

Matczak Piotr¹

Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7141-7814>

piomat3@st.amu.edu.pl

Błauciak Hanna

Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4127-4734>

hanbla1@st.amu.edu.pl

Stelmaszczyk Hanna

Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1740-2847>

hanste1@st.amu.edu.pl

Mentoring and process writing in developing high school L2 learners' autonomy

Student autonomy refers to learners' ability to control their learning processes, make independent decisions, and regulate their learning activities. Recognized as a crucial aspect of language learning, autonomy empowers learners to engage actively with language tasks and fosters lifelong learning skills. In recent research on L2 teaching, developing learner autonomy has emerged as a key goal, aligning with

¹ The authors confirm their contribution to the paper as follows: conception and research design: Piotr Matczak 40%, Hanna Błauciak 30%, Hanna Stelmaszczyk 30%; preparation of methodological tools: Piotr Matczak 30%, Hanna Błauciak 30%, Hanna Stelmaszczyk 40%; data analysis and interpretation: Piotr Matczak 30%, Hanna Błauciak 40%, Hanna Stelmaszczyk 30%. Piotr Matczak was the principal investigator and coordinator of the project. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.



Artykuł jest udostępniany na licencji Creative Commons – Uznanie autorstwa-Na tych samych warunkach 4.0 Międzynarodowe, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

contemporary educational paradigms that emphasize learner-centered approaches. This study explores the role of process writing and mentoring in cultivating autonomy among high school L2 learners. The research project implemented a mentoring initiative wherein six graduate students guided thirteen high school students in crafting academic essays stimulated by literary texts. Its primary objective was to enhance students' academic skills, with emphasis on fostering learner autonomy. The qualitative data sources included post-writing reflective assignments, diaries used to document the process and participants' reflections, both written by high school students, and a focus-group interview held with them. The findings indicate positive shifts in learner autonomy development, including better time management, enhanced self-reflection, and more skillful resource evaluation, combined with heightened awareness of academic writing practices among the participants.

Keywords: learner autonomy, key competencies, process writing, mentoring, high school education

Słowa kluczowe: autonomia ucznia, kompetencje kluczowe, pisanie jako proces, mentoring, edukacja w szkole średniej

1. Introduction

Learner autonomy, understood as the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec 1979), has become a central focus in modern education in both European (Council of Europe 2018: 153) and Polish contexts (Ministry of National Education 2017: 49). Autonomy emphasizes active student engagement, critical thinking, and self-regulation, making it a pillar of effective educational practices (Hoven 1999; Benson 2007). Its significance extends across various disciplines, but its role in language education, in particular, offers diverse ways for exploration and innovation.

Writing has long been a crucial skill in language education and as such, it has been developed through various approaches. However, despite its importance, writing as a process – specifically in fostering learner autonomy – remains an underexplored area (Little, Dam, Legenhausen 2017). Process writing, which emphasizes writing as a dynamic and student-driven activity, holds great promise for activating student engagement and critical reflection (Yeung 2019). Yet, this shift also necessitates a redefinition of the teacher's role, moving from a traditional instructor to a facilitator, guide, and mentor. This evolving dynamic is essential to understand how autonomy in writing can be effectively cultivated.

This article addresses this research gap by integrating three key concepts: learner autonomy, process writing, and mentoring. The study presents a project involving university students and high school learners in a mentoring program designed to enhance learner autonomy through guided writing activities. This research aims to investigate the development of learner autonomy in high school students in the context of process writing and mentoring, based on the following research questions:

1. How did mentoring influence the development of learner autonomy in the context of process writing?
2. What were the key characteristics of an autonomous learner that were fostered in a mentoring project?
3. What challenges appeared in the process of developing autonomy in guided process writing and what were students' attitudes toward them?

The first part of the article offers a literature review on the relationships between learner autonomy, process writing, and mentoring. It is followed by the description of the study and the analysis of the results. Finally, the results are interpreted in the discussion section.

2. Literature review: learner autonomy, process writing, and mentoring

Learner autonomy, a concept coined by Henri Holec in the 1970s, was originally defined in his seminal work *Autonomy and foreign language learning* as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (1981: 3). This concise definition remains central to the concept, although its interpretation has evolved over time. Holec viewed autonomy as an inherent attribute of the learner, whereas Dickinson (1987) later emphasized the importance of external conditions enabling autonomy. Little (1991) reframed autonomy as interdependence rather than complete independence, and Nunan (2003) introduced the idea of autonomy occurring in varying degrees of intensity. Definitions were further nuanced by researchers such as Ushioda (2003), who underscored the role of the social environment in fostering autonomy.

The expansive yet unspecific definition of autonomy and the autonomous learner is chief among the reasons why studying it is a challenge for researchers in the field of didactics. Introductions to recent publications on the subject point to problems in collecting quantitative data (Yeung, 2019), stemming from the fact that surveys examining the growth of learner autonomy are sometimes biased and cause students to mark the answers researchers expect. Student autonomy is a trait or situation that

is somehow elusive, unmeasurable, or at least impossible to define precisely. For this reason, research on learner autonomy has been dominated by qualitative studies, focusing on collecting, cataloging, and describing students' comments to demonstrate changing perceptions and the formation of autonomous attitudes. Perhaps also for the same reason, it seems difficult to introduce autonomy formation into language education at the foreign language learning level, despite ever-growing academic interest (Jimenez Raya and Vieira, 2021: 1).

