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Hungarian higher education EFL students' perceptions of learner autonomy

ABSTRACT. Technology has provided language learners with opportunities to learn English autonomously. Despite previous studies in the Hungarian context (e.g., Édes 2008; Szőcs 2017), more research on learner autonomy is required in order to find out what might explain university EFL learners' lack of autonomy and help them become more autonomous. The purpose of this quantitative study was to address the problem by investigating learners' perceptions of their own and their teachers' responsibilities in language learning, their perceived abilities and motivation to learn English, their autonomous behaviours outside and inside the classroom, and the relationships between the above variables. The questionnaire was completed by 74 EFL students from a Hungarian university. The data were analysed by SPSS 26.0. The results indicate that in the investigated context, in the EFL learners' perceptions, teachers were more responsible for their in-class learning than themselves. Nevertheless, the students demonstrated some autonomy both inside and outside class, to an equal extent.

KEYWORDS: Autonomous language learning, learner autonomy, EFL, autonomous behaviours, Hungary.

1. INTRODUCTION

As one of the most accepted educational notions, learner autonomy still stimulates more critical discussion, especially in language education (e.g., Borg & Alshumaimeri 2019). Although autonomy favours a learner-centred teaching approach, how it should be defined, applied, and appropriated in each educational context still needs to be dialogued. A balance between the level of language learner autonomy and the level of teacher involvement in the overall teaching-learning process is a notable point in promoting language learner autonomy. To address this issue, the roles of language teachers and learners within this concept have been discussed in the relevant literature.

In the context of higher education in Hungary, learner autonomy is among the objectives outlined in the National Core Curriculum (NCC), alongside the widely acknowledged educational goal of fostering learner autonomy in the modern era of language learning (Sifakis, Oder, Lehmann & Blūma 2006; Szőcs 2017). The NCC calls for a degree of autonomy for institutions and teachers to develop local curricula for individual institutions and educational programmes. Despite its positive shift towards competence-based education relevant to the current 21st-century education era, the Hungarian curriculum reform has been criticised for not reflecting the reality of language education in Hungary (e.g., Medgyes & Nikolov 2010; Öveges & Csizér 2018). Furthermore, in the centralised framework curriculum, learner autonomy is somewhat limited, as compulsory language education and school-leaving exams are likely to restrain learners from choosing what and how they want to learn (Sifakis et al. 2006).

Based on the previous Hungarian studies, despite both learners' and teachers' positive attitudes towards autonomous language learning, delays in promoting learner autonomy in Hungarian secondary and higher language education are attributed to teacher-centred methods, students' beliefs about teachers having more responsibility for their learning, and students' failure to put their beliefs about autonomous language learning behaviours into practice (Asztalos & Szénich 2019; Édes 2008; Kormos, Csizér, Menyhárt Török 2008; Szőcs 2017). Moreover, Asztalos, Szénich and Csizér (2020) recently stated that despite the reforms, such as increased contact hours and in-service teacher training in Hungarian language education, there are hardly any significant changes in terms of autonomy. Asztalos et al. (2020: 280) mentioned "lack of long-term strategies in compulsory education and the monolingual Hungarian context" as possible reasons for this. Despite previous similar studies in the selected area, further research on language learner autonomy is still needed in the Hungarian tertiary education context in order to investigate the underlying causes of the phenomenon while potentially providing solutions that facilitate the fostering of language learner autonomy.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In academia, it is not uncommon to define an educational concept from different angles. The concept of autonomy is viewed differently by many scholars, depending on their perspectives and contexts. Its concept or role in language education has also been discussed in the context of other educational concepts (e.g., motivation and self-efficacy) (Dong & Mustapha 2020; Girelli et al.

2018; Hornstra, Stroet & Weijers 2021; Liu 2015; Tabassam, Azhar & Islam 2021). The following section presents a brief explanation of the concepts of language learner autonomy and some related constructs such as ability and motivation.

