

Utilizing Homework to Enhance Out-of-school Learning and Foster Autonomy Development

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Abstract

This study was conducted to gather information about how university students learning English as a foreign language managed their learning processes while doing homework as an out-of-school learning activity. Possible signs of autonomy development were also investigated. The participants of the study consisted of 22 learners of English at a state university in Izmir, Turkey, and their teacher. Retrospective self-reports written by students and observation notes of the teacher/researcher were used for data collection over a 12-week period. The data was analysed through directed content analysis. Difficulties encountered during the homework production phase and ways of coping with them were discussed in detail. High motivation, positive attitudes towards language learning, self-awareness, decreased anxiety, self-confidence, self-evaluation, taking responsibility, and creating own tasks, which were thought to indicate autonomy development, were found. The study also underlined the need for teachers to consider the social and economic differences among students when assigning homework. Overall, the findings suggest that thoughtfully designed homework tasks, combined with reflective support, can enhance learner autonomy and foster long-term independent learning skills.

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Introduction

Autonomy is a learner characteristic whose importance in effective learning cannot be overstated. Although autonomy is not a trait that can be learnt or taught, teaching and studying methods, materials, assessment strategies, and the addition of autonomy as a target outcome in the curriculum can help to promote and develop autonomy. The teacher's role, therefore, is to guide and encourage learners so that they become aware of their responsibility in their own learning, since learning can be achieved only by the learners themselves.

When autonomy research is examined, there are relatively few studies that investigate the relationship between in-class learning and out-of-class learning activities (Benson, 2001). As a result of language learners' reflections on their learning processes outside the classroom, it may be possible to obtain data on how they make use of this process. At this point, the classroom teacher can make a small intervention in the content of the learning. Effective homework tasks assigned by the teacher can contribute to autonomy improvement.

Learner Autonomy

Language teachers want their learners to achieve success while learning the target language. In her book, Wenden (1991, p.15) describes successful learners as those who 'have learned how to learn'. These learners are well-informed about the adaptation of learning skills while learning, and they are able to perform these skills independently of an instructor with confidence. For that reason, these learners are called autonomous learners. Benson (2001, p.8), who studied autonomy in the language learning field, defined the term autonomy as 'the capacity to take charge of one's own learning', and learner autonomy is related to using this capacity for learning.

Breen and Mann (1997) mentioned eight different characteristics of autonomy to clarify what it meant to be autonomous in a language classroom. The first one is related to *the learner's stance*. Autonomous learners decide what they want to learn, how they want to learn it and from which sources they will learn. From time to time, they stop and reflect on their learning practices and make new decisions, which shows they have *metacognitive capacity*, and they see themselves in the centre of learning. They monitor their learning, and when needed, they can *manage* the necessary *changes* for the sake of better learning. They have either an intrinsic or an extrinsic *desire to learn*. A *robust sense of self* is another attribute of an autonomous learner, which empowers the learner when challenges are met. Learners whose language learning capacity and achievement are *independent* of the learning process in the classroom are called autonomous. They also build a *strategic engagement with learning* which enables them to determine their own needs, goals and study preferences and decisions. Finally, they have the *capacity to negotiate*. They collaborate with the teacher and other learners in the classroom to maximize their learning potential and performance. All these characteristics that define autonomy remind us of learner engagement, which can be described as the learner being active in all processes and dimensions of learning. Indeed, learner autonomy cannot develop if students are not engaged in the learning process (Cotterall, 2017).

In institutionalized learning settings, teachers may find it difficult to adapt the practices that may lead their students towards more autonomous learning, as strict curricula and standardized assessment systems must be followed. Even if this is the case, there are various ways of promoting learner autonomy during teaching time. Phan and Liu (2023), for instance, implemented collaborative learning to improve the autonomy of low achievers in a high school English learning classroom in Taiwan. They adapted the compulsory course content to collaborative learning, and as a result, they were able to find the traces of autonomy improvement for both high and low-achieving students.