In the Polish context, learner autonomy has been researched extensively by leading applied linguists, who have attempted to transplant ideas conceived in Western academic centers to the local schooling system (Michońska-Stadnik, 1996; Wilczyńska, 1997; Drożdżiał-Szelest, 1997). Pawlak (2008) highlights the publication of the European Language Portfolio in the first decade of the 21st century as a crucial event that facilitated work on learner autonomy in Poland. The implementation of the concept in Polish schools is perceived, however, as a difficult task due to a variety of challenges: the limited level of teacher control, an increased number of individual consultations, and school programs focused on covering the necessary material (Pawlak 2011: 307). Polish research on learner autonomy acknowledges the significance of the concept and delineates the idiosyncrasies of the local environment that affect its – perhaps limited – efficacy in Polish schools.

Building on contemporary understandings of autonomy, our project adopts a dual focus on process writing and mentoring, aligning with recent research advocating these approaches (Little, Dam, Legenhausen 2017; Yeung 2019). We believe that writing, often overshadowed by speaking in foreign language education, is a powerful yet underappreciated tool for developing learner autonomy. According to Little, Dam, and Legenhausen (2017), writing skills foster autonomy by requiring students to organize information, articulate arguments, and engage in reflective thinking. The process writing approach has been recognized as aiding student independence and autonomy (Zamel, 1982; Graves, 1983). It encompasses stages such as prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing, and thus provides a framework conducive to autonomy (Hyland, 2000). Marine Yeung (2019) supports this perspective, emphasizing that process writing allows students to develop individual voices, critically evaluate peer work, and independently refine their texts. Peer and teacher feedback, self-evaluation, and opportunities for revision encourage students to become self-directed learners and writers. This approach aligns with Matsuda's (2003) argument that process pedagogy helps students discover their voices and develop autonomy through active engagement in planning, revising, and reflecting on their writing.

Similarly to process writing, mentoring has emerged as a supportive didactic procedure for fostering learner autonomy. Mentoring involves a collaborative and holistic relationship between mentor and mentee, characterized by personalized guidance, goal-setting, and developmental feedback (Kram, 1985, as quoted in Holmes, 2023: 71). Unlike coaching, which often focuses on short-term skill-building, mentoring promotes long-term development through constructive dialogue and individualized support. Unlike teaching, it does not involve structured instruction for imparting knowledge, but rather emphasizes individualized feedback and personal development (Abetang et al., 2020). Mentoring draws on theories such as social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977), self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000), and constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978), all of which emphasize the interplay between self-regulation, motivation, and social interaction. In this context, mentoring enables students to set realistic yet challenging goals, reflect on their learning, and receive feedback tailored to their unique needs (Holmes, 2023: 71). These interactions contribute to the cultivation of autonomy by encouraging self-efficacy, critical thinking, and self-regulation (Eby et al., 2008). Besides fostering autonomy, mentoring offers additional benefits, such as promoting student well-being and enhancing social integration into academic programs (Kutsyuruba and Godden, 2019; Wallace and Haines, 2004). These outcomes are particularly valuable for those such as first-generation college students, who may face challenges in academic environments.

Given the theoretical and empirical support for both process writing and mentoring, our project sought to utilize and empirically explore their combined potential. Our aim was to research the influence of process writing through mentoring on high school students' autonomy, focusing on their self-perceptions of academic competence and awareness of academic standards.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and setting

The student sample involved thirteen participants, students from grades 1-3 in a prestigious high school in Poznań. Among the participants were students from classes with extended curricula in humanities, or biology and chemistry². The students' level of English ranged from B1+ to C1. It is essential to

² The students were not chosen according to their extended curricula. It was a rather organic process, as only students from extended humanities and biology-chemistry classes attended the organizational meeting.

note that none of the students had had any experience in writing an academic essay before. Additionally, some of them also had no prior practice in reading longer texts in a foreign language and read a novel in English for the first time during their participation in the study.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and the participants were recruited through an announcement about the project that was shared at the school. The project was targeted primarily at students interested in Anglophone literature. When asked about their motivation in the pre-writing questionnaire, all thirteen students mentioned improving their English as a leading cause of deciding to participate in the project. Six of them named Anglophone literature specifically as an important element of their motivation, further elaborating that it is a topic they perceive as interesting, or they see reading as a means of improving vocabulary and command of the foreign language. For instance, one of the students wrote: "I want to improve my English skills, learn new things and break my language barrier a little bit. Also I've wanted to start reading books in English for a long time so now I got some motivation." Another participant stated that their main goal was "to learn how to analyze literary works insightfully." Four students mentioned wanting to learn new skills – that is, writing an academic essay. Additionally, one student mentioned negative language learning experiences and named the project as a way of overcoming a dislike of the English language, in an endeavor to, as they put it, "found [sic] something in studying English that will be pleasant and enjoyable". The high school students participated in this project voluntarily, which suggests an already-existing degree of learner autonomy. The students were aptly aware of perceived gaps in their knowledge and lack of experience, citing never having read a longer text in English or never having written an academic essay. The students took the initiative to develop their skills by agreeing to participate in the project. As previously mentioned, their main motivation was to further develop their language skills. However, the literary content also played an important role in encouraging students to sign up for the project.