2.1. Autonomy in life, autonomy in learning, autonomy in language learning

The term *learner autonomy* came under discussion in language education with Holec's (1981: 3) definition: "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". Later scholars (e.g., Benson 2001, 2008, 2012; Dickinson 1994; Little 1991; Littlewood 1996; Nunan 2003) have contributed to the dialogue with diverse conceptualisations of the term. Although Dickinson's (1994: 12) definition of autonomy is "an attitude to learning", both Dickinson (1994) and Holec (1981) similarly recognised the importance of taking responsibility for learner autonomy. Dickinson (1994: 5) claimed that "language learning is best facilitated by the development of greater independence on the part of the learner, involving the learner in accepting a greater share of responsibility for his own learning". The notion of taking responsibility for one's life and learning stems from the concept of being a responsible individual (e.g., Benson 2012; Dickinson 1994).

However, in Little's (1991: 4) definition, autonomy is "a *capacity* – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action". Another similar conceptualisation was conceived by Littlewood (1996: 428), who proposed that autonomy is "a capacity for thinking and acting independently that may occur in any kind of situation (including, of course, a situation where the focus is on learning)". According to Littlewood (1996), this *capacity* is based on two aspects: *ability* and *willingness*. The former involves knowledge and skills necessary to make decisions when learning, while the latter relates to the motivation and confidence to do so.

Learner autonomy seems to be the point where the philosophical concept of autonomy in life and the educational concept of autonomy in learning meet. According to Benson (2001), learners can be inherently autonomous, which can also be related to *personal autonomy*, i.e., *autonomy in life* (Benson 2012). Benson (2012) claimed that a person's autonomy in life can somehow affect their autonomy in general learning and language learning. Personal autonomy refers to how and to what extent individuals can exercise autonomy in their lives. Accordingly, the level of ability to practise personal autonomy will have implications for individuals' learning journey. The educational environment itself plays a significant role in this matter, particularly in whether it enables learners to exercise autonomy and to what extent it enables them to do so. Consequently, being able to promote

the language learner's autonomy seems to be, in some way, tied to fostering the learner's personal autonomy (Lou, Chaffee, Lascano, Dincer & Noels 2018).

The view that learners may have the ability to take responsibility for their language learning to some extent is insufficient to conclude that every autonomous language learner will know how to make appropriate choices for their learning (Little 1991; Littlewood 1996). In general, "…a lot of learners actually don't know what is going on in their classes" (Dickinson 1993: 330). This is where *learning competence* (Holec 2008: 3) or *informed autonomy* (Dickinson 1994: 5) needs to be nurtured in learners via *learner training* (Dickinson 1994; Little 1991).

While it is desirable to implement learner autonomy in EFL classes, the practical challenges are unavoidable, depending on the number of institutional constraints that arise in any formal educational context. In this case, the most likely solution may be to balance the level of autonomy shared by all stakeholders, such as learners, teachers, and administrators, and allow learners conditioned freedom or *situational freedom* (Benson 2008: 29). However, before learners are trained on learning competence, i.e., on learning to learn, their presumably existing autonomous behaviours, i.e., "the learners' overall attitudes towards the idea and practice of autonomous learning" (Benson & Lor 1998: 1), must be identified in order to determine their level of autonomy.

Moreover, the growing English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and multilingual communities cannot be disregarded since they bring challenges and discussions to English language teaching and learning. From this ELF perspective, Illés (2012: 509) defined learner autonomy as "the capacity to become competent speakers of the target language who are able to exploit the linguistic and other resources at their disposal effectively and creatively". Palfreyman's (2014: 179) similar definition of learner autonomy as "a capacity for intentional use in context of a range of interacting resources towards learning goals" also highlights the significance of exploiting resources. Also, Illés (2019) proposed a model that might be able to accommodate the needs of the current education age, particularly in using English as an international lingua franca for adult tertiary-level language learners. The model consists of three perspectives: autonomy as a communicator, autonomy as a learner, and autonomy as a person.