While classroom learning activities that encourage autonomy are important, they may not provide enough time for learners to fully develop the necessary skills. Therefore, learning outside classroom time gains more prominence. In a recent study conducted by Özer and Yükselir (2021), the participants reported that their goals could not be achieved solely through classroom learning but also depended on participating in learning outside the classroom. A relationship between learner autonomy, self-directed learning, goal commitment, and academic achievement in English was also found in this study. Experiencing learning outside the classroom is rewarding for learners in terms of autonomy, and teachers can contribute to this experience in various ways.

Aside from the study mentioned in the previous paragraph, the theoretical literature on autonomy, approaches to its development, and practices generally focus on learning in the classroom. Studies that trace autonomy in a learner's out-of-school learning and measure whether a learner becomes more autonomous have been needed (Benson, 2001).

Homework

Homework can be defined as 'tasks that teachers assign to students that are meant to be completed during out-of-school hours' (Bempechat, 2004, p.189). Homework can be assigned to students for different purposes. They can be given to revise a previously taught subject or introduce a new topic, so students come to the classroom prepared. They can be short or long depending on the purpose, the students' readiness, or capacity. There is compulsory homework, which is generally graded. Voluntary or optional homework, on the other hand, is not necessarily graded and given to students who want to spend extra time learning the subject matter. Homework can be given written feedback or checked orally with students during class hours.

There are various studies about the effects of homework on learning. In their study with EFL learners at university level, Rodriguez-Fuentes and Swatek (2022) provided information about the materials that were used to assign to the students could have a positive impact on learning grammatical structure in foreign language learning. Improvement of study skills and attitudes towards learning are examples of the long-term academic effects. More independent learners with self-discipline and better problem-solving skills are among the non-academic benefits of homework (Cooper, 1989). Learners are better at problem-solving skills as homework assists students in developing strategies to deal with mistakes, difficulties, and failures (Bempechat, 2004). Apart from academic benefits, teachers also believe that homework helps students to build self-confidence and good study habits and to inform them about their learning process. In addition, homework assists teachers in determining their learners' strengths and weaknesses (Moorhouse, 2021).

Finally, the purpose of homework is to evaluate the learning process for both the teacher and the student. Mutlu (2021) conducted a study with prep-class students at a state university in Turkey to understand their perceptions about homework as a formal assessment method. The students reported that they benefited from the process of completing the homework, although they encountered several difficulties, and they preferred being assessed on homework performance instead of formal exams. As Vatterott (2009) highlighted in her book, homework functions for the *assessment for learning*, not for the *assessment of learning*. Therefore, not grading but using effective feedback methods, such as asking reflective questions related to the homework given, may support the students in their learning process by increasing their motivation and teaching them self-assessment skills.

Despite the studies focusing on the outcomes after the homework process, there is relatively less emphasis on how students manage the homework process. It is also noticeable

that autonomous learning and homework have not been directly associated in the literature. The aim of this study was to investigate how students manage their learning processes outside the classroom through assignments and to observe their autonomy development as a possible result of their self-evaluation of their homework processes. There were two research questions that could align with the aim and focus of the study:

1. How do university students learning English as a foreign language manage their learning processes when doing homework as an out-of-school learning activity?
2. What signs of autonomy development can be observed in university students learning English as a foreign language when they reflect on their homework completion process?"

Methods

The main purpose of this study was to gather information about how learners manage their learning processes while doing homework as an out-of-school learning activity. In addition, potential signs of autonomy development were monitored after retrospective reflection on the homework process. A qualitative design was used to achieve the objectives of the research. Before initiating the study, which was conducted in the 2023-2024 academic year, permission was obtained from Dokuz Eylul University Social Sciences and Humanities Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee.

Participants

The study was conducted in one of the English preparation classes at the School of Foreign Languages at Dokuz Eylul University in Izmir, Turkey. Convenience sampling was used. There were 22 participants, consisting of 16 females and 6 males. The study group included 3 Turkmen, 3 Kazakh, 1 Iraqi, 2 Azerbaijani, and 13 Turkish students. The participants were placed in a B1 level class by the institution, following a placement test given at the beginning of the educational year. All participants signed the consent form for the study. Another participant in the study was the researcher, who also served as the class instructor, teaching the class for 15 hours a week. She had 24 years of teaching experience in the same school.

