For our purpose, however, the concept is more suitably conceived by Ibadurrahman (2011) who described it as "any language learning activities that are performed outside the class, be it for the sake of learning, the language itself, or for pure pleasure" (Ibadurrahman, p.1)¹³.

Pickard (1996), while advocating the close relation of this matter to the concept of learner autonomy, concludes from his research study that the vast majority of out-of-class language related activities performed by learners is receptive in nature; in other words, connected mainly to listening and reading. Ibadurrahman (2011), in reference to Hyland (2004), attributes the reason for such results to the limited opportunities of many speakers to produce the language meaningfully outside the class, and also to the frequently occurring learner anxiety and fear of negative judgment on the part of a native/more proficient speaker.

Guo (2011) compiles the various advantages of performing such activities (originally formulated by Field, 2007, Resnick, 1987, and Nunan, 1989) stating that students need to develop the ability to acquire information that is available both inside and outside the classroom context, and that out-of-school learning is more directly connected to events and objects in the physical worlds, with the result that learning well

¹¹ And, as stated by Benson (2001), the one "with considerable implications for the theory of autonomy" (Benson, p. 62).

¹² By various authors also called out-of-class language activity (Chausanachoti, 2009), out-of-class practice (Al-Otaibi, 2004), out-of-class experiences (Terenzini, 1995) or simply out-of-class language use (Anderson, 2004), or even out-of-class language learning strategy (Pickard, 1996) while maintaining the same definition (quoted in Ibadurrahman, 2011).

¹³ Both these definitions are, however, inconsistent with a characterization provided by Terenzini (1995), who claimed that "traditionally, out-of-class experiences have been defined as taking place within an institutional context, relating to students academic endeavours, and contributing to student learning outcomes" (quoted in Krause, 2007).

in schools is not sufficient preparation (with regard to quality as well as to quantity) for functioning well outside of school and gaining the language proficiency. To support this idea, Pearson (2004) paraphrases the results of a research conducted by Bialystok (1981) which confirmed that out-of-class exposure to the target language helped the learners complete language tasks they met subsequently, and that such functional practice was critical to the development of all language skills.

The out-of-class learning is, therefore, considered both a manifestation of learner autonomy and a condition for the development of language proficiency, concept of which is a matter described in the following section.

Language Proficiency

Language proficiency, similarly to autonomy, is one of the terms which are frequently used but less often defined or explained, although both are often referred to as the main goal of language learning (Farhady, 1980).

Brière (1972) defines the language proficiency as “the degree of competence or the capability in a given language demonstrated by an individual at a given point in time independent of a specific textbook, chapter in the book, or pedagogical method“ (1972, p.332) (quoted in Farhady, 1980). The Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) (2011) avoids using the vague, and therefore problematic, terms such as “competence”, “capability”, “demonstrated”, and “individual”¹⁴ and defines proficiency as a “person’s ability to function in the target language regardless of the type of training he or she has had in that language”, thus giving the definition the important connotation that a considerable part of being proficient means to be able to function in real-life language situations. The Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL) (2007) as well chooses to describe proficiency (in this case concretely English language proficiency, although the definition could be applied generally) in relation to its communicative importance as “the ability of students to use the English language to make and communicate meaning in spoken and written contexts” (2007, p.1).

Regarding the content of proficiency, Harley (1990) states that until recently, being proficient in a language meant only a little more than grammar and lexis;

¹⁴ Farhady (1980) denotes those terms as insufficiently specified because the term *competence* could refer to linguistic, socio-cultural, or other types of competence, the term *capability* may refer to the ability of the learner to recognize, comprehend, or produce language elements (or a combination of them), *demonstration* of knowledge could be in either the written or the oral mode, and, finally, that the expression *individual* could refer to a language learner as listener, speaker, or both.

nowadays, however, as a result of the widely accepted communicative approach, the emphasis is being put primarily on the ability to communicate in the given language.

Ingram (1990), on the other hand, criticizes these definitions, claiming that the ability to communicate depends on things other than language and the ability to use it (such as general knowledge or personality traits), so it should not be incorporated in models of language proficiency (quoted in Verhoeven, 1992). Benson (2001) is similarly earthbound in his assumptions, claiming that the mere presence of learner autonomy (though, otherwise, he frequently advocates its grand importance) could not guarantee the development of as complex long-term achievement as language proficiency; there are, therefore, other factors as well, the list of which is to be found in the next section.

Factors Affecting the Development of Language Proficiency

Besides the hereinafter discussed influence of learner autonomy, the level of language proficiency is with no doubt conditioned by other factors. Whereas Shoebottom (1996) sorts the reasons for the different pace of learning among individual learners into two groups; external and internal factors, Skehan (2012) distinguishes four main areas in which those varieties occurs: language aptitude, learning style, motivation and learner strategies¹⁵.

According to Shoebottom (1996), the main areas, from which the individual variations stem most frequently, are the learners' age (not only the current age, but especially the age at which the learner commenced his or her language studies), personality, structure and level of motivation¹⁶, experience, level of cognition, native language, curriculum, instruction, culture and status, access to native speakers and motivation provided by others¹⁷. Ehrman, Leaver and Oxford (2003) supplement this by further adding gender, learning aptitude and other demographic variables to the list, whilst Sleve and Miyake (2006) included and investigated especially the impact of student's musical ability. It is, therefore, rather evident that language proficiency is dependent on numerous factors, autonomy being only one of many.

¹⁵ While comparing these two classifications, I came to the conclusion that, though Skehan (2008) describes the matter much more closely and scholarly, he completely ignores the external influences impacting a person's learning; therefore, although considered an expert in this field, for the holistic analysis required for the purpose of this thesis, his classification was, unfortunately, rejected as unfitting for further use.

¹⁶ Motivation could be divided into: *external*, affected mainly by the person's surroundings (both people and general circumstances and possibilities) and *internal*, more relevant to autonomy and formed by the person's own demands. Internal motivation is further subdivided according to whether the action it powers is fulfilling either cognitive, achievement or social needs (Nakonečný, 1996).

¹⁷ Up to 'native language', those are sorted by the author into the group of internal factors; the ones named from 'curriculum' onwards are considered external.

Related Terms

Though Brière (1972) chooses to define proficiency through the use of the term competence, Berofsky (1995), adopting a more philosophical approach, argues that both autonomy and proficiency should be distinguished from it (although admitting that this term is used by some as the key analysands of autonomy), since a competent person may not be disposed to use his or her skills due to his or her insufficient maturity and possible dependency on others. The terms language competence is therefore considered similar, though not identical, to language proficiency.

In relation to the basic curricular document in the Czech Republic concerned with education, RVP, the concept of language proficiency noticeably resembles the theory underlying the definition of a term closely colligated to the one previously discussed; the communicative competence. This phrase, however, describes a rather broader phenomenon and consists also of the competence to communicate in the learner's first language. For the second language proficiency is therefore a fairly closer match the term 'competence in foreign languages', as formulated by the European commission (2002) as "not limited to technical skill in a particular language but also includes openness to different cultures and respect for others and their competence and achievements" (2002, p. 17), though it is still rather wider in its implications that the competence in foreign language is closely interlaced with other competencies.

Harley (1990) claims that "full English proficiency" amounts essentially to fluency in English as both these terms refer to an ability to function adequately in face-to-face situations and use English appropriately in a conversational context. The main part of authors (Harmer (2007), Scrivener (2005)), however, although admitting that fluency is with no doubt important for a language speaker, considers it only a part of language proficiency (supplemented usually by accuracy) serving to smoothly connect the language outcome together.

Another frequently discussed notion is the concept of school success (in various publications denoted also as academic/school success/achievement/performance) is usually perceived (e.g. by Ward, Stoker and Murray-Ward (1996) or von Stumm, Hell and Chamorro-Premuzic (2011)) as a degree to which students achieved the proficiency level required by given teacher (or institution)¹⁸ over a period of time, usually conveyed by a certain grade. In terms Czech schools, the grading is usually realized by marks from

¹⁸ McCall, Kingsbury and Olson (2004) state that, in order to evaluate this, the teacher first needs to establish her/his own definition of proficiency, design her/his tests to determine whether students are proficient and establish her/his cut-off scores on their tests to identify proficient students.

1 to 5; 1 meaning the student's performance/proficiency (compared to given criteria and the performance of his/her schoolmates) in the given subject is 'outstanding', 2 'very good', 3 'good', 4 'sufficient' and 5 'insufficient', signifying that the student failed completely to achieve the desired standards. This number is, therefore, essentially the practical representation of concrete student's level of proficiency in a given subject, as perceived and evaluated by the student's teacher¹⁹.

Language Proficiency in Relation to Learner Autonomy

A considerable part of the previous sections was dedicated to the explanation of two terms which are fairly common throughout the various volumes of methodology literature; the learner autonomy and language proficiency. The main point of this thesis is, however, the less frequently discussed relation of those two notions which is also, later on, subjected to a research study.

Even sheer logic (and mathematics) hints that the level of language skills needed for the desired language fluency could not be achieved by the sole means of in-class tutoring; even the learners themselves realize this fact, as proven by Cotterall (1999), who discovered that students rated practice and opportunities to use the target language ahead of the teacher in terms of their importance for successful language learning (in Pearson, 2003).