Besides, Benson and Lamb (2020) recently discussed learner autonomy by linking it with multilingualism. They emphasised that learner autonomy nowadays can mean more than taking responsibility for learning. In Benson and Lamb's (2020) view, it also encapsulates the enactment of autonomy in language learning and language use through the use of possible learning opportunities and the target language. Therefore, with the current trends in language learning, it is crucial to provide choices and promote the potential learning opportunities and resources available to learners. Benson and Lamb (2020) proposed a model suit-

able for multilingual communities in which "learners would choose a language that they wished to learn, identify manageable targets (which may or may not relate to certified accreditation), find available resources, monitor their learning, and assess and evaluate their progress" (Benson & Lamb 2020: 85–86). This can be relevantly adaptable for English learners and also coincides with Illés' (2012) definition of learner autonomy.

2.2. Learner Autonomy, Motivation, and Self-determination

Learner autonomy, motivation, and self-determination are often discussed together as interrelated concepts in the focused research field (Lou et al. 2018). As Masgoret and Gardner (2003: 173) described,

> a motivated individual expends effort, is persistent and attentive to the task at hand, has goals, desires, aspirations, enjoys the activity, experiences reinforcement from success and disappointment from failure… and makes use of strategies to aid in achieving goals.

In the context of second language (L2) learning, goal setting is a topic frequently associated with both learner autonomy (e.g., Nunan 2003) and motivation (e.g., Dörnyei 1998; Tremblay & Gardner 1995). Learners who establish clear objectives for their L2 development tend to exhibit higher motivation (Tremblay & Gardner 1995). Additionally, *learner autonomy* is regarded as one of the essential principles for motivating language learners, as stated in Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998) ten commandments for motivating language learners. Deci and Ryan (1985), Dickinson (1993, 1995), and Ushioda (2008) investigated the connections between autonomy and motivation and established how the two ideas are related. According to Dickinson (1993), achieving success in learning can elevate learners' motivation, prompting them to assume greater responsibility for their own learning. This is exemplified by the fact that learners driven by intrinsic motivation can also be considered autonomous learners, and vice versa. These learners take ownership of their learning journey and attribute their achievements or setbacks primarily to their own attempts. Consequently, even in the face of failure, their motivation remains intact throughout the learning process (Dickinson 1995).

Continuing the discussion, Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory (SDT) serves as a link between the concepts mentioned earlier. In the framework of SDT, there are three fundamental motivational aspects: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation, which were categorised by Ryan and Deci (1985) as autonomy orientation, control orientation, and impersonal orientation. According to Deci, Olafsen and Ryan (2017), only those who possess a sense of

autonomy will take on more responsibility, act autonomously, and thus achieve more favourable outcomes. Autonomy represents one of the psychological needs alongside competence and relatedness, which collectively serve as prerequisites for personal happiness under the concept of SDT (Deci et al. 2017). Existing literature consistently highlights the significance of all three psychological needs for fostering learners' autonomous motivation. When learning takes place in an autonomy-supported environment, there is a higher chance for learners to be more motivated and autonomous (Noels, Pelletier, Clément and Vallerand 2000). Again, Noels, Lou, Chaffee, Zhang and Zhang (2019) mentioned the positive relationship between autonomy perceived (self-perceptions of autonomy), competence, relatedness, and self-determined and intrinsic motivation. Therefore, SDT plays an important role in explaining how learner autonomy and motivation are connected.

2.3. Learners' beliefs in their ability in autonomous learning

Since the ability or capability of taking responsibility for one's learning is frequently used to define learner autonomy, autonomous learners are generally those who can set goals, select learning content and materials, assess their achievements, etc., i.e., learners who are autonomous at different stages of the learning process. It has also been acknowledged that learners' learning efforts and behaviours are influenced by their beliefs in their competence to carry out an activity (e.g., Bandura 1997). Bandura (1997: 3) defined *self-efficacy* as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments". Numerous studies have addressed the significance of self-efficacy in language learning and its impacts on other aspects of learning such as learner autonomy and motivation (e.g., Csizér, Albert & Piniel 2021; Xiao 2021). This study also examined whether learners believe they can take responsibility for their learning in the conventional classroom environment.