Data Collection Tools

The 'Life-Based Semantic Perception Form' developed by researchers and applied via Google Forms was used as a data collection tool in the study. The 2022 BPT perception form, developed by the researchers to examine the life-based semantic perceptions of physics teachers towards physics questions and used as a data collection tool, consists of two parts. The first part of the form consists of five open-ended and optional questions to determine the demographic characteristics of physics teachers. The second part of the form consists of seven questions in the 2022 BPT physics section. Physics teachers were asked to evaluate the life-based dimensions of the physics questions in the form. Moreover, the teachers were asked to tick the score value box between 1 and 10 according to their closeness to the statements under the BPT questions. The development process of the data collection tool is presented in Figure 2.

Data Collection and Analysis

The study used a qualitative approach to better understand students' out-of-school learning, focusing on their reflections and behaviors rather than assessing any direct intervention effects. Using retrospective written self-reports and observation notes allowed the researcher to collect rich data about learners' engagement with their homework process and possible signs of autonomy they reflected.

Retrospective self-reports written by learners were used for the data collection for a duration of 12 weeks. By having students reflect on their learning, it was possible to see how students did their homework, what strategies they used, and how they overcame challenges. These reflections gave insight into the learners' self-awareness, problem-solving approaches, and perceived growth in autonomy. It was also possible to highlight areas where students felt more independent and areas where they still sought external guidance, thanks to the retrospective self-reports.

In this study, the participants were given two homework tasks each week. One was for revising a previously learnt topic in the classroom, and the other one was for the following topic so that the students would come to the lesson prepared. Students were informed that homework would not be graded, and it would not be compulsory. All homework was checked during class time and feedback was given orally. Following this, the participants were given the same questions for both assignments:

1. Where did you do your homework? How much time did you spend completing it?
2. Did you encounter any difficulties while completing your homework? How did you deal with them?
3. Did you find this homework useful?
4. Did you do any activities to study English apart from your assigned homework? Please specify.

The participants answered these questions on a piece of paper, either in Turkish or English which was the target language to be learnt. The participants were also told that if they had not done the assigned homework, they could write down the reasons why they had not done so.

Observation notes were taken both during the lesson and on the same day after each lesson for 12 weeks. The content of the notes was not structured by certain headings. Observations about the lessons, the students' participation, their interactions with the teacher and other students, and any situation that attracted the teacher's attention were included. Observation notes allowed the researcher to capture nonverbal cues and behavioral patterns that might not have emerged in self-reports.

The data was analysed through directed content analysis. As Hsieh and Shannon (2005) stated, directed content analysis is an approach that begins with a theoretical framework, or predetermined themes based on relevant literature. Researchers use these predetermined categories as a guide, but they also remain flexible for new themes or patterns that can emerge from the data during the analysis process. Therefore, it is both structured and flexible. In this study, the data collected from the participants were read and summarized by the researcher at the end of each week. Prior to the end of the data collection process, possible codes that could be included in the analysis were noted down. This early and continuing analysis was also a suggested form of coding by Miles and Huberman (1994). After the data collection process was completed, the raw data was scanned again from the beginning, and all applicable codes were determined. These codes were grouped under certain categories. Following this, the raw data was checked again to see if there were any missed, overbuilt, ill-fitting or inapplicable codes.