The research of this issue shapes an often discussed notion; although many authors, if only in theoretical level, ascribe to the autonomy the ability to foster proficiency, claiming e.g. that "an increasingly desired outcome of formal instruction is development of ability to continue improving language proficiency through self-instruction and experiential forms of learning" (Dickinson and Wenden, 1995, quoted in Leaver and Shekhtman, p. 256), Little (2007) states that no matter how often is autonomy applied to the process and content of language learning, the relation to its specific outcome, language proficiency, is mainly neglected. Apple (2009) especially highlights that, in spite of how frequently is autonomy described as essential to increased English learning²⁰, there have been relatively few quantitative studies that support this claim. Dickinson (1987) as well observes that most of the needed research on the

¹⁹ In the methodological part of this thesis, regard will be given especially to the marks given to the students at the end of the last semester, which is the final outcome of the evaluation performed by teacher in the scope of a five month period.

²⁰ Berofsky (1995) even unifies those terms, claiming that "the term autonomy is frequently used to mean what we are calling proficiency" (1995, p. 26), though, at least according to my experience with other literary resources, this theory is rather unique and rarely used by other authors.

effectiveness of self-instruction in language learning has not been done and that “very few of the present or past methods and techniques for language learning are solidly based on research results. Either the research has not been done for them or the results are inconclusive” (1987, p.1, quoted in Dafei, 2007²¹).

Dafei (2007), in reference to Benson (2001), declares that almost all research in the field of autonomy is concerned with the nature of autonomy and its components, the possibility of fostering autonomy among learners and the effectiveness of some selected approaches to fostering autonomy in terms of language learning. Apple (2009) supports this, claiming that a common thread among EFL autonomy-related research is a focus on learner-centered classroom activities that promote autonomy.

The reason for this apparent deficiency of empirical background could be attributed to the facticity which was explained for example by Lamb (his chapter included in book compiled by Paran and Sercu (2010)) who likened autonomy and proficiency in that particular regard, as both are multidimensional and immensely difficult to measure objectively. In case of proficiency it is tedious to include all the supposed elements of it, and, while searching for autonomy, it is even more difficult to discern the real autonomous behaviour from the numerous similarly-looking acts²² (called ‘the mask of autonomous behaviour’) performed by many students in order to please the teacher; there are also only little means of discovering the true ability to take charge of the learning instead of the actual observable conduct. It is therefore supposedly even more demanding to measure both these aspects simultaneously in one person; furthermore while at the same time striving for the ultimate practicality, objectivity and reliability.

Despite the arising difficulties, learner autonomy and language proficiency are still clearly interlocked and also parts of the primary key competencies²³ which currently form the base of (not only) the Czech educational system. As such, they were in the past not completely ignored and some attempts to research this field were made (though not European, let alone Czech), examples of which are described in the next section.

²¹ I realize that a lot could have changed since Dickinson made this statement in 1987, but the use of this quotation by Dafei (twenty years later!) hints that, in fact, it has not.

²² Lamb (2009) ascribes this mainly to the nearly non-existent measurement scales which are, on the other hand, working quite well for the assessment of proficiency. Apple (2009) adds to this that even those few tools in existence are in nature qualitative, not quantitative.

²³ The full list of eight principal domains of key competencies was formulated by European commission (2002) and consists of: communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, ICT, numeracy and competencies in maths, science and technology, entrepreneurship, interpersonal and civic competencies, learning to learn and general culture.

Previous Research

Apple (2009) tried to implement a quantitative study in order to fill in the obvious gap in the research. His observations encompassed 204 students of a technical college in Japan, using two instruments. The first was the EFL autonomy questionnaire created by Shimo (2008), the second, intended to measure the level of proficiency, was the TOEIC-IP exam. The research confirmed the correlation between strongly developed learner autonomy and language proficiency as measured by TOEIC-IP exam, though the author himself admits that, while the standard error of measurement of TOEIC is 25 points for each section of the test, and error between two different test implementation may be as high as 35 points, it is impossible to prove with 100% degree of certainty whether the difference for the study sample was indeed caused by the presence of learner autonomy. In addition, TOEIC test's items are considered generally passive in nature (meaning that if active skills were included, e.g. students were required to write an essay or assessed in a spoken dialogue, the results could prove different).

Dafei (2007) as well conducted a research study, in her case involving 129 Chinese students of English at the medial age of 19, and using simultaneously a standard test (for discovering the proficiency level), a questionnaire (for stating the level of autonomy) and an interview (applied to ascertain the reasons for the various differences among students). In comparison with above mentioned Apple's (2009), her results were more decisive, as she, in conclusion, stated that "the finding implies that to foster the students' learner autonomy in the classroom or in the relevant training programs in second or foreign language teaching and learning might help improve the students' English proficiency. It also infers that the more autonomous a learner becomes, the more likely he achieves high language proficiency" (Dafei, p. 13), confirming thus with empirical evidence the Corno and Mandinach's claim (1983) that learner autonomy could help to improve the learners' proficiency and the autonomous learners were the learners of high proficiency.

As for research in the field of out-of-class activities, in addition to the above mentioned Pickard (1996), who was aiming his study to elicit the most common out-of-class activities among 20 students, another survey, performed by Hyland (2004), proved significance of out-of-class learning based on a study of 208 student teachers and 20 primary teachers in Hong Kong; successful language learners were found to engage in various English activities outside the classroom (quoted in Guo, 2011). Pearson (2003)

paraphrases the research results of Victori and Lockhart (1995), Ushioda (2001), Yorozu (2001), Wenden (2001) and Lamb (2002) as having shown that motivation and metacognition influence out-of-class learner behaviour. Both factors have been regarded as important aspects of learner autonomy which affect the type of activities learners choose to complete and why, as well as what they learn from them.

Stating this, the theoretical part of this thesis is complete; so far, it has provided the basic academic information and definitions of various key concepts, among which the most important for our purposes were those of learner autonomy and its related terms, especially that of out-of-class learning, language proficiency, its correlation with autonomy and the prior research realized by other inquirers. At this point, however, the attention will be transferred to the conduction of a small scale research study in the Czech context.

3. METHOD

This chapter is intended to introduce the research method and participants who were involved in the following study in attempt to answer the main research question: to what extent do out-of-class activities influence learner's school success. It should also provide the necessary background information required for comprehension of the subsequent analysis and help the reader to create an image of the relevant learning situation.

Research Instrument

For the purpose of this study, as the most suitable method was selected a questionnaire²⁴. The reason for assorting this method was quite obvious; it proved useful in previous researches²⁵ and is, as an empirical method, able to collect relatively vast amount of information in comparatively little time.

For the ultimate clarity and in order to avoid possible misapprehension, the questionnaire was created and conducted solely in Czech language; it contained eight topic related sections and an inquiry on the student's current age, gender and the age at what he or she started learning English.

The first section of the questionnaire listed the various common out-class activities²⁶, asking the students to mark a number on a scale to signify how often (if at all) they dedicate their time to each of them. The second part asked for the reason why the students performed the selected activities (to find the source of their motivation for learning), using the same principle and technique as previously (scales and numbers to denote the importance of given reason). The third section was dedicated to the investigation of the amount of time (daily or weekly) the participants usually spent doing those activities. Therefore, so far the questionnaire asked the students which, how often, why and for how long they were usually performing out-class activities.

²⁴ The full and unabridged questionnaire, as it was presented to the students, is included in section "Appendices", under the title "Appendix 1: Dotazník". The version translated into English is to be found in the same section, this time under the name "Appendix 2: Questionnaire".

²⁵ The list of anterior related studies is to be found in the section called "Previous research".

²⁶ The last option was left blank (open) for the students to fill in if something important for them was missing, as I could not include all the potential possibilities; the same was done in case of section 2 and 7. The reason for including it is, however, mainly psychological, since I came to the conclusion that students don't like to be "sorted" and tend to cooperate better when thinking their opinions really matter to the questioner; those "bonus" answers were, therefore, later included in the charts, but more for the matter of interest than analysis.

The fourth question served to ascertain the English grade given to the students on their last school report, the following one confirming whether the students thought it was deserved. The sixth part inquired on which language skills are most difficult or easy for the given participant. The seventh section asked the students to evaluate which kind of language activities helped them the most to their current level of English and, finally, the last question elicited the importance of future English learning for the students. The second half was therefore dedicated to discovering the students' school grades, their perception of their overall language ability, their views of complexity of the individual language skills, of main contributors to their current language ability and of their future English language learning.

The questionnaire was implemented during class (at the beginning of the lesson) in the scope of one week, starting 27. 5. 2012 and ending 5. 6. 2012, and took the students on average 10 minutes to fill in. The exact instruction for the participants were: "Please, complete responsibly and thoughtfully the following questionnaire. Do not forget to answer all the questions. You will have as much time as you want, so there is no need to hurry"²⁷. And to participants the next section of this chapter would be dedicated.