Students who showed interest were invited to a preliminary organizational meeting and were assigned to a mentor. During the course of the project, all meetings took place at the school, under the supervision of a teacher.

The mentors included six MA students from the Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The thematic focus of the project resulted from the mentors' research interests and experience in writing academic papers on American, Canadian, and British literature. Although all student-mentors had experience in teaching English, they had not, apart from the principal investigator Piotr Matczak, undergone formal teacher training.

However, the mentors were thoroughly familiarized with the theoretical framework relevant to the project and they remained under the supervision of two university professors, who oversaw the conceptualization and implementation of the entire project.

3.2. Procedures

The project involved thirteen high school students and six mentors, MA students. With assistance from their mentors, the high school students worked on a selected topic related to Anglophone literature and, over the period of six months, wrote an academic essay³ and prepared an essay-based academic poster. During that time, each high school student met with their mentor approximately twice a month, although the frequency of the meetings was adjusted to each student's individual needs. The project unfolded in the following stages: selection of the research topic, thematic literary discussion, academic essay discussion, process writing, poster preparation, and poster session. The number of meetings devoted to each stage was adjusted to match each student's reading and writing progress. In general, the discussion of the selected literary work lasted two to three months, whereas the remaining three to four months were devoted to process writing and poster preparation.

In the first meeting, the students were asked to select a literary text and an expected focus for the literary analysis. At this stage, nine students chose the primary text autonomously, whereas four students asked their mentors for suggestions. Then, the mentors facilitated discussions on the selected literary topics based on specifically prepared content-based presentations, the students' own reading insights, and fragments of academic articles from the field of literary studies. The secondary sources were either provided by the mentors, or found by the students themselves and evaluated by the mentors in terms of applicability and academic validity. Apart from the literary discussions, the mentors explained the structure of an academic essay, as well as helped the students prepare the thesis statement and arguments. Next, the students drafted their essays, typically working on two to three paragraphs

³ The essays that students wrote concerned Anglophone literature due to the literary background of all the university students who participated as mentors. The topics of the essays were related to British (e.g., "*The Secret Garden* by Frances H. Burnett: a journey of healing" and "Social classes in *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf"), American (e.g., "Hemingway's short stories in the context of the Lost Generation" and "Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye* as a universalization of a teenager"), and Canadian (e.g., "*Obasan* by Joy Kagawa: intergenerational conflict") literatures.

at a time, and the mentors provided constructive feedback on the students' written work. The essays were evaluated in terms of logical argumentation, appropriate use of primary and secondary sources, and language correctness. The students were then asked to correct their essays on the basis of the mentors' feedback. In the final stage, the students' work was turned into a research poster illustrating the results of their analysis of the selected topic, and a poster session was hosted in the high school.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

The study was qualitative and applied a multiple-case research design (Dörnyei, 2007). Data for the study were collected from five sources: students' reflective diaries (or logs), mentors' reflective diaries, two questionnaires composed of open-ended questions, and a final interview – the essays themselves were not analyzed.

The mentors' reflective diaries (or logs) took the form of questions and answers (see Appendix 5), which enabled them to track the students' progress and weak and strong points. Effectively, the logs were meant to help the mentors manage the project schedule and workload in a way that was responsive to each student's individual needs. However, a detailed analysis of the mentors' experience in carrying out the project is beyond the scope of this study.

During the study, the students wrote their logs in English, noting their feelings, progress, to-do tasks, and problems encountered. The entries had a suggested form of questions and answers (see Appendix 2). All students followed the proposed form, making their entries in the form of points. The students were encouraged to complete their logs after every meeting with their mentor, or as often as they felt the need to. However, the quantity, length, and frequency of entries varied greatly from student to student. Some wrote only about major tasks and problems, resulting in few entries, while others preferred to make more detailed notes. The page count ranged from 3 up to 10 pages.

After the project, the students filled in a questionnaire in English, consisting of five open-ended questions (see Appendix 3).

Finally, a focus-group interview (Dörnyei, 2007) was held with the participants, during which they shared their impressions and thoughts. The interview took place in the participating school, in one of the classrooms. The students were divided into two groups and interviewed by one of the mentors. The interview was conducted in Polish. The students were asked twelve open-ended questions (see Appendix 4) that inquired into the participants'

satisfaction, encountered problems, and outlook on the educational values of the project. The participants took turns answering the questions asked by the interviewing mentor. The sessions lasted 30 minutes. The interview was later transcribed.

The post-writing questionnaire, the answers given during the interviews, and the student logs were anonymized. The above materials were coded in Atlas.ti. and used as source material for qualitative analysis. During the analysis, 446 quotes were identified as pertaining to this study, labeled with one or more of 22 codes that belonged to one of the thematic categories: autonomy (218), challenges (74), and emotions (negative – 44, and positive – 110).

4. Results

The results presented in this section are divided into three thematic categories: autonomy, challenges, and emotions, and analyzed accordingly.