2.4. Autonomous Learning Behaviours

Benson's (2008: 15) assertion that "autonomy is primarily concerned with learning, in a much broader sense, and its relationship to learners' lives beyond the classroom" also signifies the importance of understanding learners' beliefs about autonomous learning and their autonomous learning behaviours inside and outside the classroom. Learners may demonstrate different forms of autonomy throughout their language learning process (Benson 2001; Little 1991); nevertheless, they may not be aware of their autonomy practices. Therefore, it is

worthwhile to examine learners' beliefs and behaviours to get to know individual learners' level of autonomy in learning English in each context (Chang 2007).

3. PREVIOUS STUDIES

In terms of the research setting, a review of previous similar studies conducted in secondary and tertiary education in the chosen context (Asztalos & Szénich 2019; Édes 2008; Kormos et al. 2008; Szőcs 2017) has been undertaken. Édes' (2008) case study with three first-year English majors at a Hungarian higher education institution explored their autonomous beliefs and behaviours and yielded some insights into how autonomous they were and how they adapted to the transition between secondary and tertiary learning. The findings revealed that the learning process differed between the secondary and tertiary levels because learning tended to be more passive in the former, whereas the latter demanded a more autonomous attitude from the students, to which they were not accustomed. Szőcs (2017) investigated the correspondences and discrepancies between learners' and teachers' beliefs about autonomous learning in secondary schools. By emphasising the value of both life experience and language learning experience, the teachers made a connection between their students' autonomy as language learners and their personal autonomy in life. Later, Asztalos and Szénich (2019) examined language learners' learning habits beyond the classroom. They discovered that learners seemed to recognise the salience of being responsible for their learning achievement, and they viewed both learners and teachers as being responsible for their learning process. More than half of the participants implied that they would need guidance and support from teachers. Based on the reviewed studies, one consistent finding seems to characterise language learner autonomy in the Hungarian EFL context, namely, that it does not seem to reach a satisfactory level. In secondary schools, learners do not appear to have developed the habit of autonomous learning, which adversely affects their learning in higher education as well (Kormos et al. 2008). The current study focused on the Hungarian tertiary context and attempted to investigate the beliefs about autonomous learning and autonomous learning behaviours of English majors.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Considering the literature reviewed and the aims of the investigation, the following research questions were developed:

RQ1.: What characterises students' views regarding their own roles and those
of their teachers in terms of taking responsibility in learning English?

RQ2.: What are the patterns of their autonomous English language learning
behaviours both within and outside the classroom?

RQ3.: How do students' perceptions of their own responsibilities, their autono-
mous behaviours, their motivation, and their perceived ability in learning
English intersect and influence one another?

4.1. Participants

A total of 74 EFL students filled in the online survey. Among them, there were
17 male students, 55 female students, and one individual who did not specify their
gender. 32 of them were from a particular Hungarian university, while the rest
did not provide information about their university affiliation. Their nationalities
included 65 Hungarians, one Hungarian-Estonian, one English-Hungarian, two
Russians, two Kazakhs, one Turkish, one Bangladeshi, and one Chinese. Their
ages ranged from 18 to 32, and their academic years of study ranged from first
year to sixth year. Seven of them attended the first year, 10 the second year, 46 the
third year, three the fourth year, seven the fifth year of the university, and one
was in the sixth year. In spite of studying in different academic programmes, the
participants were English majors, taking another language or subject as another
major or minor, such as English in Business, English in the Media, Mathematics,
French, German, Hungarian, Spanish, or Italian. 31 of them were teacher trainees.
The distribution of their self-reported proficiency was as follows: 53 of them
regarded their English as advanced, 11 as native-like, nine as intermediate, and
one as pre-intermediate. The fact that they were specialised in English made
the participants well-suited for the purpose of the research since they could be
assumed to be more motivated learners of English.