Participants

Students

All students participating in this research were attending one secondary school; to be precise, the classes involved were 1.L, 2.E, 6.L, 6.M, 5.E and 7.M²⁸ from Gymnázium Luďka Pika in Plzeň, Opavská 21. Each class has, accordingly, five, two, three, three, three and three lessons of English a week in ordinary circumstances. The total number of 83 students between the ages 11 and 20 was addressed, from whom 8 were for various reasons²⁹ discarded; the rest of the participants (formed by 75 students) completed the questionnaire legibly, fully, unambiguously and, at least at the first sight, with due thought, and their scores were, therefore, used for further processing. Their long term

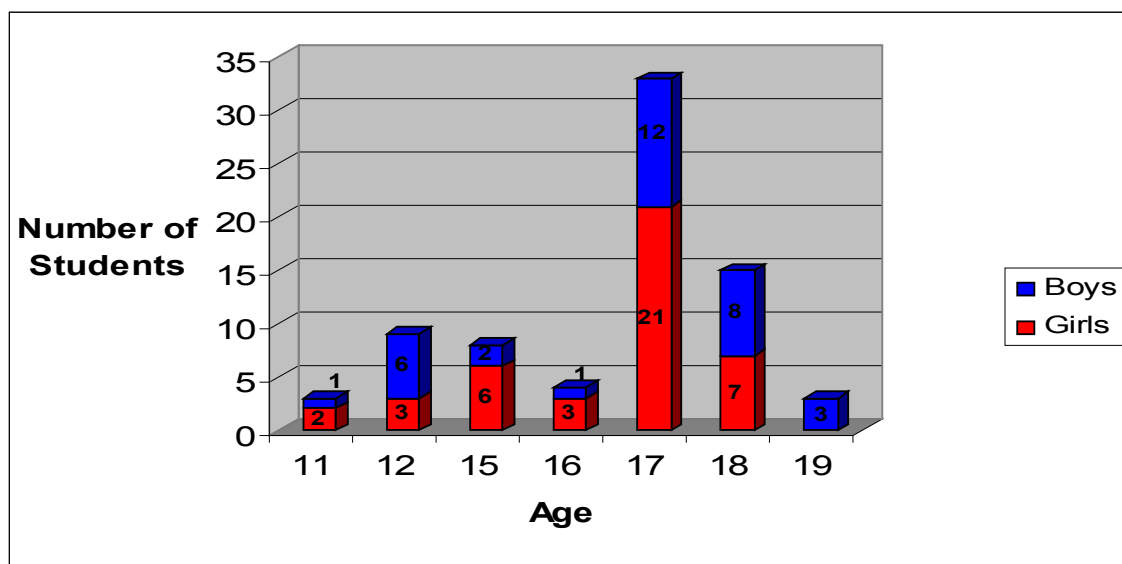
²⁷ That not all the students actually listened to this is clear from the subsequent need to discard the total number of 10 questionnaires (from reasons explained in footnote number 29). The most frequent question from the students concerning the questionnaire was whether they are required to sign it.

²⁸ The classes were sorted from the youngest to the oldest ones.

²⁹ One for obvious stultification of the questionnaire and unwillingness to cooperate (answering "I don't know" or "I won't tell you"), one for conflicting answers (claiming to never watch English films and in the following question admitting to often watch English films with subtitles), two for ambiguity and indecision (selecting two items on one scale) and four for incompleteness of answers, where the missing item could not be logically deduced; I did not, however, discard e.g. questionnaires with incomplete supplemental questions (English films with/without subtitles) when the student claimed to never do that particular activity itself (watching English films).

goal in English is to eventually pass the maturita exam, their short term aim is to do well enough in English to be able to advance into the next year of their studies.

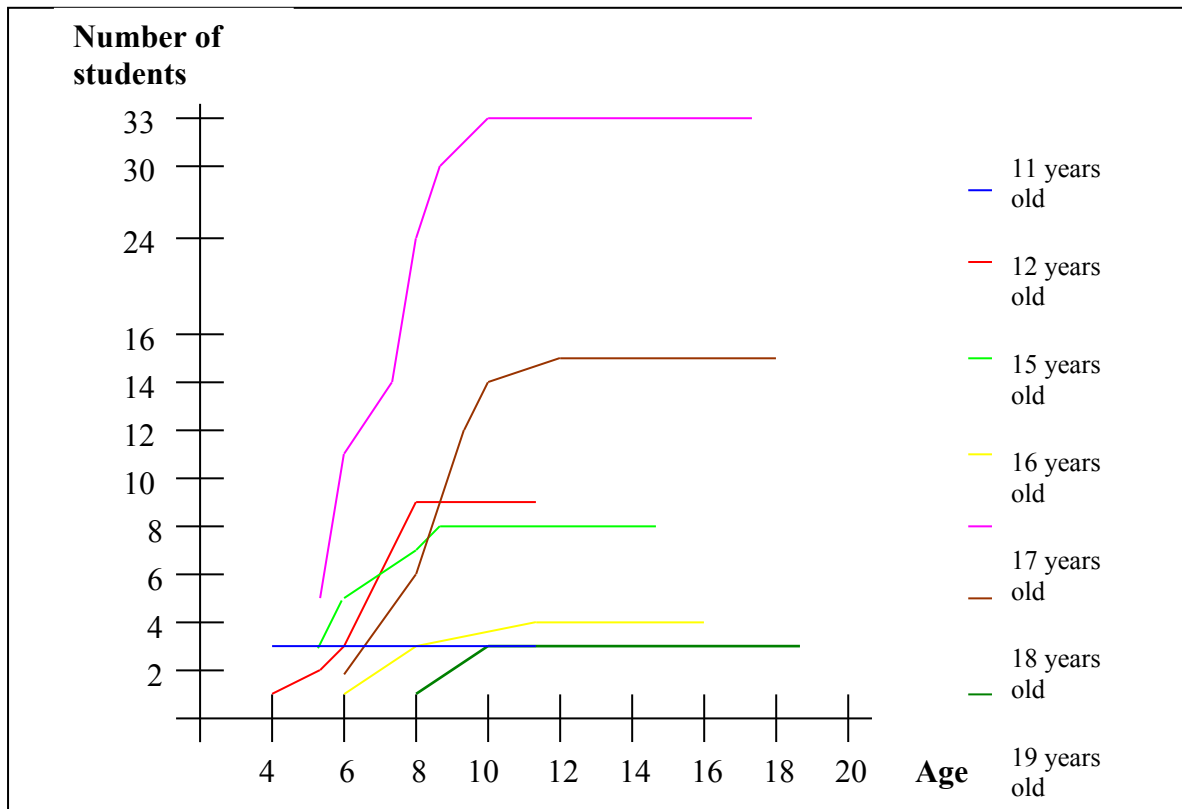
From the following diagram it is clear that the main part (33) of the respondents were 17 years old (the harmonic mean amounted to 16,173 years) and that among the participants there were slightly more girls than boys.



Graph 1: Age and gender structure of participants

The age, at which the participants began studying English, differs considerably (from 4 to 12 years of age), but most of them commenced their English studies when they were 8 years old³⁰ (total number of 22 subjects). For further information, see the following chart representing the duration for which participants were in the process of learning English.

³⁰ This particular piece of information could be most probably ascribed to the fact that, in Czech educational system, the studies of the first foreign language are compulsory since the third grade, where most children are just eight years old.



Graph 2: Duration and age of commencing participants' English studies. ³¹

In addition to the shared learning institute, learning goal and age group, there is another entity the learners have in common: their English teacher, Mgr. Eva Šašková, to whom the next section of this thesis will be dedicated.

Teacher

Mgr. Eva Šašková, the teacher assigned to lead this group of students, is an experienced woman, entrusted as well with leadership of the team of English teachers at the given school (Gymnázium Luďka Pika, Plzeň) where she had been working from the moment of her graduation from the West Bohemian University in Plzeň in 1996. Her other subject is Czech language which she, due to the school schedule organization, currently does not teach. She readily permitted me to investigate both her teaching methods³² and her students' learning circumstances.

When asked about methodology points relevant to this study, Mgr. Šašková admitted to never consciously foster autonomy in her students; her lesson plans are based mainly on the outline predesigned within the scope of the selected textbooks (English

³¹ I realize this diagram may seem for some people rather complicated, so, for the facilitation of this matter, there is a chart with concrete numbers added in the further following section containing appendices (named Appendix 3: Supplemental table for graph 2).

³² With which I was rather familiar by the time since she was my supervising teacher during my teaching practice.

Plus for class 1.L and Maturita Solutions of varying difficulty level for the rest of her classes).

The teacher's assessment is based, above all, on results of written tests provided by the professional authors alongside with the textbooks³³. In addition, she assigns the students about four written essays a semester (their topics are known beforehand) which they are required to write in class during one lesson; evaluated are also two speaking exercises (structured as a monologue) performed by each student before the whole class. Although listening, as a separate skill, is practiced during lessons, it is not marked in any way. The homework she usually selects for her students is in form of home preparation for a more time demanding exercise which is intended to be covered in the next lesson. Mgr. Šašková also rewards the students'³⁴ in-class activity by "small 1s".

The data collected from the students were attentively analyzed and the results subsequently related to the information provided by the teacher; the outcome of this procedure, alongside with commentary aiming to explain the arising indications, could be viewed in the next chapter.

³³ These tests include mainly exercises similar in form and content to those presented in the textbook; their main point is to check the student's grammar and vocabulary.

³⁴ Especially in case of the young (11 and 12 years old) group of students in class 1.L.

4. RESULTS AND COMMENTARIES

As implied both by the content of the theoretical section and the main research question, the study is, above all, concerned with surveying the extent and structure of out-of-class activities conducted by the selected learners. It also explores students' motivation for performing those activities and implication this behaviour could have on their language proficiency - in this case assessed by the teacher through school grades and the by learners' own judgment.

In other words, the main purpose of this study is to confirm or uproot the standing presumption that learners' voluntary commitment to English related activities (as a measurable manifestation of learner autonomy) attains a noticeable effect on their learning achievements; simply put, it aims to measure to what extent the students' willingness to actively participate in their own learning outside class affects their school success.

Results of Individual Items

The first result was revealed even before the true questioning begun; it was the fact that the younger students are, the more they tend to commence learning English at earlier age³⁵. This led to the discovery of an interesting phenomenon; at one school, which supposedly expects the same level of knowledge from all the students, there are eighteen year old students who have studied English for a shorter period of time (since twelve to eighteen years) than all of the eleven year old students (since four to eleven years) - their level of English should, however, considerably differ, since the older students are expected to pass the matura exam within the next year. With that said, attention could be transferred to the individual section included in the questionnaire.