4.1. Autonomy

Table 1 presents codes grouped in the section named “Autonomy” that encompasses elements of learner autonomy observed and reported in high school students during the project. The codes we have created are as follows: independence, self-regulation, improvement/progress, motivation, time management, studying awareness, and freedom of learning.

Table 1. Frequency of reported quotes related to learner autonomy

Code name	Example quote	Frequency
independence	(...) I liked that I could work independently. (...) Whenever I felt I was ready, I presented my work and had lots of time to analyze the literary text myself. (Student 7)	52
self-regulation	Sometimes I would complete the task right after the meeting, sometimes right before the next one, but I had a specific timeframe to complete it. (Student 2)	37
improvement/progress	This project has shown me what I am capable of doing: I tested myself and my abilities. (Student 5)	33
motivation	I was motivated by the fact that I had so many exams that week, and also my friend's birthday party. (Student 4)	32

Table 1 continued

Code name	Example quote	Frequency
time management	I planned the exact time I would take care of searching for information. (Student 3)	26
studying awareness	I know that I would not learn everything in one weekend. (Student 13)	24
freedom of learning	I know my strengths and weaknesses, so I know how to adjust my learning process to different subjects. (Student 6)	14

Source: own study.

As can be seen, the most frequently reported aspect of learner autonomy was independence. The students exhibited the skill of independently organizing the workload and setting priorities, as illustrated by the following citation:

(...) I had plenty of time to work on my own terms: I could plan how much effort I want to put into it, how much I have to read and just generally what I want to focus on. (Student 9)

Self-regulation was the second most frequent code, exemplified by the students' ability to adjust the conditions, timeframe, and pace of work to their individual needs and abilities. For example, Student 5 adjusted their working environment to enhance their learning experience and autonomously set deadlines:

I tried to motivate myself by setting deadlines and working in a pleasant environment in cafes and at home. (Student 5)

Self-regulation also included making time for rest; Student 8 wrote that they "planned to do this on the weekend, but I spent that time resting so I promised myself I would try on Monday".

The students' reflections indicative of improvement and progress were noted 33 times. The students recognized the development of their skills throughout the course of the project, as can be seen in the following quote:

I'm glad I was pushed out of my comfort zone like this because I feel like it made my work upgrade from a closer monologue only existing in its little ostracized world, to a somewhat of a piece of a bigger discussion. (Student 11)

Motivation was another important factor for the students' autonomous learning and was coded 32 times. The students self-observed fluctuations

in their motivation levels, i.e., they identified the times when they felt motivated as well as when they felt discouraged and unmotivated. The following quote illustrates such self-awareness among the students:

I was motivated by finishing the book quickly but I got a bit discouraged by the amount of work I had this week. (Student 11)

Generally, the students found the deadlines both stressful and motivating; Student 9 wrote that they were “motivated by the fact that tomorrow there will be another meeting and I HAVE to do it⁴”. Student 6 stated: “For me, the deadlines were motivating because I liked working on the project. (...) I found out that if I like something, I need clear motivation to do it, for example deadlines”.

An important aspect of learner autonomy is the ability to manage one’s time and tasks. Time-management skills were observed 26 times in the students’ reflections. The participants had to set priorities regarding the project work and schoolwork, as can be seen in the following citation:

For me, this project was just as important as schoolwork and I included project tasks on my to-do list alongside school tests. (...) First, I took care of the assignments crucial to the school finals, then I did project work, and only then did the assignments that I had little interest in. (Student 3)

Yet another significant dimension of learner autonomy is awareness of the learning process, which was reported 24 times. For example, Student 1 described their process of breaking bigger tasks into smaller ones:

First, I made a general plan for the essay, a sort of a mind map, took notes. Then I started writing and the essay got progressively more complex the more that I wrote. I did the same when creating the poster. (Student 1)

Finally, the least frequent code indicated that students act according to the principle of the freedom of learning. Focusing on the assignments within the scope of the students’ interests is exemplified by the following quote:

I had plenty of time to work how I liked, so simply I could plan how much work I was going to do, how much I had to read, or what I would like to pay attention to. My studying was not systematic but rather natural – I did many things in longer sittings, which I preferred. (Student 2)

The results indicate that independence was the most frequently reported aspect of learner autonomy, with students emphasizing their ability

⁴ The original emphasis via capitalization was maintained.

to organize their workload and make independent decisions. Self-regulation followed closely, as students managed their time and adjusted their learning pace according to their needs. Skills such as motivation, time management, and studying awareness were also frequently mentioned, showcasing the students' growing ability to handle complex tasks autonomously. Although freedom of learning appeared less frequently, it reflects students' emerging ability to tailor their learning processes to their preferences and strengths.

These findings suggest that the mentoring and process writing approach significantly fostered various dimensions of learner autonomy. The high frequency of autonomy-related behaviors, particularly independence and self-regulation, indicates that students not only participated in guided learning but actively took ownership of their academic growth. This suggests a successful transition from teacher-dependent learning to self-directed education, a crucial competency for future academic and professional environments.

4.2. Challenges

Table 2 presents codes grouped in the section named "Challenges" that encompasses problems reported by students and recognized in the analysis. The codes we have created are as follows: difficulties with writing, procrastination, limited time, and poor planning.