Two other researchers were consulted to strengthen the credibility of this study. One of them was an English instructor who had an MA degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The other one was a sociologist with an MA degree in Social Anthropology who had expertise in qualitative analysis. An interdisciplinary perspective to the analysis was provided through working with these two external researchers from different fields. The data was first coded by

the researcher of this study. Then, two consensus meetings were organized with these two researchers. In the first one, they were given the data and the analysis tables in a printed version to check the appropriateness of the codes and sub-themes. In the second meeting, all comments in the analysis tables were juxtaposed, and necessary arrangements and changes were made following a mutual agreement. The role of consensus meetings, which ensure the validity and consistency of the interpretations of the data, is significant in content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Results

This study had two main research questions. The first question was asked to obtain information on how EFL learners carry out their learning processes outside of school. The second was to find out whether reflecting on their out-of-school learning processes contributed to their autonomy development.

Place and Time Used for the Completion of the Homework

The data regarding time spent on homework, the changing study environments, and reasons for incomplete assignments were organized in Table 1:

Table 1
Study Environments and Homework Completion Factors

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Details-codes</i>
Time Spent on Assignments	Minimum Time	20 minutes
	Maximum Time	2 hours
Study Environments	Initial Environment	Homes, dormitory rooms
	Evolved Environments	Campus library, study halls provided by the municipality, nearby cafes, and buses while traveling
Homework Completion Challenges	Reasons for Incomplete Assignments	Lack of time due to part-time work, adaptation issues (foreign country), illness

As shown in Table 1, the participants of the study spent a minimum of 20 minutes and a maximum of 2 hours to complete their assignments. At the very beginning of the study, homework was mainly done at home or in the dormitory rooms. As the study progressed, the campus library, study halls provided by the municipality for students, nearby cafes, and even buses when traveling became the settings for their study. Sometimes students did not complete their homework assignments for different reasons, such as having no time due to part-time working, adaptation problems due to being in a foreign country, or sickness. Some of them apologized and promised to do the following homework.

Difficulties Encountered and Ways to Handle Them

The most frequently mentioned difficulties were related to the content of the assignment. The participants reported that the unknown vocabulary and some grammatical structures were challenging for them. Among other difficulties, some individual problems, such as internet access problems and a lack of technological devices, were cited. Table 2 provides an example of the data analysis of the difficulties expressed for the revision assignment given in the first week.

Table 2

Content Analysis Results for the Difficulties Encountered for the Revision Assignment in the First Week

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Sample statements</i>
Difficulties encountered	Content-based difficulties	Vocabulary	"There were some words that I hadn't known."
	Other difficulties	Internet access	"Because there is no internet connection at dormitory, I had difficulty to complete the task."

Table 2 shows the results of the analyses of the difficulties reported by the students for the revision task in the first week of the study. The most frequently reported problems were related to the content of the assignment and the lack of access to the internet. However, these problems disappeared after a few weeks of the study. Some students also reported that they had no difficulty at all in doing their revision homework.

The participants found preparation homework more challenging than revision homework. They used several ways of handling difficulties. Table 3 shows some example statements reflected by the participants.

Table 3

Content Analysis Results for the Participants' Ways of Handling Difficulties

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Sample Statements</i>
Ways of handling difficulties	Use of technology	YouTube	"I watched YouTube videos about conditionals."
	Use of technology suggested in the classroom	Suggested website	"I used the dictionary websites that you recommended for vocabulary."
	Peer assistance	Classmates	"I could not understand one type of exercise, so I came to class early and asked my friends."
	The help of other people	Teacher	"I called my previous English teacher from high school, and she helped."
		Friend	"I did some exercises with my roommate."
	Referring classroom instruction	Lesson notes	"I checked my grammar notes."
		The teacher's instruction	"I did it in the same way as you taught us how to take notes."

By far the most common method was using technology to cope with the difficulties encountered. Participants used online dictionary sites, language learning websites, and video sharing sites to overcome the difficulties they encountered in their assignments. Some students preferred the websites that they had been informed of in class. Peer assistance and getting help from others were the second most common ways to handle difficulties. Another category that

was identified was referring to classroom instruction. The participants checked their lesson notes or used the skills they had studied during class hours to overcome the difficulties while studying on their own.

Benefits

All the revision assignments given in the 12 weeks of the study were reported as beneficial to “improvement of English”. Reinforcement of what had been learnt was the most frequently cited benefit. It was followed by vocabulary, speaking, reading, listening, and grammar improvement. Contributing to exams was another benefit mentioned.