4.2. Instrument

The original questionnaire, developed by Spratt, Humphreys and Chan (2002),
was adapted for a similar study conducted in Japan by Tomita and Sano (2016).
In their study, Tomita and Sano included 47 items that measured four main
constructs in their questionnaire: 13 items assessed students' perceptions of their
own and their teachers' responsibilities; 11 items evaluated their perceptions of
their abilities; one item gauged their motivation; and 22 items examined their
autonomous behaviours. The questionnaire items of Tomita and Sano (2016)

(discussed below) were modified for the Hungarian context in the current study. Clear section instructions were added for the respondents' convenience, and the scales were again revised in the present questionnaire. The questionnaire adopted a five-point Likert scale, as students were asked to choose from options ranging from 1 to 5. This made the students' choice easier due to their familiarity with the Hungarian grading system, which consists of five grades. The pilot questionnaire's last version contained five sections: background information and four other sections, with a total of 60 items to measure six variables. The background information section of the survey asked about the respondents' nationality, gender, course title, academic study, specialisation, age, and English proficiency. The items for the six variables were structured in the survey as follows:

1. *Students' responsibility* (13 items): In Section 1, the point (Fairly) was introduced between "A little" and "Mainly" on Tomita & Sano's (2016) four-point Likert scale (Not at all, A little, Mainly, Completely). This allowed students to provide more nuanced responses regarding their own responsibilities in learning English.

2. *Teacher's responsibility* (13 items): The questionnaire reused the identical items from Section 1 to assess how learners perceived their teacher's responsibilities within the context of learning English.

3. *Students' perceived abilities* (11 items): Tomita and Sano's (2016) five-point scale was adjusted to (Very poorly, Poorly, OK, Well, Very well) to maintain grammatical consistency with the modified question: "If you had the following opportunities, how well do you think you would be able to…?"

4. *Students' motivation* (5 items): The original questionnaire's single item measuring motivation was replaced with five items designed by the researchers, that inquired about learners' motivated learning behaviour. A five-point scale ranging from "Completely agree" to "Completely disagree" was used.

5. *Students' autonomous behaviours outside the classroom* (22 items): In Section 4, additional items were included to assess learners' current autonomous learning activities both outside and inside the classroom. These additions were based on input from Hungarian students regarding their common independent English learning practices. The original four-point scale (Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never) was changed and extended to a five-point scale (Almost Daily, A couple of times a week, A couple of times a month, A couple of times a year, Never).

6. *Students' autonomous behaviours inside the classroom* (9 items): No changes or modifications were made for this construct. The same five-point scale as in Section 4 was used.

The questionnaire was developed in English for the target participants speaking a different language from the researchers. To ensure clarity and precision, some items were rephrased and adapted in accordance with the professional opinions of experts in the field. The researchers used a free version of Qualtrics and a PhD student's institutional account to create an online survey.

5. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To collect the data, the researchers circulated the online survey link with the help of university professors, since they were unfamiliar with the research context and had no direct contact with the participants. The survey received a total of 74 responses between February and March 2022. Next, the data were transferred into an SPSS dataset, and data analysis was conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 26.0. To answer the research questions, descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, correlation, and regression analyses were computed.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and their interpretations for each research question. Descriptive statistics for the scales will be shown after reporting the scales' Cronbach's alpha internal reliability coefficients. Subsequently, the results of the paired-sample t-tests will be discussed, followed by the scales' correlation and regression analyses.

All the dimensions achieved Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the necessary criterion of .70 (Dörnyei 2007), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability coefficients for the scales

Scales	Cronbach's Alpha coefficients
Students' responsibility	.80
Teacher's responsibility	.74
Students' perceived ability	.75
Students' motivation	.85
Students' autonomous behaviours (outside class)	.83
Students' autonomous behaviours (inside class)	.75

Source: own study.

Based on the descriptive statistics presented in Table 2, the scale with the highest mean value (M = 4.08, SD = .72) pertains to *students' motivation*. This suggests that the Hungarian EFL learners participating in the study exhibited a notably high level of motivation in their pursuit of English language learning. Following *students' motivation*, students' views on their *teacher's responsibilities* and *students' perceived abilities* recorded the second and third highest mean values among the six variables. More than half of the students demonstrated confidence in their abilities related to autonomous learning. Furthermore, they displayed autonomous behaviours both within and outside the classroom.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the scales

Scale	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teacher's responsibility	3.90	.41
Students' responsibility	3.31	.49
Students' autonomous behaviours (inside class)	3.21	.61
Students' autonomous behaviours (outside class)	3.19	.53
Students' perceived ability	3.60	.47
Students' motivation	4.08	.72

Source: own study.