Table 2. Frequency of reported quotes related to challenges

Code name	Example quote	Frequency
difficulties with writing	I didn't know how exactly to write the second paragraph. (Student 1)	32
procrastination	I procrastinated a bit because I was tired and very busy with school this week. (Student 10)	19
limited time	I don't have so much time, cause I have a lot of tests during this week. (Student 3)	14
poor planning	Even though I don't have a habit of doing things regularly, I sometimes try to develop it, but usually I fail sooner or later.	9

Source: own study.

The most frequent obstacle was difficulties with the writing process. Generally, the students had to adapt to formal English writing conventions, which was new to them. For example, Student 7 said that "It turned

out writing in English is much different than in Polish.” Student 1 saw symptoms of writer’s block: “I hated starting a paragraph”.

The second most common challenge the students struggled with was procrastination. Most of the students procrastinated on project work due to other obligations, lack of motivation, stress, and fear of making mistakes, as can be seen in the following citations:

I think this fear of submitting a work that is bad is what is making me procrastinate the most, I’m just genuinely scared of writing it. (Student 8)

The third reported problem was related to time constraints. Many of the students were engaged not only in schoolwork and project work but also in other extra-curricular activities, which made time management and meeting project deadlines difficult. This was articulated by Student 13:

I knew that I wouldn’t have enough time for everything later, so I had to do things for the project earlier. (Student 13)

Although generally, as has been demonstrated in section 5.1., the students exhibited the good time management and organizational skills necessary in autonomous learners, some struggled with poor planning, which was reported 9 times. This can be seen in the following comment:

The amount of time between meetings was too short and too long at the same time, I was either worried that I wouldn’t finish in time and this was motivating, but also I was thinking that a week is a lot of time, so I can do it later. (Student 7)

The primary challenges students encountered were difficulties with writing, procrastination, and time constraints. The data reveal that the students struggled with adapting to formal English writing conventions, leading to feelings of frustration and anxiety. Procrastination was linked to external pressures such as school obligations and fear of failure, while time constraints often stemmed from competing responsibilities and inadequate planning.

These challenges highlight the complexity of fostering autonomy in high school students. However, the reflective nature of the process writing approach allowed students to identify and address these barriers, indicating a developing resilience. Overcoming procrastination and time management issues through self-regulation and planning showcases students’ growth in problem-solving skills. Despite the initial setbacks, these challenges acted as valuable learning experiences that strengthened their overall autonomy.

4.3. Emotions

Tables 3 and 4 present codes grouped in the section named “Emotions” that encompasses both negative and positive feelings reported by students and identified in the analysis. The students expressed a range of feelings: negative feelings were tracked 44 times and positive feelings were reported 110 times. The codes we have created are as follows: anxiety, fear, frustration, discouragement, and lack of energy as negative emotions, and enjoyment, satisfaction, pride, curiosity, pleasure, and gratitude as positive emotions.

Table 3. Frequency of reported quotes related to negative emotions

Code name	Example quote	Frequency
anxiety	I felt very anxious that I won't be able to complete the essay. (Student 8)	14
fear	I was afraid that my introduction would be too elevated and boring. (Student 6)	11
frustration	I find it frustrating that reading in English takes so long. (Student 11)	7
discouragement	I was motivated by finishing the book quickly but I got a bit discouraged by the amount of work I had this week. (Student 11)	6
lack of energy	It was kind of hard to start doing anything, again. (Student 3)	6

Source: own study.

Even though positive feelings outweighed negative feelings, the students experienced anxiety and fear, which they reported 14 and 11 times, respectively. As has been explained in section 4.1., the students displayed a fear of making mistakes and not meeting deadlines.

The third most frequent negative feeling was frustration, coded 7 times. Tasks that exceeded the students' current language levels and academic skills, such as reading a foreign language literary text or conducting academic research, were described as “frustrating” or “annoying,” as expressed by Student 10:

The research process was very stressful and frustrating because (...) I had to dig into the cultural, historical, economic, and political research so that was annoying. I also had to reference academic articles in the essay, at least mention them, and I couldn't find anything that would be relevant to my topic. (Student 10)

Discouragement was also among the reported negative feelings. Six quotations were found to convey such a negative feeling, for example:

I have never found in my whole life a topic that interested me so much that I wanted to learn something more about it. (Student 2)

Finally, some students complained about a lack of energy. The problem was reported 6 times and was largely related to a decrease in motivation levels or limited time. This can be observed in a quote from Student 3, who wrote: "I procrastinated a bit because I was tired and very busy with school this week".

Table 4. Frequency of reported quotes related to positive emotions

Code name	Example quote	Frequency
enjoyment	I think I was content with what I was doing, because I felt like it was something enjoyable, but also it was improving and challenging me. (Student 8)	28
satisfaction	On the positive side, I like how it turned out in the end. (Student 5)	22
pride	Every time I was done with a paragraph I was proud of myself that I managed to get it done. (Student 8)	19
curiosity	It's far more interesting than my school homework. (Student 7)	19
pleasure	Sometimes, writing the essay was more pleasant than studying for school tests so I started with writing. (Student 3)	15
gratitude	The university student assigned to me was very nice. (Student 12)	7

Source: own study.

