

Students' Perceptions Regarding the Development of Autonomous Learning Abilities by Working with Self-study Guides

*La percepción de los estudiantes acerca del
desarrollo de habilidades del aprendizaje autónomo
al trabajar con guías de estudio*

Autores:

Dr. Secundino Isabelle Flores - Universidad de Colima
secundino@ucol.mx

Dra. María Magdalena Cass Zubiría - Universidad de Colima
mcass@ucol.mx - [ORCID: 0000-0002-4671-2981](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4671-2981)

Dr. Raphaël Hubert Elie Sebire - Universidad de Colima
raphael_elie@ucol.mx - [ORCID: 0000-0003-2803-7203](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2803-7203)

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative descriptive study explored university EFL students' perceptions of responsibility and their abilities associated with autonomous learning after working with self-study guides for one academic year. Twenty-six Mexican university students completed the first two sections of Chan et al.'s (2002) questionnaire on autonomous language learning. Descriptive analysis showed that participants perceived themselves as having considerable responsibility for several aspects of their learning, while greater responsibility for other aspects was attributed to the teacher. Participants also perceived themselves as more capable of performing some autonomous learning activities than others. Although descriptive differences between female and male participants were observed, no consistent gender-based pattern emerged. The findings suggest that self-study guides may provide opportunities for students to exercise responsibility and practice abilities associated with autonomous learning, although these perceptions vary according to the particular aspect of learning considered.

KEY WORDS

Self-study guides, autonomous learning, English as a foreign language, university students, autonomous learning skills.

RESUMEN

Este estudio cuantitativo descriptivo exploró las percepciones de estudiantes universitarios de inglés como lengua extranjera sobre su responsabilidad y sus habilidades asociadas con el aprendizaje autónomo después de trabajar con guías de autoestudio durante un año académico. Veintiséis estudiantes universitarios mexicanos respondieron las dos primeras secciones del

cuestionario sobre aprendizaje autónomo de Chan, Spratt y Humphreys (2002). El análisis descriptivo mostró que los participantes se percibieron con una responsabilidad considerable en varios aspectos de su aprendizaje, mientras que se atribuyó al docente una mayor responsabilidad en otros aspectos. Los participantes también se percibieron más capaces de realizar algunas actividades de aprendizaje autónomo que otras. Aunque se observaron diferencias descriptivas entre mujeres y hombres, no se identificó un patrón consistente relacionado con el género. Los hallazgos sugieren que las guías de autoestudio pueden brindar oportunidades para que los estudiantes ejerzan responsabilidad y practiquen habilidades asociadas con el aprendizaje autónomo, aunque estas percepciones varían según el aspecto particular del aprendizaje considerado.

PALABRAS CLAVE

guías de auto-estudio, aprendizaje autónomo, inglés como lengua extranjera, estudiantes universitarios, habilidades del aprendizaje autónomo.

Introduction

Developing autonomous learning skills can help university students take greater responsibility for their learning and continue learning beyond their formal education. Crabbe (1999) contends that when students learn autonomously, they learn from the successful and unsuccessful experiences they have, which can help them to develop better learning strategies and become better learners in the future. Thanasoulas (2000) affirms that the implementation of autonomous learning at school can foster the development of the ability to deal with the rapid changes in life. This can assist students in overcoming the challenges brought about by these changes more easily. Educational institutions can play an important role in creating learning experiences that foster independent learning, the development of autonomous learning skills, and students' responsibility for their own learning (Dofs & Hobbs, 2011). One way to provide students with opportunities to exercise greater responsibility for their learning is through the use of self-study guides.

Self-study guides have been used for a long time, and their outcomes have been studied for several decades (Conderman & Hedin, 2017). Study guides can help students learn different types of content and become more analytical and independent learners (Gore, 2004). The results of a study conducted by Dofs and Hobbs (2011) indicated that students considered the guides helpful in developing aspects associated with autonomous learning, such as metacognitive awareness and the acquisition of new learning strategies. Teachers participating in the study also considered that the guides assisted students in becoming more independent and successful learners.

Previous research suggests that self-study guides can provide opportunities for students to assume greater responsibility and exercise skills associated with autonomous learning. However, further research is needed to understand which aspects of their learning students perceive themselves as responsible for and how they perceive their ability to perform activities associated with autonomous learning after working with these materials. Examining these perceptions is relevant because students may not perceive themselves as equally responsible or capable across all aspects of autonomous learning. Therefore, this study aimed to explore university EFL students' perceptions of their responsibility and abilities associated with autonomous learning after working with self-study guides for one academic year. Using a quantitative descriptive design, the study also explored possible differences between female and male participants' perceptions of responsibility and their self-reported abilities associated with autonomous learning.

Literature Review

Self-study guides definition

Self-study guides are instructional aids that help students construct their own knowledge (Hollingsead et al., 2004). They can also help students focus their attention on important content and support their learning of course material (Conderman & Bresnahan, 2010). They can involve and engage students in their learning process (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Blake & Young, 1995; Ciborowski, 1995), as well as facilitate learning due to their flexibility (Salyer et al., 2002). These guides can be either printed or digital and allow students to use learning materials in the way they find most convenient, which may help them understand the content and complete the activities included to achieve learning (Garcia Aretio, 2014; Garcia Hernandez & de la Cruz Blanco, 2014; Hollingsead et al., 2004). The principal objective of study guides is to facilitate learning. This is done by including relevant information, organized learning activities and materials, and guidance for students' learning (Khabaz-Mafinejad et al., 2014). Furthermore, Harden et al. (1999) indicate that study guides play the role of a tutor that supervises and guides the work students do.