A paired sample t-test could provide an answer to RQ1, which inquires about students' opinions of their own responsibilities and their teachers' responsibilities. The result in Table 3 shows that it was statistically significantly different between *students' responsibility* and *teacher's responsibility* ($t = -10.719$, $p < 0.01$). The fact that *teachers' responsibility* (3.90 with SD =.41) produced a higher mean value than *students' responsibility* (3.30 with SD =.49) suggests that students are likely to attribute more responsibility to their teachers than to themselves. Remarkably, they seem to feel that teachers are more accountable for classroom learning than they are.

Table 3. Paired sample t-test between students' responsibility and teacher's responsibility

Scales	Mean	Std. deviation	t	p
Students' responsibility	3.30	.49	−10.719	< 0.001
Teacher's responsibility	3.90	.41		
Students' autonomous behaviours (outside class)	3.19	.53	−0.380	0.705
Students' autonomous behaviours (inside class)	3.21	.61		

Source: own study.

This confirms what has been claimed by Albert, Tankó and Piniel (2018a, 2018b) and Illés and Csizér (2018), who concluded that "foreign language teaching in Hungary is still overwhelmingly teacher-centred by employing traditional, classroom-focused teaching methods" (after Asztalos et al. 2020: 280). This finding also corroborates the idea that "teachers believed that more autonomy would be possible, but they did not think it was applicable in their context, revealing the discrepancy of the world that was desirable but not available to them at the time of the research" (Szőcs 2017: 134). Perhaps students also do not feel assured about or unacquainted with taking more responsibility for their classroom learning.

An analysis of paired sample t-tests was performed to respond to RQ2. The two results did not show a statistically significant difference, even though the mean value of *students' autonomous behaviours (outside class)* (M = 3.19, SD =.53) was slightly lower than that of *students' autonomous behaviours (inside class)* (M = 3.21, SD =.61, t = -.380, p 0.705). As a result, the study's participants demonstrated moderately autonomous behaviours both inside and outside of the classroom. The majority of them scored highly on reading news articles, novels, and TV shows with regard to autonomous behaviours (outside of class), according to the item analysis of the scales. A third of them spoke English every day with foreigners. A very likely reason for this is the international university environment. The students do not seem engaged in other types of autonomous learning activities, such as using language learning applications, etc. A relatable justification can be seen in this: "a reason for the lack of out-of-classroom language learning may be students' workload at the university, combined with the time and energy they need for part-time jobs necessary to finance their studies" (Asztalos & Szénich 2019: 7). An alternative reason might be explained by the fact, that due to their perceived high level of English, they may not feel the need to improve it. Regarding students' autonomous behaviours (inside class), more than half of them chose 'never' for 'making suggestions to the teachers about class activities or assignments'. This suggests that although they showed confidence in their autonomous abilities, it did not seem clear to them how autonomous they should or could be in class. This is also associable with the result of Kormos et al. (2008). There can be several reasons behind this, for instance, the way teachers act in the class, the nature of the courses, or the curricula.

To address the final research question, which explores the connections between students' perceptions of their responsibilities, their autonomous behaviours, their motivation, and their perceived ability in English learning, correlation and regression analyses among the scales were conducted. Table 4 illustrates the significant correlations between these dimensions (p < .01).

Table 4. Significant correlations between the scales (p < .01)

	Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Students' responsibility	___					
2	Teacher's responsibility	.439**	___				
3	Students' perceived ability			___			
4	Students' motivation				___	.351**	.439**
5	Students' autonomous behaviours (outside class)					___	.682**
6	Students' autonomous behaviours (inside class)						___

Source: own study.