Table 4 shows examples of the categorization that participants stated as beneficial for both types of homework assignments.

Table 4
Content Analysis Results of Reported Benefits

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Sample Statements</i>
Benefits	Improvement of English	Grammar	“It helped me to understand the differences between two tenses.”
		Reinforcement	“This kind of homework helps us to revise what we learnt during the day.”
		Listening	“It helped me to improve my listening skills especially pronunciation.”
	Engagement in learning	Responsibility	“I feel a responsibility to study when I have homework to do.”
		Research	“This is very useful because you need to search to learn.”
		Positive feelings	“It was fun, it reminded me of my past experiences.” “It was interesting.”
		Involvement in classroom instruction	“I especially focused on your lecture while telling the difference between two tenses as I couldn’t understand while studying alone.” “Compared to the beginning of this term, I think I am much better now in constructing my sentences.”
		Self-awareness	“I had online tests to check if I had learnt correctly.” “This is about real life; it is important to know about describing our illness, as we can get ill abroad.”
		Self-assessment	That’s why it was useful. “We should have more exercises to practice vocabulary.”
		Meaningful learning	“I would like to receive more reading assignments.” “We should learn how to learn and study outside school.”
		Participation in the classroom decision-making process	“We just need to learn how to learn.”

In the preparation homework tasks, data was mostly collected under the “engagement in learning” category. In the first week of the study, doing preparation homework was beneficial only for doing research and taking responsibility. In the following weeks, however, the students benefited from positive feelings for learning English, involvement in classroom instruction, self-awareness, meaningful learning, self-confidence, self-assessment, and participation in the classroom decision-making process, as can be seen in Table 4 with the participants’ direct statements. Some negative feelings were also reported, albeit in very small numbers. These were limited to the content of assignments that some students did not enjoy doing, such as reading assignments.

In the written self-reports, the participants were asked to write down any activities they did apart from the assignments to study or practice the target language. Table 5 lists the activities that the participants carried out on a weekly basis for their English practice, other than the assignments given to them.

Table 5

List of Non-Assignment Activities That Participants Carried Out to Practise Their English

<i>Weeks</i>	<i>N of students who wrote self-report</i>	<i>N of students doing activities in English other than homework assignments</i>	<i>Types of activities</i>
1	18	11	Vocabulary revision, workbook exercises, grammar videos on YouTube, interactive plays in English, and watching a film with English subtitles
2	18	13	Keeping a vocabulary notebook and practicing newly learnt vocabulary, studying irregular verbs, watching a film with English subtitles, listening to a podcast in English
3	16	9	Watching a film with English subtitles, studying for the quiz, watching a video about the usage of something/anything/nothing, reading texts in English
4	20	15	Workbook exercises, listening to a podcast recommended in the classroom, studying past tense
5	18	16	Workbook exercises, keeping a vocabulary notebook and practicing newly learnt vocabulary, listening to a podcast recommended in the classroom, reading a comics book in English, studying must-have to
6	19	17	Organizing notes taken in the classroom, reading texts in English, and studying grammar
7	21	17	Revision exercises, workbook exercises, translation exercises, listening exercises, speaking practice with a classmate
8	17	8	Workbook exercises, reading an article in English, using an application for speaking practice, pronunciation exercises, and watching a film with English subtitles
9	17	11	Keeping a vocabulary notebook and practicing newly learnt vocabulary, online listening test, online grammar test, studying grammar to practice the present perfect tense, using an application for speaking practice

10	19	8	Reading a graded English book, speaking practice with a classmate, keeping a vocabulary notebook, and practicing newly learnt vocabulary, watching a cartoon with English subtitles
11	19	17	Listening to BBC learning podcast as recommended in the classroom, reading a graded English book, reading a manga, English crossword puzzle, studying grammar in the library, using an application for speaking practice
12	19	15	Writing an opinion essay, reading a graded English book, listening to an English song with lyrics and memorizing it, on-line grammar test, studying for mid-term exams.