Item One: Frequency of Individual Out-of-class Activities

In the beginning, a considerable part of the questionnaire was filled with listing the most common out-of-class activities, asking the students to mark the frequency with which they dedicate their time to each procedure. The total results were noted into the following table where the number 1 stands for daily frequency, 2 for often, 3 for sometimes, 4 for rarely and 5 for never:

³⁵ As a graphic illustration for this claim could serve the diagram depicting the duration of time for which the participant were learning English that is included in the previous chapter

1	2	3	4	5	Kind of activity
25	26	12	12		Active listening to English songs
2	7	21	30	15	Reading of English texts
13	17	29	12	4	Browsing of English web pages
7	18	8	17	25	Playing games in English with subtitles
11	13	20	16	15	Playing games in English without subtitles
20	37	10	7	1	Watching English films with subtitles
2	8	16	36	13	Watching English films without subtitles
	10	13	23	29	Watching English TV channels
1	2	10	27	35	Writing in English
5	6	25	32	7	Communication with English speakers
3	10	15	30	17	Individual work with English textbook
2	5	5	2		Other activities ³⁶

Table 1: Frequency and structure of students' out-of-class activities.³⁷

From this it is clear, that majority of the participants regularly perform active listening; there was no one who would actually deny doing this at all. On average, each student listens to English music with frequency numbered as 2,15, meaning a little bit under "Often".

Classical reading (from English paper materials), on the other hand, achieved the average of 3,65, which denotes that the questioned students perform this "Sometimes" or only "Rarely" (majority of them selecting the number "4"). Reading of English web pages, however, achieved a considerably better score: 2,69 (between "Often" and "Sometimes"). It is, therefore, much more popular and used among the participants than the previous form of reading.

As for the various sorts of games which the students play in English, it is evident that more common is playing them without subtitles (not only from the most common students' choices; it could be also assessed from comparing the medial numbers of 3,15 for "without subtitles" and number 3,47 for "with subtitles")

In case of films, however, the proportion is reversed; majority of participants prefer watching them with subtitles (2,09); without them, the students watch English films only "Rarely" (3,67). These two activities, though essentially similar, occupied the opposite places on the presumable scale: watching English films with subtitles is the most

³⁶ This question should serve for the participants to be able to embody activities I might have omitted from the list; however, many participant supplied activities which were included in previous categories (e.g. exchanging letters with English speakers); in those cases I disregarded the answers. Among the activities I ranked as valid were e.g. teaching English to someone else, English cards and board games or singing.

³⁷ For increased lucidity, the highest number was put in bold font. A blank space means "0".

common activity of all, watching English films without subtitles is among the least frequent ones. As even less favourite is considered another similar activity - watching English TV channels (3,95).

The most rare of all is, however, writing in English, scoring the average number of mere 4,24; the main part of students, therefore, do not write in English at all if they are not somehow forced to do it. As more frequent was evaluated the communication with an English speaking person (if the speaker needed to be native or not was not specified) which the students performed most often “Rarely” but still nevertheless with calibre frequency of 3,4.

Individual work with textbook proved to be rather seldom as well; most students dedicate to it only “Rarely” and it achieved the overall number of 3,64, similarly as for example classical reading or watching film without subtitles. Other valid English related activities were performed by 14 students, therefore by approximately 19% of all participants, and their frequency amounted to the average number of 2,5.

Before diverting the attention to various reasons based on which the students performed those activities, it may be considered useful to sum up this section; in short, therefore, it could be concluded that among the selected participants the most popular English related activity is watching English films with subtitles, closely followed by listening to English songs, browsing English web sides and playing games without subtitles. As the less favourite activities are considered communication with English speakers, playing English games with subtitles, individual work with English textbook, reading of English printed texts, watching films without subtitles and English TV channels, and, finally, the least common of all the activities is voluntary writing in English.

Item Two: Motivation

In order to assess to what extend the previously discussed out-of-class activities were performed due to learners’ own decision (and whether they could be, therefore, considered as a display of autonomy) it is important to inquire on the motivation the students have for doing them.

The proposed answers conveyed factors included in the spectrum of both external (forced to the learner from outside, in this case represented by categories “Parents’ support” and “No way of performing the activity other than in English”) and internal motivation (based on the fulfilment of a person’s needs and crucial for developed

autonomy, conveyed by the rest of the possibilities³⁸). The results of the inquiry are displayed in the following table where 1 stands for a crucial reason, 2 for an important factor, 3 for a reason of medium significance, 4 for a weak argument and 5 for a matter which is not important at all:

1	2	3	4	5	Reason
39	22	10	3	1	Personal amusement
3	18	25	15	14	Parents' support
38	24	7	5	1	Improvement of learner's English level
10	10	24	15	16	No way of performing the activity other than in English
27	22	14	7	5	Preference for original version in order to avoid alteration
5	2	2			Other reasons ³⁹

Table 2: The hierarchy of learners' reasons for performing English related out-of-class activities

Even at the first glance, the reasons ranking with internal motivation (the first, third and fifth one) are substantially prevailing. As the statistically most significant reason was elected the personal amusement gained from the activity (on the scales reaching the general number 1,73), closely followed by the improvement of learners' English level (1,76) and the fifth reason in chart: preference for original version (2,21). Factors of external motivation, however, scored considerably worse: both outer reasons, "parents' support" (3,25) and "no possibility of performing the activity otherwise" (3,23), were deemed not too important for the learners. When transformed into overall harmonic means, internal motivation for out-of-class activities outbalanced external motivation 1,9 to 3,24 and is, therefore, more important for this group of learners.

It could be, therefore, deduced that student's internal motivation and voluntary willingness to perform the out-of-class activities prevailed over the forced circumstances which may have been affecting them; thus, performing those activities could be, in general, considered as a manifestation of participants' learner autonomy.

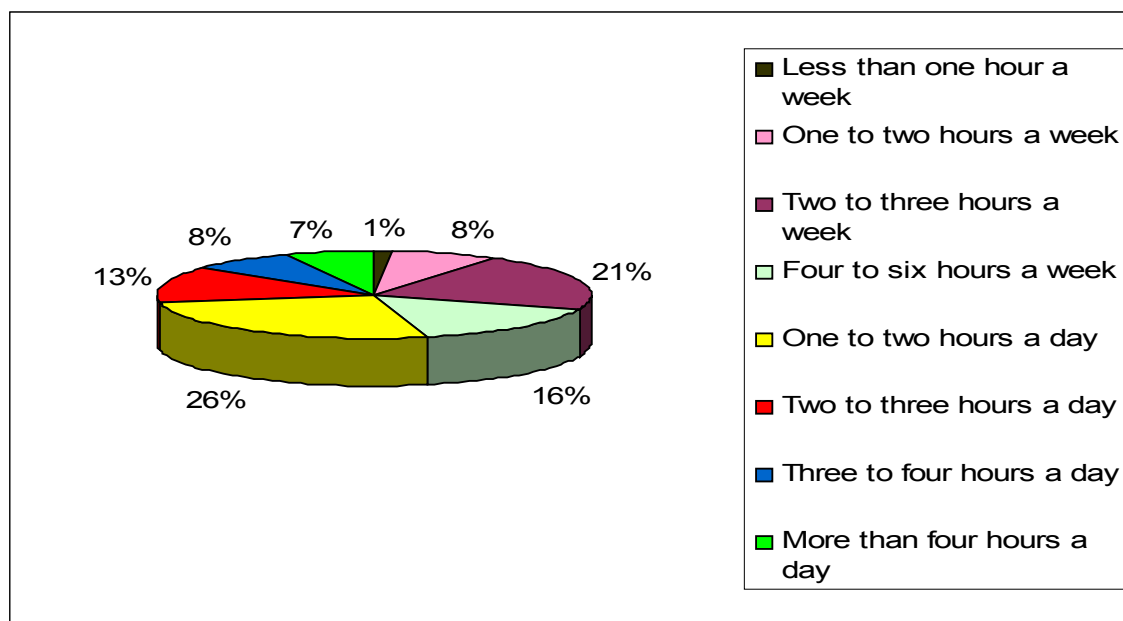
³⁸ Concretely, the first category, personal amusement, corresponds to internal cognitive motivation, improvement of English level and preference for original version is especially relevant in terms of achievement motivation, but could be attributed to social motivation as well, since learning English is among the students generally considered as very important (for further information see the section called "Item eight: Importance of future English learning"); attaining a certain level of English therefore brings along (even in the midst of teenagers) a definite amount of social prestige.

³⁹ In this section (except the cases which should be included in other categories and were, therefore, dismissed) appeared statements expressing what would be called "cuddle factor" by Harmer (2007) but also reasons pointing to external motivation as are e.g. good school grades.

Item Three: Time Dedicated to Out-of-class Activities

Beside their structure, frequency and motivation leading to out-of-class activities, in the potential learning outcome of this behaviour there is involved another equally important factor - its duration or, in other words, time dedicated to it by the learners.

The graph below depicts the amount of time the individual research participants denoted as corresponding to their average weekly or daily involvement in their English related out-of-class activities:



Graph 3: Time dedicated to the English related out-of-class activities by the participants.

As visible from the graph above, the grandest part of students usually spent by their voluntary English activities from one to two hours a day, and more than half of the learners (54%) dedicate to those activities more than an hour a day. There was only one single student who admitted spending with optional English activities less than an hour a week and, on the other side, five students who claimed to spend more than four hours a day involved in them. It could be said that, averagely, the students dedicate to their English related out-of-class activities approximately one or two hours a day.