There is a moderately significant correlation ($r = .439, p < .001$) between *students' own responsibilities* and *teachers' responsibilities*. This data suggests that if students view themselves as responsible, they also place responsibility on their teachers. Besides, there is a moderate correlation between the students' *perceptions of their motivation* and their *autonomous behaviours (inside class)* ($r = .439, p < .001$) and their *motivation* and *autonomous behaviours (outside class)* ($r = .359, p = .002$) This can prove that motivated students are more likely to be autonomous both inside and outside the classroom.

The fact that the students demonstrated some autonomous behaviours both inside and outside class while perceiving their teachers as having more responsibility for course-associated decisions seems to be at odds. However, this can be explained by the students' tendency to feel more eager and at ease with autonomy as long as their autonomous behaviour does not infringe on the teacher's authority, particularly in in-class learning. This might be due to their belief that teachers are the only and most authoritative persons regarding class-related decisions, although they were confident about their autonomous abilities. Their ability to operate autonomously in a classroom setting may thus be influenced by how and how much space their teachers give them to do so. Consequently, the potential reason behind this outcome could be that when teachers involve students in decision-making and participation in classroom activities, it not only motivates them but also enhances their self-assurance in executing these tasks. This finding confirms that of Little (1996). Besides, there is a strong correlation between *students' autonomous behaviours (outside class)* and *students' autonomous behaviours (inside class)* ($r = .682, p < .001$), which proves that if students are autonomous inside the classroom, they will also act autonomously outside the classroom.

In addition to the correlation analysis, regression analysis was also computed to find out causal relationships between the scales. Table 5 below shows the influence that *students' responsibility* and *autonomous behaviours inside the classroom* have on *students' perceived ability*.

Table 5. Results of regression analysis of the scales with students' perceived ability as the dependent scale (p < .01)

Scale	β	t	p	
Students' responsibility	.25	2.24	.028	
Students' autonomous behaviour (inside class)	.23	2.07	.042	
R²				.14

Source: own study.

Based on the results, 14% of the students' perceived ability can be explained by students' perceptions of their own responsibility and autonomous behaviours inside the classroom, and the influence of the two dimensions is almost the same (.25 vs. .23).

Table 6 shows the impact the scales *teachers' responsibility*, and *students' autonomous behaviour (inside class)* have on *their motivation*.

Table 6. Results of regression analysis of the scales with students' motivated learning behaviour as the dependent scale (p < .01)

Scale	β	t	p	
Students' autonomous behaviour (inside class)	.40	3.80	<.001	
Students' perceptions of teachers' responsibility	.23	2.18	.033	
R²				.24

Source: own study.

The results indicated that 24% of the students' motivated learning behaviour can be explained by the two dimensions together, and the effect of students' autonomous behaviour inside the class is almost twice as strong as that of their perceptions of their teachers' responsibility. This can be interpreted in a way that students' motivated learning behaviour is enhanced when they feel a sense of independence in the classroom. In other words, an autonomy-supported environment can lead to positive learning experiences. This is consistent with the recommendation made by Csizér et al. (2021: 17) to "allow for successes that learners can take pride in, where they can feel that they are equipped with the tools they need to become competent foreign language users."

7. CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to examine how Hungarian EFL learners perceive learner autonomy and how they manifest autonomous behaviours in the process of learning English. The study's findings align with the outcomes of prior research studies, suggesting that learners' autonomous beliefs are not always fully translated into practice despite their confidence in their ability to learn autonomously.

In response to RQ1 (What characterises students' views regarding their own roles and those of their teachers in terms of taking responsibility in learning English?), we can conclude that students continue to view their teachers as being more in charge of their language learning than themselves. As regards RQ2 related to their autonomous learning practices in and out of the class, the students appear to exercise some autonomy in roughly equal amounts both in and outside the classroom, although they seem to stick to their preferred extracurricular activities (e.g., reading books, watching TV programmes). Given their self-confidence in their abilities for autonomous learning, they may be ready to further enhance their language learner autonomy. Regarding RQ3 (How do students' perceptions of their own responsibilities, their autonomous actions, their motivation, and their perceived ability in learning English intersect and influence one another?), the results demonstrated that if students view themselves as responsible, they also hold their teacher accountable. Additionally, students' motivated language learning behaviour seems to be positively influenced by their autonomous behaviours inside the classroom, and their teachers taking responsibility for their language learning.