As can be seen from Table 5, doing workbook exercises, keeping a vocabulary notebook, listening to a podcast recommended in the classroom, reading a comic book in English, organizing notes taken in the classroom, doing English crossword puzzles, and reading a graded English novel were among the most reported activities. In the 8th week, there was a decrease in the number of students who studied English in addition to homework assignments. Because the students had mid-term exams a week before, they reported that they had been tired of studying and they had wanted to spend their time doing other types of activities. In the 10th week, the participants had speaking presentations at school and some reported that they had to study for their presentations and could not spend more time doing activities to practice the target language.

Although there was no prediction in the research design about the language that the participants would prefer while writing their self-reports, it was seen that they began to use the target language as the study continued. In the first week of the study, there was only one student who wrote all the self-reports in English and another one who used the target language in some of her answers. These numbers increased gradually as the study progressed. In the 10th week, this number peaked, and 9 students wrote all their answers in English, and 3 of them partly in English.

Observation Notes

The researcher noted several key signs of motivation, engagement, and autonomy development over the 12 weeks of observation. As can be seen in Table 6, all the notes were categorized into four categories.

Table 6
Autonomy Development Indicators Based on Analysis of Observation Notes

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Code</i>
High Motivation and Active Participation	Signs of Engagement	Active participation in lessons, asking and answering questions, and providing sample sentences
	Seeking Help	Asking the teacher for assistance with study strategies, additional resources, and study environments
	Study Environment	Suggestions of various study spaces (e.g., campus libraries, off-campus libraries, cafes with study facilities)

Increased Confidence and Willingness to Participate	Study Planning		Difficulty focusing, seeking advice on study time planning, discussion of study habits, and learning styles
	Learning Resources	Style	Implementation of the learning style scales suggested by the teacher
	Confidence in Speaking	in	Increased confidence in speaking the target language, reduced anxiety
	Engagement in Decision-Making	in	Involvement in course decisions, suggesting changes in class pace and task types
	Task Preferences		Requesting more re-write and word-formation exercises, revisiting previously studied topics
Signs of Self-Regulation and Goal-Setting	Challenge for High Achievers	High	Requesting more challenging homework to prepare for upcoming topics, expanding course content beyond the syllabus
	Learning Goals		Setting personal learning goals, sharing goals with the class (e.g., "Study all tenses," "Study past participles")
	Self-Evaluation		Evaluating learning progress through online tests from recommended websites
Enjoyment and Engagement with Different Homework Types	Study Groups		Forming study groups and regularly visiting the library after class
	Preference for Personalized Assignments	for	Enjoyment of assignments based on personal interests (e.g., personal experiences, observing surroundings, creating a recipe video)
	Task Enjoyment		Enthusiasm for tasks that incorporate personal tastes, compared to traditional language tasks like fill-in-the-blank or multiple-choice

As Table 6 shows, high motivation and active participation were particularly noticeable, as students engaged in lessons by asking and answering questions. They sought help from the teacher on study strategies, habits, resources, and alternative study spaces like campus libraries and cafes.

By the fifth week, students showed increased confidence, particularly in speaking the target language. They became more involved in class decision-making, and some of them requested additional exercises for rewriting or word formation practice. High achievers asked for more challenging homework, which led to an expanded syllabus. Some students set personal learning goals and evaluated their progress through online tests. Some formed study groups and visited the library regularly. Finally, some students enjoyed personalized homework assignments, such as those based on their interests or experiences (e.g., observing surroundings or creating videos). These assignments were more engaging than traditional exercises like fill-in-the-blank or multiple-choice questions, highlighting the role of personalized tasks in increasing motivation and engagement in learning.