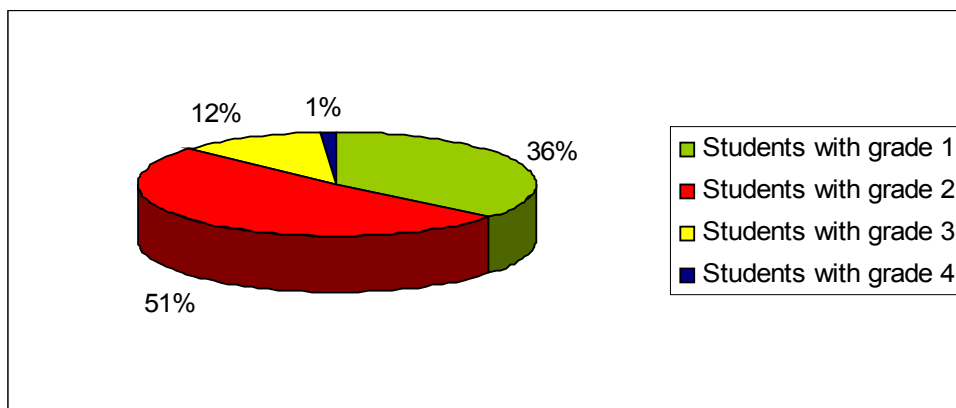
Stating this, the part researching exclusively out-of-class activities is finished. The next part of this research is dedicated to the exploration of the students' school success.

Item Four: Students' School Success

The selected way intended to measure participants' level of proficiency was, for the purposes of this thesis, through their school grades. All the students have one teacher,

who assesses them according to the same criteria, so the differences in given grades could be objectively ascribed to the different level of meeting those standards.

The structure of assigned grades could be viewed in the following graph:

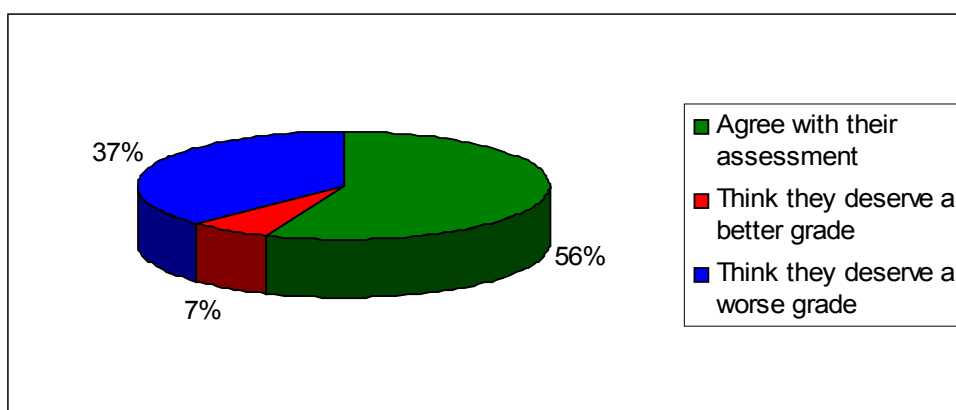


Graph 4: Structure of school grades given to the participants

As shown above, most of the participants earned the grade “2”, whereas the harmonic mean of all English marks given by the teacher was 1,79. How the students regarded this evaluation as objective is a matter discussed in the next section.

Item Five: Student’s Perception of Their School Success

In this section, students were given the opportunity to grade their own English language skills while trying to be as objective as possible. Essentially, they have three possibilities: agree with the mark they were given by the teacher, insinuate that, according to them, they deserved a better mark, or confess that they think themselves to be deserving of a worse grade than they actually received. The following graph, therefore, summarizes the students’ opinions of their English grade:



Graph 5: Students’ perception of their English grades

As evident, the majority of questioned learners agree with the grade they were given by the teacher (56%), but there is still a considerable part of students who think that

they were misjudged – in most cases overestimated (37%) but there are few as well who suppose to be, on the contrary, underestimated by the teacher (7%).

Item Six: Level of Difficulty of Individual Language Skills

As the next thing, learners were asked to assess the difficulty of individual language skills. Again, for the ultimate clarity, it is better to explain that in the following chart 1 stands for a very easy skill, 2 for fairly simple, 3 for somewhat difficult, 4 for difficult and 5 for very complicated:

1	2	3	4	5	Language skill
7	17	35	14	2	Listening
22	34	12	7		Reading
13	24	22	15	1	Speaking
17	35	18	5		Writing

Table 3: The level of difficulty of individual language skills

The findings have shown that listening is considered as the most difficult (on average 2,83), followed by speaking (2,56). Writing was perceived easier (2,15) and reading was elected as the most simple (2,05).

Item Seven: Students' Perception of Helpful Learning Activities

Research results aside, an important factor in assessing the structure of learners' language proficiency is the learners' own opinion about it. In this section, therefore, students were required to evaluate to what extend the offered type of activities helped them to achieve their current level of English. In the chart below, their answers are accumulated again under numbers, where 1 means that the activity helped a lot, 2 that it was certainly helpful to some extend, 3 denotes an average importance of the activity, 4 only minor level of usefulness and 5 means that the activity did not help the learner at all:

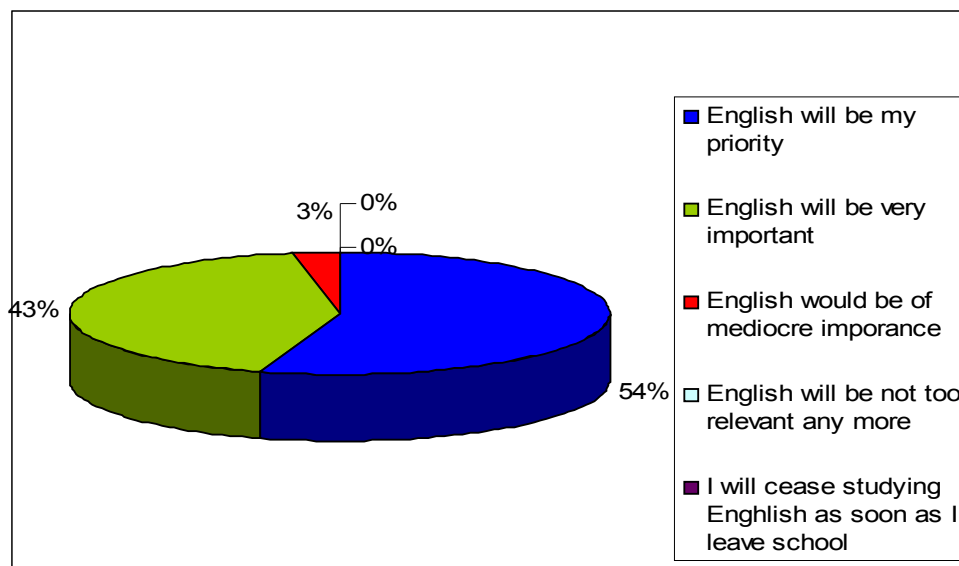
1	2	3	4	5	Learning activity
24	29	17	2	3	English lessons at school, compulsory HW
10	14	24	13	14	Home preparation for school (for tests, grammar rules...)
37	20	12	6		Voluntary out-of-class activities
19	19	19	7	11	Visits and excursions to foreign countries
6	1		1		Other activities ⁴⁰

Table 4: The importance of individual activities for the learners' language proficiency

Evidently, students' out-of-class activities were, by far, considered as the most helpful (total mark given 1,83). English lessons at school and compulsory HW were regarded as the second most useful (2,08). The third position was occupied by students visits and excursion to foreign countries (2,63) and the last one by home preparation for school (3,09).

Item Eight: Importance of Future English Learning

In order to assess the students' motivation and general attitude to English learning, as the last item the participants were asked to evaluate their anticipated future (once they leave their secondary school) in relation to their English learning. The objective was to mark one from five possibilities - the results were as follows:



Graph 6: Students' view of their English learning after leaving school

Apparently, there were no students who would regard English as not relevant for their future, nor were there any who would consider dropping it right after school. Quite the contrary; the majority of students (54%) perceive English as their learning priority, 43% of them think it is very important for them and mere 3% assigns English only mediocre importance.

The next section is dedicated to comments on the results stated above. It, therefore, contains my personal opinions, observations and possible explanations concerning the aforementioned data collected throughout the research process.

Commentary on Individual Items

As for the first item, the configuration of the favoured kinds of out-of-class activities confirmed the structure presented by Pickard (1996) who claims that learners generally prefer to train receptive skills; thus, those findings were not too surprising for me. I also anticipated that the participants would like to listen to music and watch films since it is what people (not only) of their age usually enjoy. Both these activities are easily accessible (as opposite to communication with a foreigner), do not threaten the

⁴⁰ In this case as well as in the previous ones, students tended to fill in activities which are included in other formulations; among those which were not dismissed were this time English lessons provided in kindergarten, language schools or by an English tutor.

possibly anxious learner with potential embarrassment (as writing or speaking would) and could be with ease performed at home. The preference of browsing web pages over reading of printed materials was also to be expected; through the internet the learners can easily gain access to materials of their interest. It is not financially demanding (as books or magazines are) and they could reach vast amounts of informative articles.

What, on the other hand, did surprise me, was the reversed approach to watching films with or without subtitles and to playing games with or without this visual aid. Subtitles help understanding and listening to dialogues with their aid makes the movie watching certainly less demanding for the learner, so why it is not the same with games and learners do not mind the untranslated English there?