Despite some negative feelings and obstacles, the students expressed a wide range of positive emotions. Enjoyment was the most frequently reported one, with 28 quotations containing expressions of joy and passion, for example:

Personally, I am more fond of STEM subjects and the humanities were more of a side interest for me, especially English and writing in English. I discovered that it really is a passion of mine and now it's like escapism for me, I just sit down and start writing something in English. (Student 1)

The second and third most frequent positive feelings that prevailed among the students were satisfaction and pride derived from their hard work, as illustrated by the following quote:

I was, I still am, so proud of myself, that I did such a great job, that this is my work and it is really good. (Student 11)

Despite some expressions of fear, the students also reported curiosity (19 times), which is crucial for autonomous learning. Curiosity was largely related to the students' personal interest in the project, as is visible in the following citation:

I think what I loved the most is that I've done something new and I've stepped out a little bit from my comfort zone with the topic of the project. (Student 6)

The students found the project work not only enjoyable but also pleasurable. Pleasure was reported 19 times, mainly in relation to the writing process, which many found surprisingly pleasant. For example, Student 5 said:

I thought that it would be more difficult, that I would have to spend a lot of time writing, but sometimes I felt so inspired that I just sat down and wrote entire paragraphs with no problems. So I was pleasantly surprised that it turned out to be quite easy. (Student 5)

Finally, gratitude was expressed 7 times. The students were grateful for an opportunity to work with university students and appreciated their patience and positive approach. Student 4 wrote that they were "grateful for my mentor's patience", while Student 8 claimed that "the university student assigned to me was very nice."

The emotional responses during the project varied, with positive emotions outweighing negative ones. Enjoyment, satisfaction, and pride were among the most frequently reported positive feelings, often tied to the sense of accomplishment and personal growth from completing challenging tasks. Negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, and frustration were also prevalent, particularly in the initial stages of writing and research.

The dominance of positive emotions suggests that the mentoring and process writing approach was generally well-received and motivational. However, the presence of negative emotions indicates the need for continuous support and encouragement. By overcoming their initial fears and frustrations, students not only improved their writing skills but also gained emotional resilience, which is critical for maintaining long-term motivation and academic perseverance. This emotional journey reflects the transformative impact of the project on both their cognitive and affective development.

5. Discussion

Concerning research question 1, the research data indicate that mentoring through process writing seems to be an efficient way of enhancing student autonomy in high school learners who already display some features of autonomous learners. The results show that the students have reported multiple instances of attention paid to self-regulation, motivation, and time management. The model of process writing that involved working on content-based material has allowed students to engage with the topic on a deeper level, making them motivated enough to complete both the academic essays and the posters in the allotted time. The mentors' guidance has proved to be crucial for autonomy development, contributing an additional layer of independent, yet instructed, work for students.

The project has provided sufficient data to be able to indicate the key areas of autonomy development in high school students, which allows us to formulate the answer to research question 2. The process writing methodology enabled students to engage thoroughly with their assignments, allowing them to organize and articulate complex ideas independently through a cycle of drafting and revising. Mentoring was crucial, offering tailored guidance and emotional support, which assisted students in overcoming challenges such as adapting to formal English writing standards and juggling competing responsibilities. This combined strategy of mentoring and process writing significantly contributed to the development of meaningful autonomy, as demonstrated by students' abilities to manage their obligations, establish goals, and evaluate their own progress.

In terms of research question 3, the study has also revealed the challenges related to developing student autonomy via mentoring and process writing. Among the most frequent ones are procrastination, difficulties with time management, poor planning, and lack of writing skills. All of them were listed by high school students at the beginning of the project, and their frequency decreased with time. All of the students completed their assignments in the allotted time, which allows us to state that most of the challenges were overcome due to the mentors' guidance and help.

The results of this research highlight the significant role of process writing and mentoring in promoting learner autonomy among high school students. Mentoring was identified as a vital factor in cultivating learner independence, providing tailored support and guidance in goal-setting that empowered students to confront challenges on their own (Kram, 1985, as cited in Holmes, 2023). The personalized aspect of the mentoring relationship encouraged self-regulation, as students adapted their working pace and environment, evidenced by their capacity to establish their own deadlines

and work in a flexible manner (Eby et al., 2008; Allen et al., 2004). Furthermore, mentoring bolstered students' confidence, allowing them to take control of their learning experiences, especially in the intricate tasks of writing in English and citing academic sources. This support system facilitated a transition from dependence on teachers to self-reliance, marking a significant shift towards self-directed learning. These developments can be viewed as components of lifelong learning capital essential for personal development (Council of Europe, 2018).

The project identified several key traits associated with autonomous learners, including independence, time management, and self-motivation. Independence was the most commonly noted characteristic, as students assumed responsibility for organizing their tasks and prioritizing their work. According to Little, Dam, and Legenhausen (2017), writing promotes autonomy by necessitating that learners structure information, formulate arguments, and engage in reflective thinking. Time management and self-regulation were recognized as crucial skills, with participants effectively balancing project work alongside their academic obligations. Motivation was a critical factor, with students acknowledging both internal and external influences that affected their commitment to completing tasks. Reflective practices, such as maintaining logs and participating in feedback sessions, improved their awareness of study habits, enabling them to become more strategic and self-aware learners (Matsuda, 2003).