Discussion and Conclusions

After an assignment is given, there are several factors that affect the completion of the assignment. The time allocated by the student for homework and the environment where it is done are two of them (Cooper, 1989). The participants completed the revision assignments in similar time periods. On the other hand, the time used for preparing homework for the new topic varied. Trautwein and Köller (2003) explained the differences in time amounts spent on homework by reminding us of the distinction between time spent on learning and the amount of time needed to learn. In this study, as students practiced and revised what they had already studied at school while doing revision homework, they spent similar amounts of time. However, while getting ready for a topic that would be studied in the classroom, they spent various amounts of time, as their aptitude, awareness about their learning styles, resources available, persistence, and the environment all affected the time they needed to learn. Recent research highlights the importance of time management in self-regulated learning, showing that students who allocate their study time thoughtfully tend to achieve better outcomes (Huang & Liu, 2023). These results are consistent with the current study's observation that students' differing time commitments during homework demonstrate emerging self-awareness and individualized approaches to learning. Notably, when students reflected on their learning pace and context, they realized their control over the learning process and adjusted their approaches accordingly, demonstrating emerging metacognitive skills linked to autonomy development (Zimmerman, 2002).

One student and occasionally others reported that they had not done their homework because they had to work. When they did their homework, it was done either at the workplace or on the bus while commuting. This highlights social inequities exacerbated by homework demands (Cooper, 1989). Similarly, participants who lacked internet access at their accommodations faced challenges, though some adapted by utilizing campus libraries or local study spaces. These findings underscore the importance of teachers considering socioeconomic and contextual diversity when assigning homework (Xu & Wu, 2013). The presence of international students added another layer of challenge; however, as the study progressed, these students overcame initial difficulties and better managed their homework and study routines. It was observed that these excuses disappeared as the study progressed and the participants endeavoured to somehow manage the processes of doing homework and studying. Despite all these, this study underlined the need for teachers to consider the social and economic differences and other possible diversities among students when assigning homework.

Signs of autonomy improvement included increased responsibility, positive attitudes toward learning, heightened motivation, and reduced anxiety, consistent with characteristics described by Breen and Mann (1997). Furthermore, autonomous learners actively seek help when needed (Smith et al., 2018). In this study, participants engaged their teachers, peers, and family members to overcome difficulties. Classroom interactions facilitated awareness of alternative study materials and environments, fostering practical problem-solving. Recent research by Zuo et al. (2024) highlights how structured support for self-regulated learning strategies during out-of-school homework activities, such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and reflection, significantly contributes to the development of learner autonomy. The students' proactive behaviours, such as creating vocabulary notebooks or requesting additional assignments, illustrate their growing capacity to negotiate learning needs, aligning with Benson's (2001) view of autonomy as learner agency in decision-making.

The study also revealed that assignment quality influences learner engagement and autonomy. High-quality assignments that promote choice, creativity, personal relevance, and real-life connections encourage independent learning (Vatterott, 2009). Students who enjoyed certain assignments tended to pursue similar activities independently, indicating that interest-driven tasks can effectively foster autonomous learning habits.

Additionally, the classroom environment plays a crucial role in developing learner autonomy. Yang et al. (2022) found that factors such as task orientation, teacher support, and student involvement significantly predicted learner autonomy in a Chinese EFL context. This underscores the importance of creating a supportive and engaging classroom environment to foster independent learning behaviors.

In conclusion, effective homework assignments, carefully selected by the teacher to align with learners' needs and differences, and supported by reflective practices such as self-reports, can positively influence the development of learner autonomy. Reflecting on the homework process encourages students to examine how they engage with learning, fostering greater self-awareness, responsibility, and independent learning behavior. Recent studies have shown that practices like self-assessment, when integrated into language learning tasks, can enhance learners' autonomy, motivation, and resilience (Aldosari & Alsager, 2023). Furthermore, structured feedback, whether human or analytics-based, can strengthen learners' reflective abilities and engagement, leading to improved performance and deeper learning (Suraworachet, Zhou, & Cukurova, 2023). Such reflection also benefits educators by providing insight into students' learning needs and informing more effective lesson planning. Through reflective practices, teachers may not only facilitate student learning but also foster their development as autonomous learners.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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