I could offer various guesses which may serve as possible explanations. The student may be too lazy or unable to download Czech for their games (which tend to be more complicated and inaccessible than in case of movies). Maybe the worse level of understanding does not matter so much (since the person is more actively involved in the game than in the film and do not pay too much attention to the language) or, possibly, in games vocabulary and grammar tend to be a lot easier, often in form of set phrases and specific expressions.

Similarly as in the case of films, the not too frequent activity of watching English TV channels is probably influenced by the fact that the students do not understand the broadcasting properly without the aid of subtitles (to what they are used to from movies). Additionally, not all the learners can tune the English TV channels at home and in this case the students can hardly choose what exactly they will watch and when.

The structure of students' motivation was an expected - though pleasant - discovery. I did not suppose that the learners would be dedicating their time to those activities in such amounts if they did not truly enjoyed doing them. Furthermore, at their average age (a little over 16), the influence of parents or other authorities is, at least from the developmental aspect, considerably diminished.

The actual time the students spend with English outside the class was, however, rather striking - most of them were this way effectually multiplying the time duration of their weekly school English lessons (some of them managed that even daily). Furthermore, there is some kind of guarantee that the students are really involved in those activities (unlike during English lessons at school) since they are dedicate themselves to them willingly and driven mainly by their interests. It is probably related to the fact that

teenagers spend a lot of time with computers and internet which is closely connected to the use of English as most of the information there is in this language⁴¹.

From the grades given to the students, a suspicion could arise that the teacher is being too “nice” to the student (furthermore when supported with the information that a big part of students think they deserved worse). However, it may not necessarily be the reason; speaking from my personal experience, I could state that students with bad school grades also tend to have troubles with school attendance (which of those factors is the cause for the other one is, however, sometimes hard to tell), so it is quite possible that the “unsuccessful” ones just were not present at the time of questioning (even more so due to the fact that the questionnaire was completed at the beginning of the lesson).

Another feasibility is that the teacher’s assessment is based above all on marking the output of skills which the students denoted as easy (writing, reading comprehension). On the other hand, the students’ perception of “simpler skills” could be certainly influenced by the backwash from the school tests; learners were required to practice them during lessons and probably studied for them at home, knowing they would be tested.

As for students’ opinions, the most relevant ones for this study was their subjective view of what really helped them to achieve their current level of English; I was pleased to discover that, indeed, most of them ascribed their learning success firstly to the out-of-class activities. However, not even the teacher should feel too disappointed since her lessons and teaching efforts got her the second most important position, although the backwash arising from her tests leaves something to be desired. The indication which was a little surprising for me was of how many students had the opportunity to use English in foreign surroundings; they probably travel/encounter foreigners a lot more than I would have guessed.

The results end with an optimistic piece of information; the students consider learning English to be really important for them and perceive it as a priority. Again, it could be partly influenced by the possibility that part of the students for whom the learning is not important just were not present at the moment, but it is still a positive phenomenon.

Now, when finished commenting on individual results, I discuss the principal part of this thesis - the interrelation of those results, concretely the relation of participants’ autonomous behaviour to their language proficiency.

⁴¹ About 43% of web content is considered to be in English (by Internet World Stats, 2010).

Results of Items in Relationships

Within this study, numerous item relationships could be detected. But, unfortunately, no regard will be taken to vast majority of them since their range would by far outmatch the supposed extend of this thesis. For those reasons, only few relationships are investigated, the most important of them being simultaneously the main topic of this thesis – the relationship between students' English related out-of-class activities and their school success.

Relationship between Students' Out-of-class Activities and their English Skills

In order to assess the level of influence that the out-of-class activities held over the students' English outcomes, I choose to compare two groups of students who were placed on the opposite ends of the assessing scale – the first of them formed by learners whose behaviour was showing signs of autonomy, the second by students lacking these characteristics. The rest of “average” students were omitted from this particular comparison.

For the purpose of this study, as highly autonomous learners were selected those students who immerse themselves into the out-of-class activities willingly (meaning that they denoted at least two from the three factors of internal motivation as crucial reasons), performs at utmost types of English related activities at daily basis, and, at the same time, dedicate to those activities more than average amount of time (for this group it means two and more hours a day); as not autonomous learners were, on the other hand, selected those learners who spent with the out-of-class activities three and less hours a week and performed only few of them daily or with significant interest (marked the two of the three reasons indicating the internal motivation with number 3 or higher). In this way, two groups (each with 10 members) were formed.

The group of autonomous learners constituted of 6 men and 4 women of the average age of exactly 17 years. As a group, they performed 3, 45 kinds of activities daily, dedicated to them generally more than three hours a day⁴² and performed them driven by their own interest (harmonic mean of factors of their internal motivation was 1,3, therefore a very strong one). These students evaluated the difficulty of the four language skills by the number 1,85 (between very easy and rather simple) and their

⁴² This item is somewhat hard to assess precisely, since the answer „more than four hours” (appearing within this group four times) does not convey an exact number.

average school grade was 1,4 – two learners supposed they deserved a worse grade, two felt underestimated and considered themselves worth of a better mark⁴³.

The group of “unautonomous” learners was formed by 7 women and 3 men, aged averagely 16,5 years. They performed generally 0,4 types of English related out-of-class activities daily, spent with them approximately 2 to 3 hours a week and their internal motivation was rather weak (with harmonic mean of 3,1) As a group, they evaluated the level of difficulty of the language skills by number 2,73 (between rather simple and of medium difficulty) and their school grade was averagely 2,6, from which 6 students supposed that they deserve even worse than they actually received (in two cases even by 2 degrees).

To compare those results, a short table was created:

Type of the group of learners	Autonomous	Less autonomous
Ø types of daily out-of-class activities	3,45	0,4
Ø duration of out-of-class activities	More than 3 hours a day	2-3 hours a week
Ø level of internal motivation	1,3	3,1
Ø language skills’ difficulty	1,85	2,73
Ø students’ school grade	1,4	2,6
Ø self-evaluation grade	1,4	3,4

Table 5: Comparison of the results achieved by the groups of autonomous and not autonomous learners.

From this chart it is clear, that the autonomous learners (who performed more out-of-class activities more frequently, with elevated motivation and for longer time) achieved, as a result, better grades and considered the language skills as easier; they also evaluated their own achievements more positively.

Influence of Learners’ Age

Besides the relationship between the learners’ autonomy and their proficiency, another noticeable phenomenon was discovered within the relation of learners’ age to the structure of their out-of-class activities. For illustration, see the comparative table below:

⁴³ Another interesting discovery showed that, though those learners achieved above average grades, they are rather unwilling to work independently with their school textbook (realized by number, their score was only 4,5, therefore somewhere between the frequency named “Rarely” and “Never”) whereas the group of not autonomous learners, who received worse grades, achieved the number 2,8 (between “Often” and “Sometimes”) in the same category.

1	2	3	4	5	Kind of activity	1	2	3	4	5
2	4	3	3		Active listening to E. songs	23	22	9	9	
		4	3	5	Reading of English texts	2	7	17	27	10
	4	3	4	1	Browsing of E. web pages	13	13	26	8	3
2	3		2	5	Playing E. games with subtitles	5	15	8	15	20
3	2	1	4	2	Playing E. games without subtitles	8	11	19	12	13
3	4	2	3		Watching E. films with subtitles	17	33	8	4	1
1		2	5	4	Watching E. films without subtitles	1	8	14	31	9
	4		1	7	Watching E. TV channels		6	13	22	22
		3	3	6	Writing in English	1	2	7	24	29
	1	4	6	1	Communication with E. speakers	5	5	21	26	6
3	5	1	2	1	Individual work with textbook		5	14	28	16
1		2			Other activities	1	5	3	2	

Table 6: Comparison of groups of 11-12 year old (left) and 15-19 year old (right)

As notable, the results correspond in most categories and only two exceptions are apparent; younger students even less frequently tend to select for themselves the printed materials, but, on the contrary, they more often voluntarily work with their textbook.

The younger learners also incline to agree more frequently with the grade given by the teacher and achieve usually grades slightly better than average, although their out-of-class involvement in English related activities is not significantly greater; they also feel more confident in their abilities (denote the language skills as easy more often than their older colleagues).

Commentary on Item Relationships

The comparison of the two groups of learners (autonomous and not autonomous) was probably the most interesting work I did in the scope of this thesis; I was even rather impatient to be finally able to get the results. The differences, however, showed to be more eminent than I anticipated.

The first of the results that I would not have guessed was the tendency of the autonomous learners to evaluate themselves as subjectively better⁴⁴ and, on the opposite side, the inclination of the not autonomous learners to assess their own achievements as worse. According to me, this could be caused by the “worse” students’ low self-esteem (created by continuous school failures), their awareness of their own English language weaknesses (which the teacher’s grades may not include) or even their knowledge of

⁴⁴ This could be claimed even though that those students’ average self-evaluation was about the same as their English grade, because among the 10 autonomous learners were 2 who felt underestimated, whereas in the whole group there were only 5 and among the group of not autonomous learners none of them. Those 2 “underestimated” autonomous learners are also the only ones who volunteered a commentary on their own grade within the questionnaire: the first claiming that he got the grade “2” because he was “slacking off”, the second justifying his grade “2” by a proclamation that he does not consider school grades an “objective assessment of his knowledge”.

some kind of cheating during English tests, but also by mistakes on the teacher's part who could tend to give all the students average marks in order to avoid the extremes (grades 1 and 5) or by her unwillingness to solve the problems that would arise if she let a student fail her class completely⁴⁵.