Students experienced a range of challenges despite their progress, including difficulties with writing, procrastination, and time management. Initially, writing in English presented obstacles due to unfamiliar formal conventions (Hyland, 2000), which resulted in feelings of frustration and anxiety. Nevertheless, mentoring played a crucial role in alleviating these challenges by providing constructive feedback and emotional support, thereby encouraging students to persevere. Procrastination was frequently associated with a fear of failure; however, many students successfully addressed this issue by implementing personalized strategies, such as breaking tasks into smaller, more manageable components and modifying their schedules.

In the broader context of language education, this study underscores the effectiveness of integrating process writing with mentoring to foster learner-centered methodologies. It illustrates that the development of autonomy can transcend language learning to include essential skills for lifelong learning. For example, the ability to plan tasks, prioritize effectively, and navigate obstacles is critical not only for academic achievement but also for tackling complex, real-world challenges (Little, 1991; Benson, 2007).

Admittedly, the study had several limitations that need to be taken into account, should such an endeavor be undertaken in the future. The

high school students who participated in this study displayed a pre-existing degree of autonomy prior to the start of the project, and therefore a precise increase in their autonomy levels was not possible to detect. Still, the results of the study indicated that their autonomy was nonetheless enhanced. Furthermore, the success of the project was contingent on the students' high level of English proficiency. It is not clear whether such a project would be equally successful among less autonomous and less proficient students. As acknowledged, the role of the mentors in this project was to foster and develop the students' already-existing learner autonomy and academic skills. If carrying out a similar study in the future, some form of coherent training for the mentors would be recommended to minimize the confounding variable of the mentors' personal mentoring style. However, the project did not account for the impact of the mentors' personal mentoring styles, which is a possible limitation of this study.

The project appears to be both original and somewhat unique within Poland and potentially across Europe. In our review of existing research, we did not find any other extensive studies on learner autonomy that employed a mentoring approach and involved as many as six researcher-mentors. While the theoretical aspects of learner autonomy have been extensively documented, its practical application within school settings remains an underdeveloped area that presents challenges for educators (Jimenez Raya and Vieira, 2021). We acknowledge that replicating such a project would be nearly impossible without the backing of a university and the involvement of students or other volunteers willing to serve as mentors for high school students. Nonetheless, we view this initiative as a significant opportunity to enhance collaboration between university departments and local high schools, a partnership that could yield substantial benefits for both parties.

6. Conclusion

This research investigated the impact of process writing and mentoring on promoting autonomy among high school L2 learners, with a particular emphasis on their decision-making and self-regulation abilities. Over the course of the project, students were found not only to improve their capacity to take control of their learning but also to cultivate essential academic skills and lifelong learning competencies, including time management, self-reflection, and resource evaluation.

In summary, this study highlights the importance of learner-centered methodologies in secondary education. By integrating process writing with mentoring, the initiative not only met immediate academic goals but also

equipped students with skills that are applicable beyond the classroom, thus preparing them for the challenges of higher education and future careers. These findings underscore the necessity for further incorporation of process writing and mentoring into teaching practices, advocating for innovative, collaborative learning frameworks that promote sustained autonomy and personal development.

Acknowledgements

The project was made possible by the financial and organizational support of the Inicjatywa Doskonałości – Uczelnia Badawcza [Excellence Initiative – Research University] program “Study@Research” that allocated 10,000 PLN to our undertaking. As young scholars, we are grateful for this opportunity to conduct and share research. We would also like to thank our supervisor, Professor Aleksandra Wach, for her unwavering organizational and methodological support and guidance throughout the project. Lastly, the project would not have been possible had it not been for the courtesy and enthusiasm of Liceum Ogólnokształcące św. Marii Magdaleny in Poznań [Saint Mary Magdalene High School in Poznań] – the high school that cooperated with us in the process of collecting empirical data. This project is indeed the fruit of the extensive collaboration of academia and its socio-educational environment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abetang, M. A., Oguma, R. N., Abetang, A. P. (2020), *Mentoring and the difference it makes in teachers' work: A literature review*. “European Journal of Education Studies,” No 7, pp. 301–323.
- Bandura, A. (1977), *Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change*. “Psychological Review,” No 84, pp. 191–215.
- Benson, P. (2007), *Autonomy in language teaching and learning*. “Language Teaching,” No 40, pp. 21–40.
- Council of Europe (2018), *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion Volume with New Descriptors*. Council of Europe.
- Dickinson, L. (1987), *Self-instruction in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007), *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Drożdźał-Szelest, K. (1997). *Language learning strategies in the process of acquiring a foreign language*. Poznań: Motiwex.