Based on the results, a few pedagogical recommendations can be made to Hungarian tertiary EFL teachers in the study's context, which is also an English as a lingua franca context. Owing to the high level of motivation of English majors in Hungary and their beliefs in their abilities for autonomous learning, it would be rewarding both for teachers and the learners to get learners involved in course-related decisions. The first step for teachers is to raise awareness of learner autonomy and how it can be practiced. Since "'choice' is a fundamental aspect of learner autonomy" (Lamb 2009: 69), encouraging students to make choices and autonomous decisions can motivate them to take responsibility for their language learning, potentially leading to positive outcomes.

Allowing tertiary EFL learners to choose any autonomous language learning activities (e.g., using language learning applications, watching news or reading news or books, etc.) may be beneficial for these adult learners who may need to balance their studies with work commitments. It might also be beneficial to bring together those learners who choose the same activities with a view to sharing and

discussing their learning challenges and experiences as they progress through the learning process. Illés' (2019) adult learner autonomy model of autonomy as a learner, autonomy as a communicator, and autonomy as a person, can be partially applied and implemented. By actively participating in both language learning and language use under the supervision of teachers, learners will also become aware of the opportunities and resources for language learning that are available to them (Benson & Lamb 2020). Additionally, teachers might discuss with their students how to develop learning objectives, choose resources and activities, and evaluate those in order to foster their autonomy. Furthermore, because the majority of the study participants were English language teacher trainees, these implications might especially be valuable for them in their future careers as educators.

The current study had its limitations. Due to the limited sample size, the generalisability of the findings should be questioned first. Moreover, the students' high level of English proficiency may have some bearing on their engagement in autonomous language learning activities, as they do not seem particularly enthusiastic about them. Investigating whether this lack of enthusiasm is due to a perceived lack of necessity or other factors would necessitate further research. While they demonstrated confidence in their ability for autonomous learning, it appeared that they were less inclined to participate in decisions concerning classroom affairs. Conducting follow-up interviews could offer more explanations for the underlying reasons. Therefore, further research is necessary to explore the reasons behind the findings and yield more insights into aspects related to the focus of the study.

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Autonomia ucznia z perspektywy studentów uczących się języka angielskiego jako obcego w kontekście węgierskiej szkoły wyższej

Abstrakt. Rozwój technologii znacząco zwiększył możliwości uczących się w zakresie autonomicznej nauki języka angielskiego. Chociaż jak dotąd przeprowadzono wiele badań nad autonomią ucznia osadzonych w kontekście węgierskim (e.g., Édes 2008; Szőcs 2017), nadal istnieje potrzeba prowadzenia dalszych badań, które wyjaśnią przyczyny braku autonomii wśród studentów uczących się języka angielskiego jako obcego i pomogą wskazać, w jaki sposób można uczynić ich proces uczenia się bardziej autonomicznym. Celem przedstawionego w artykule badania ilościowego było zanalizowanie sygnalizowanego powyżej problemu poprzez zbadanie sposobów postrzegania zadań i odpowiedzialności nauczyciela i uczących się w procesie nauki języka, ich umiejętności, motywacji, zachowań autonomicznych w klasie językowej i poza nią, a także zależności pomiędzy tymi zmiennymi. Kwestionariusz zastosowany w projekcie wypełniło 74 respondentów – studentów węgierskiego uniwersytetu. Zebrane dane zostały zanalizowane za pomocą SPSS 26.0. Uzyskane wyniki wskazują, iż w badanym kontekście nauczyciele są postrzegani przez studentów jako osoby bardziej odpowiedzialne za proces uczenia się niż sami uczący się. Niemniej jednak studenci prezentują określone zachowania autonomiczne, obecne w jednakowym stopniu zarówno w środowisku szkolnym, jak i poza nim.

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