Another surprising result was the connection those two groups had with their willingness to work with their school textbooks in their free time; although the autonomous learners achieved better grades, they work with their school materials only rarely (frequency of 4,5), probably selecting more stimulating incentive by themselves, the less autonomous learners however, although receiving worse grades, work with their textbook more often (2,8). This may be ascribed probably to the "worse" students' efforts to catch up with the rest of the class and the autonomous learners' sufficient language advantage which permits them to dedicate less time to the actual wilful learning. Another explanation offers itself in the form of the presumption that the learners' textbook is not adequately stimulating for learners who are used to selecting their own learning materials.

As for differences discovered when comparing the two slightly different⁴⁶ age groups, it is clear that many of the distinctions are developmentally given; the younger ones (11 and 12 year old) are not so critical, respect their teacher as an authority without much questioning (at least where their grade is concerned) and are still fairly enthusiastic about learning from textbooks⁴⁷. The fact that the younger students appear to be more motivated for the learning could be also influenced by their teacher who is trying to encourage them by good grades.

Though information gathered through the questionnaire could provide many other interesting results and indications, their primary objective was to answer the main research question. So, the next section of this thesis summarizes the facts indicating whether the learners' autonomous behaviour is really connected to students' language proficiency.

⁴⁵ Though, it is also possible that Mgr. Šašková gives those moderate grades intentionally to motivate the students, and maybe it is working quite well; they were clearly not too anxious when assessing the level of difficulty of the language skills nor discouraged when expressing their willingness to future English learning. And, again, it is important to stress out that not all the students were present for the questioning.

⁴⁶ I used the expression "slightly different" knowing full well that the developmental difference between an 11 years and a 19 years old person is huge, but still - all of them are "teens".

⁴⁷ Although this could be influenced also by the fact that they have different textbook than their older counterparts; one that is richer in terms of visual stimuli (English Plus).

Research Questions

Based on the results of the data analysis, this section answers the preselected research questions. This thesis thus proceeds with providing the reader with the answers to the inquires on the general structure, frequency and duration of contemporary learners' English out-of-class activities and their relation to the students' school success.

Minor research question: *What is the structure, frequency and duration of students' English related out-of-class activities?*

As illustrated in the Table 1⁴⁸, the structure and frequency of individual out-of-class language learning activities approximately corresponds with the model presented by Pickard (1996); the predominant activities are centred around receptive language skills (listening and reading). The three most popular activities are the less demanding (subtitled) variation of watching English movies, listening to English songs and browsing English web pages. The three least common activities are watching English films without subtitles, watching English TV channels and, finally, writing in English. The noted age difference appears in the form of younger students' stronger preference of voluntary work with their school textbook but, simultaneously, also in decreased willingness to work with other printed English materials. The questioned learners dedicate to their English related out-of-class activities approximately one or two hours a day.

Main research question: *To what extend are out-of-class activities related to learner's school success?*

This question was answered with the visual aid of Table 5⁴⁹ which compares the out-of-class habit and learning behaviour of two groups of participants; one formed by learners deemed as autonomous, the other by students without those specific qualities. The autonomous group, which performed more out-of-class activities for a longer period of time and with a greater frequency and internal motivation, was discovered to achieve better school results (even through the mean of their self assessment) and to consider the four main language skills easier than the second group did. The autonomous learners were also assessing themselves more positively. Furthermore, the participating students, as a whole, ascribed their English learning progress mainly to their out-of-class activities⁵⁰. From this it could be, therefore, concluded that the learners who regularly and autonomously dedicate themselves to English related out-of-class activities tend to

⁴⁸ To be found on page 25.

⁴⁹ To be found on page 34.

⁵⁰ As marked in the Table 4 on the page 29.

achieve better school results and could be denoted as more proficient⁵¹ than those who lack these specific traits.

With the study completed and research questions answered, the attention could be turned to the possible application of the abovementioned estimations to the Czech school practice and also to the needed revelation of reasons why the discussed findings should not be generalized too much, which is accompanied by suggestions for amending this limitations and also for the future research which could be conducted in this field.

⁵¹ The proficiency is in this sense concluded from their perception of difficulty of individual language skills and their own assessment of their language ability.

5. IMPLICATIONS

This chapter enlists the various practical teaching implications ensuing from the results investigated and presented in the previous chapter as well as reveal where the possible weaknesses within its reasoning and structure may dwell, and also provide the reader with some suggestions for the future research in terms of both this study and a new independent project.

Implications for Teaching

The discussed research study revealed and to certain extent proved the connection of learner autonomy to language proficiency; for teachers it could convey an additional motivation for trying to built autonomy in their students through the various learner training techniques since this way they are not only helping the students to achieve a crucial ability for their future life, but also indirectly fostering their language proficiency.

But, although this thesis was dedicated to the exploration of a seemingly unrelated topic - with respect to the structure of students' out-of-class activities, my strongest suggestion provided for practical teaching would be formulated as a recommendation concerned with the selection of the English language textbook⁵². Present-day students are evidently no longer used to interacting with printed materials and are unwilling to work with classical textbook, especially one containing insufficient scaffolding and few visual stimuli. The computer interface provided to them by some less common textbooks (for example Global eWorkbook published by Macmillan)⁵³ is much more common and acceptable (from the point of view of their habits and interests). This showed to be even more important for the autonomous learners, who tend to ignore entirely the classical textbooks if they are not by some means forced into working with them.

About the same could be said in relation to school English lessons; the more the teacher uses ICT and other audiovisual aids, the more is (s)he presents the students with welcomed and familiar materials. In this case it is necessary to count with the limitations of individual schools and classrooms, but it could be certainly done at some level; at the very least, popular English songs (which the students often listen to; therefore, their vocabulary will be supposedly spontaneously rehearsed in the future) may sometimes replace the usual textbook recordings.

⁵² This suggestion, furthermore, does not even require a change of the curriculum nor any additional time for specific training for its realization, and is therefore more practical.

⁵³ I understand that there still are some students who have not regular access to a computer, but it is still worth at least asking the students if they would want to work with such textbook.

Those suggestions should be, however, perceived by the teachers more as hints than reprimands for those findings could not be universally applied on all the possible circumstances and there are certainly limitations to the conducted research which will be discussed in the following section.

Limitation of the Research

Although this the research managed to answer the determined research question, one of the weaknesses of this study were certainly the rather simplistic analysis methods that were used; all the computing and visualisation science were reached through simple arithmetic, logic and without the help of a tool or application more complicated than the commonly used Microsoft Excel. If I were able to work with a purely statistic tool (such as is e.g. One-Way ANOVA), the result may appear much more professional.

The findings are probably significantly culturally coloured since all the participants were born and lived in the Czech Republic; the group, therefore, lacked the needed diversity to be considered as conveying of all the different cultural aspects which show in students' out-of-class activities. The sample group could be, however, to some extent considered representative within the general cultural and educational situation in the countries of the European Union.

This research study was also limited by the relatively small number of respondents⁵⁴ which is even more aggravated by the fact that not all of the students of the selected teacher were present at the time – if they were, some statistical difference might have certainly arisen⁵⁵. On the other hand, I doubt that the divergence would be so large that it would completely change the results of the study since the numbers were rather explicit.

Suggestions for Further Research

If given the appropriate space, I would certainly consider conducting the research with at least two other teachers and compare the overall results; the common features in learners' behaviour would in that case convey more relevant significance⁵⁶. The most

⁵⁴ The intended number was made even smaller by the 10 respondents who did not complete the questionnaire in a passable way.

⁵⁵ I also discovered that the 10 questionnaires which I was forced to exclude from the research were those containing slightly below-average data (the students achieved slightly worse marks from English, were less active and less motivated (and possibly even less autonomous as well) which was probably connected also to their attitude and attention dedicated to the questionnaire).

⁵⁶ Another thing I considered was to let the students sign the questionnaire and repeat the research after a few years to see if the more autonomous learners achieved a more rapid improvement of their English proficiency level than the less autonomous ones. But this method would, unfortunately, require a considerable amount of time.

useful for me personally, however, would be to perform this study with my own students, so I could analyse their specific needs and interests.

If I should do the same research again, I would probably enrich the first item by the possibility “Teaching/explaining English to someone” because I feel that I omitted this option simply because it did not come to my mind, although it is rather common even among the students and it really should occur to me – especially considered my field of study. I would also try to make the questionnaire more tabular (though I do not currently know how exactly) to avoid having to exclude so many participants.

While conducting and scoring the research, many other possible research questions arose. If I should select only one of them, it would be to what extent learner autonomy is connected with the age of commencing the learner’s language studies. I suppose it could prove interesting to investigate whether the early start would aid the later development of learner autonomy or hinder it. Furthermore, according to me, currently is the right time to conduct such a research since today there are still many students at schools who began learning English at later age and also a big part of them who are learning it since they attended the kindergarten – the participants would be therefore easy to access and to compare suitably.

With this last bit of information, this chapter, dedicated to stating the limitation of the realized research, possible implication for teaching and suggestions for future research, is finished and with it also the adding of new facts and assumptions. The last chapter is dedicated to a conclusion which serves to sum up and highlight the relevant points discussed in this thesis.

6. CONCLUSION

The theoretical background part included in this thesis describes the concepts of learner autonomy and language proficiency along with the various factors which influence them: the students' motivation, learning conditions and other personal characteristics. The main point was, however, to ascertain the relation of those two main terms to each other.

The theoretical part was, therefore, intended to serve as a basis for the following practical investigation of the relationship between language proficiency and learner autonomy. Students' out-of-class activities were selected as the most suitable means, through which it would be possible to access the complex nature of learner autonomy, and the participants' school grade and their self-assessment were used to assess the level of students' language proficiency. The needed data were collected by an 8 item questionnaire from 85 involved students and subsequently analyzed both separately and in relations to each other.