- Eby, L. T. et al. (2004), *Career benefits associated with mentoring for proteges: A meta-analysis*. "Journal of Applied Psychology", No 89, pp. 127–136.
- Graves, D. (1983), *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Exeter, NH: Heinemann.
- Holec, H. ([1979] 1981), *Autonomy and foreign language learning*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Holmes, A. (2023), *Fostering learner autonomy in higher education through coaching and mentoring for non-traditional learners*. "International Journal of Education," No 11, pp. 69–76.
- Hoven, D. (1999), *CALL-ing the learner into focus: Towards a learner-centred model*. "WORLD CALL: Global Perspectives on Computer-Assisted Language Learning," No 3, pp. 149–168.
- Hyland, F. (2000), *Teacher management of writing workshops: Two case studies*. "Canadian Modern Language Review," No 57, pp. 272–294.
- Jimenez Raya, J. and Vieira, F. (eds.) (2021), *Autonomy in language education: Theory, research and practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kutsyuruba, B. and Godden, L. (2019), *The role of mentoring and coaching as a means of supporting the well-being of educators and students*. "International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education," No 8, pp. 229–234.
- Little, D. (1991), *Learner autonomy 1: Definitions, issues and problems*. Dublin: Authentik.
- Little, D., Dam, L., Legenhausen, L. (2017), *Language learner autonomy: Theory, practice and research*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Matsuda, P. K. (2003) *Process and post-process: A discursive history*. "Journal of Second Language Writing," No 12, pp. 65–83.
- Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej (2017). *Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 14 lutego 2017 r. w sprawie podstawy programowej wychowania przedszkolnego oraz podstawy programowej kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły podstawowej, w tym dla uczniów z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w stopniu umiarkowanym lub znacznym, kształcenia ogólnego dla branżowej szkoły I stopnia, kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły specjalnej przysposabiającej do pracy oraz kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły policealnej*. Dziennik Ustaw 2017, pos. 356.
- Michońska-Stadnik, A. (1996). *Strategie uczenia się i autonomia w warunkach szkolnych*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.
- Nunan, D. (1997), *Designing and adapting materials to encourage learner autonomy*, (in:) Benson P., Voller P. (eds.), *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*, London: Routledge, pp. 192–203.
- Pawlak, M. (2008), *Autonomia w nauce języka obcego – co osiągnęliśmy i dokąd zmierzamy*. Poznań – Kalisz – Konin: Wydawnictwo UAM i PWSZ w Koninie.
- Pawlak, M. (2011), *Rozwijanie autonomii ucznia w pracy z uczniem niezwykłym*. "Neofilolog", No 36, pp. 301–318.
- Ryan, R. M., Deci, E. L. (2000), *Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being*. "American Psychologist," No 55, pp. 68–78.

- Ushioda, E. (2003), *Motivation as a socially mediated process*, (in:) Little D., Ridley J., Ushioda E. (eds.), *Learner autonomy in the foreign language classroom: Teacher, learner, curriculum and assessment*, Dublin: Authentik, pp. 90–102.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978), *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wallace, J. E., Haines, V. A. (2004), *The benefits of mentoring for engineering students*. "Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering," No 10, pp. 377–291.
- Wilczyńska, W. (1999), *Uczyć się czy być nauczonym? O autonomii w przyswajaniu języka obcego*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Yeung, M. (2019), *Exploring the strength of the process writing approach as a pedagogy for fostering learner autonomy in writing among young learners*. "English Language Teaching," No 12, pp. 42–54.
- Zamel, V. (1982), *Writing: The process of discovering meaning*. "TESOL Quarterly," No 16, pp. 195–209.

Appendix 1: Pre-writing questionnaire

- What is my main goal for the project? What do I want to achieve?
- Do I rely on homework and teachers when it comes to studying? Or do I seek additional resources/tasks on my own when I find a topic interesting (or challenging)? (e.g. self-testing before an exam, watching YouTube videos about a given topic)
- Do I do regular study sessions and do assigned homework in advance? Do I think it is an effective learning strategy? Or do I find it unnecessary and typically manage to learn the material the day/two days before the exam?

Appendix 2: The form of student logs

- What did I do this week to get closer to my goal?
- What did I find difficult/frustrating? Why? Which task was easy/pleasant/took less time than expected?
- Was there something that motivated me to get the homework done? Was there something that made me procrastinate?
- What do I have to do before the next meeting?

Appendix 3: Post-writing questionnaire

- Did I achieve my goal?
- What obstacles did I encounter? How did I overcome the difficulties?
- What did I find easy? What did I do well?
- Which task did I like the most? Which task did I hate the most?
- Which feelings were the most prevalent (did I experience the most) while working on the project?

Appendix 4: Interview questions

- What did your participation in the project give you?
- How did the work on the project look like?
- How did you organize your work (notes, calendar, to-do lists)?
- What was difficult and stressful for you? What was enjoyable?
- How was the work with the mentor? Was it helpful, and if so, in what ways? Was it challenging to work with a mentor?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What is the most important thing you remembered about the book you chose?
- Was there anything that surprised you during the work on your chosen book?
- Did you learn something that might be useful in the future?

- If you had to choose a university degree to pursue now, what would you go for?
- Do you think you have control over your education? Why?
- What qualities do you think a good teacher should have?

Appendix 5: The form of mentor logs

- What progress did my student make this week?
- What was difficult for my student? What did they do well?
- What kind of tasks do they have to do before the next meeting?
What do I have to prepare? How can I support my student?

Received: 30.11.2024

Revised: 27.03.2025