The analysis of participants' out-of-class activity preferences proved that the students prefer to train mainly receptive skills in their free time (especially through various audiovisual stimuli) and are not very keen on working with textbook or any other printed material. Another conclusion was reached through the discovery of prevailing internal motivation the students have for performing the English related out-of-class activities and the amount of time they dedicate to it, averagely multiplying in this way the time they spent learning English at school. These item results concerned with the participants' out-of-class activity served to form a criterion for selecting 10 most autonomous and 10 least autonomous learners. The accumulated data of those two groups were subsequently compared to each other with the conclusion that the autonomous group of students reached better grades and evaluated themselves and their language skills more positively than was the average grade for the group as a whole. The least autonomous students, on the other hand, reached only substandard grades, considered the language skills more difficult and tended to underestimate themselves. By this, the main research question was answered.

The gained knowledge suggests that the methods to foster autonomy in their students and the careful selection of learning materials for the learners of this age group are considered by the teachers. Consequently, it could be expected that students' language skills will further develop and improve.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Dotazník

Pohlaví: muž

žena

Věk: _____

Od kolika let se učíš anglicky? _____

1) Kterým z těchto aktivit se věnuješ ve svém volném čase? Označ čísla od 1 do 5, kdy 1 znamená, že se dané činnosti věnuješ každodenně, 2 často, 3 občas, 4 málokdy a 5 nikdy

1 2 3 4 5 - aktivní poslech anglických písní (snažíš se porozumět textu, ne pouze jako pozadí)

1 2 3 4 5 - četba anglicky psaných knih/časopisů/novin

1 2 3 4 5 - prohlížení internetových stránek psaných v angličtině

1 2 3 4 5 - hraní her v anglickém znění

1 2 3 4 5 - s titulky

1 2 3 4 5 - bez titulků

1 2 3 4 5 - sledování anglických filmů/seriálů/ v původním znění

1 2 3 4 5 - s titulky

1 2 3 4 5 - bez titulků

1 2 3 4 5 - sledování anglických programů v TV (Euronews, BBC, Cartoon Network...)

1 2 3 4 5 - psaní blogů/článků/textů v angličtině

1 2 3 4 5 - písemná či mluvená komunikace s anglicky hovořící osobou

1 2 3 4 5 - samostatná práce s učebnicí (dobrovolné procvičování gramatiky, opakování si, vypisování si slovíček...)

1 2 3 4 5 - další aktivita související s angličtinou, která nebyla zadána jako úkol od učitele, napiš prosím jaká:

2) Z jakého důvodu se těmto aktivitám věnuješ? Označ prosím číslo pro následující důvody podle jejich důležitosti (1 pro velmi důležitý důvod, 5 pro málo podstatný)

1 2 3 4 5 - baví mě to

1 2 3 4 5 - rodiče mě v tom podporují, abych si zlepšil angličtinu

1 2 3 4 5 - myslím, že je to užitečné pro zlepšení mé úrovně angličtiny

1 2 3 4 5 - jinak než v angličtině se těmto aktivitám věnovat nelze (např. kniha/hra nebyla přeložena do češtiny)

1 2 3 4 5 - preferuji původní znění, protože tak nedochází k možnému zkreslování při překladu

1 2 3 4 5 - další důvod:

3) Kolik hodin trávíš průměrně těmito aktivitami?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> méně než hodinu <i>týdně</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> jednu až dvě hodiny <i>denně</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hodinu až dvě <i>týdně</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> dvě až tři hodiny <i>denně</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> dvě až tři hodiny <i>týdně</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> tři až čtyři hodiny <i>denně</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> čtyři až šest hodin <i>týdně</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> více než čtyři hodiny <i>denně</i> |

4) Jaká byla Tvá známka z angličtiny na Tvém posledním vysvědčení?

1 2 3 4 5

5) Jakou známku z angličtiny sis podle svého mínění doopravdy zasloužil? Ber v potaz svou skutečnou schopnost dorozumět se a zkus být prosím co nejvíce objektivní.

1 2 3 4 5

6) Přiřaď následujícím jazykovým dovednostem známku od 1 do 5 podle toho, jak jsou pro Tebe obtížné (1 značí velmi jednoduchý, 2 poměrně snadný, 3 středně obtížný, 4 těžký, 5 velmi složitý)

1 2 3 4 5 - poslech

1 2 3 4 5 - čtení

1 2 3 4 5 - mluvení

1 2 3 4 5 - psaní

7) Posuď, co především Ti pomohlo dostat se na svou současnou úroveň angličtiny (přiřaď nabízeným čísla od 1 do 5, kde 1 = pomohlo velice, 5 = nepomohlo vůbec)

1 2 3 4 5 - hodiny angličtiny ve škole a práce zadaná učitelem na doma (domácí úkoly)

1 2 3 4 5 - Tvé vlastní „nucené“ učení se doma (např. slovíčka na testy, gramatická pravidla)

1 2 3 4 5 - Tvé vlastní volnočasové aktivity, které zahrnovaly používání angličtiny

1 2 3 4 5 - zahraniční pobyty a exkurze, při kterých jsi angličtinu upotřebil(a)

1 2 3 4 5 - další:.....

8) Jak bys hodnotil(a) důležitost učení se anglicky mimo školu pro svůj budoucí život? Označuj ji podle důležitosti (1 značí, že angličtina je prioritou, budeš se v ní po škole určitě stále vzdělávat, 5 vyjadřuje, že je pro Tebe naprosto nepodstatná a zanecháš jí okamžitě, jak budeš moci)

1 2 3 4 5

Děkuji za upřímnost a spolupráci při vyplňování dotazníku ☺

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

Sex: man

woman

Age: _____

Since what age are you learning English? _____

1) To which of these activities are you dedicating yourself in your free time? Mark numbers from 1 to 5 where 1 means that you do this activity daily, 2 often, 3 sometimes, 4 rarely and 5 never.

1 2 3 4 5 – active listening to English songs (you try to really listen to the words)

1 2 3 4 5 – reading of English books/magazines/newspapers

1 2 3 4 5 – browsing of English web pages

1 2 3 4 5 – playing of games in English

1 2 3 4 5 – with subtitles

1 2 3 4 5 – without subtitles

1 2 3 4 5 – watching English movies/series in original sounding

1 2 3 4 5 – with subtitles

1 2 3 4 5 – without subtitles

1 2 3 4 5 – watching English TV channels (Euronews, BBC, Cartoon Network...)

1 2 3 4 5 – writing of blogs/articles/texts in Englishpsaní blogů/článků/textů v angličtině

1 2 3 4 5 – written or spoken communication with an English speaker

1 2 3 4 5 – independent work with textbook (voluntary rehearsing of grammar, listing of vocabulary...)

1 2 3 4 5 – another English related activity which was not assigned by the teacher:

.....

2) Why do you do these activities? Please mark one number for the following reasons according to their importance (1 for a very important reason, 5 for a not important reason at all)

1 2 3 4 5 - I enjoy it

1 2 3 4 5 – my parents support me because it improves my English

1 2 3 4 5 – I think it is important for my English learning

1 2 3 4 5 – there is no way of doing it other than in English (e.g. the book was not translated into Czech)

1 2 3 4 5 – I prefer the original version because I want to avoid the alteration during its translation

1 2 3 4 5 – another reason:

3) How many hours do you spent with these activities?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> less than an hour a <i>week</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> one to two hours a <i>day</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> one to two hours a <i>week</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> two to three hours a <i>day</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> two to three hours a <i>week</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> three to four hours a <i>day</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> four to six hours a <i>week</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> more than four hours a <i>day</i> |

4) What was your English grade at your last school report?

1 2 3 4 5

5) According to you, what grade did you really deserved? Please, consider your real ability to communicate and please try to be as objective as possible.

1 2 3 4 5

6) Match the following language skills with a mark according to its difficulty for you (1 for very easy, 2 for fairly simple, 3 for somewhat difficult, 4 for difficult and 5 for very complicated)

1 2 3 4 5 - listening

1 2 3 4 5 - reading

1 2 3 4 5 - speaking

1 2 3 4 5 - writing

7) Evaluate what, above all, helped you to attain your current level of English (choose from the number where 1 means that the activity helped a lot, 5 means that it did not help at all)

1 2 3 4 5 – English lessons at school and HW from the teacher

1 2 3 4 5 – your own “forced” learning at home (rehearsing for tests, grammar...)

1 2 3 4 5 – your own English related out-of-class activities

1 2 3 4 5 – foreign stays and excursions during which you used English

1 2 3 4 5 - other:.....

8) How would you evaluate the importance of out-of-class learning for your future life? Mark a number according to its importance (1 means that English is a priority for you and that you will continue in its studies, 5 means that English is of no importance to you and you will cease studying as soon as you can)

1 2 3 4 5

Thank you for your honesty and cooperation during the completion of this questionnaire



SHRNUTÍ

Tato diplomová práce vysvětluje čtenáři pojmy autonomie studentů a jazyková dovednost společně s jejich principy a souvisejícím termíny. Tento teoretický základ by měl sloužit jako východisko pro následující praktickou studii vztahu mezi těmito dvěma pojmy prostřednictvím srovnávání struktury, trvání a frekvence studentských mimoškolních aktivit oproti jejich školní známce a sebehodnocení jejich vlastní jazykové dovednosti. Výzkum zahrnutý v této práci je prováděn pomocí dotazníku a sesbíraná data jsou analyzována jak odděleně, tak ve vzájemných vztazích. Na závěr jsou projednávány možné důsledky nalezených vztahů a struktur na výuku.