Autonomous Learning

Autonomous learning has been defined in different ways. Holec (1981) affirmed that, in this approach to learning, students can control their own learning. Other researchers have written definitions considering their contexts, learners, and situations (Littlewood, 1996); nevertheless, these are not very different from the one given by Holec. There is agreement that a certain level of independence is given to students, that they are responsible for some or many aspects of their learning, and that they should be able to make decisions regarding their learning and its process (Benson, 2011; Boggu & Sundarsingh, 2019; Reinders & White, 2011). Therefore, regardless of how autonomous learning is defined, it has been agreed that in this type of learning students are able to make choices and are given some responsibility and independence regarding their learning. Because autonomous learning is a process, students may gradually develop greater responsibility and independence as they become more autonomous in their learning.

It is relevant to point out that students do not usually become autonomous automatically or quickly; they may need assistance to do so (Alonazi, 2017). Holec (1981) contended that teachers are responsible for helping students reach this goal. Little (2007) suggests helping students learn how to learn so that they can develop the skills and knowledge needed to become more autonomous learners. The goal is to guide students to be good guessers, to become aware of their learning styles and effective learning strategies, to be active in their learning, to not be afraid to use the target language to communicate, to be open to feedback, and to be able to establish learning goals and perform the actions needed to reach them (Orawiwatnakul & Wichadee, 2017; Thanasoulas, 2000).

Why do self-study guides help to foster autonomous learning?

Self-study guides can contribute to the development of skills needed to become autonomous learners. The findings of a study conducted by Khabaz-Mafinejad et al. (2014) showed that self-study guides assisted participants in managing their learning process. Furthermore, it was also found that students agreed that study guides helped them develop autonomous learning skills and recommended the use of these learning materials. The results of an investigation by Dofs and Hobbs (2011) regarding the effects of self-study guides used for language learning showed that these materials aided the planning of learning, the development of language

skills, awareness raising, and making students more responsible for their learning. These study guides were used at a self-access center, where they helped learners reach the goals they had established for themselves, plan their learning endeavors, and develop reflective skills. Some participants mentioned that they gained awareness regarding how to study on their own and how to establish learning goals. According to Harden et al. (1999), these materials are designed to help students organize and manage their learning. Therefore, students may have opportunities to make decisions about certain aspects of their learning, such as when and how to complete learning activities. This provides them with some control over their learning, which, according to Holec (1981), is one of the main tenets of autonomous learning.

Research suggests that self-study guides foster independent learning. Khabaz-Mafinejad et al. (2014) contend that the independent learning skills of medical students improved after learning with study guides. The findings from a study conducted by Isabeles Flores et al. (2023) also suggested that participants became more independent in their learning because they had opportunities to exercise control over their learning and the materials employed to do so. The freedom they were given while using study guides contributed to this perception. Garcia Aretio (2014) states that self-study guides can support independent learning by giving students greater freedom over aspects of their learning. These findings suggest that greater independence in learning may provide students with opportunities to make their own decisions, an important ability associated with autonomous learning. These materials give students the opportunity to learn by themselves; nevertheless, when this happens, they are guided by the study guides and, if needed, receive assistance from a teacher (Garcia Hernandez & de la Cruz Blanco, 2014). In other words, study guides can provide scaffolding that helps students work towards their learning goals with varying degrees of teacher assistance, potentially contributing to the development of learner autonomy.

Research suggests that self-study guides can contribute to the development of some skills needed in autonomous learning, such as awareness raising, planning, and reflection (Dofs & Hobbs, 2011); however, further research is needed to explore other skills that may be developed through working with study guides. In addition, previous research suggests that study guides can help students become more responsible for their learning (Cass Zubiria et al., 2022; Dofs & Hobbs, 2014); nevertheless, further research is needed to explore which aspects of learning students perceive themselves as responsible for when working with these guides. This is what the present study intended to investigate.

Objectives and research questions

The purpose of this study was to examine university students' perceptions of responsibility for their EFL learning and their self-reported abilities to perform learning activities associated with autonomous learning after working with self-study guides for one academic year. The study also explored whether these perceptions differed between male and female participants.

The research questions that guided this investigation were:

- RQ1.** After working with self-study guides for one academic year, how do students perceive their own responsibility for different aspects of their EFL learning?
- RQ2.** After working with self-study guides for one academic year, how do students perceive their teacher's responsibility for different aspects of their EFL learning?
- RQ3.** After working with self-study guides for one academic year, how do students perceive their ability to perform learning activities associated with autonomous language learning?

- RQ4.** What differences, if any, are observed between male and female participants' perceptions of responsibility and their self-reported abilities associated with autonomous language learning?

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach and a descriptive research design to examine students' perceptions of responsibility for their EFL learning and their self-reported abilities related to autonomous learning after working with self-study guides for one academic year. Quantitative data were collected through selected sections of a questionnaire (Chan et al., 2002) and analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns in participants' responses.

Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted at the School of Foreign Languages at the University of Colima, a public university in the state of Colima, Mexico. The BA in Language Teaching requires students to attain a C1 level of English and a B2 level of French by graduation.

The participants were 26 university students enrolled in B2 English courses in the BA in Language Teaching. They were sophomore, junior, and senior students between 19 and 22 years of age. Of the 26 participants, 22 (84.6%) were female and 4 (15.4%) were male. None selected the "Do not want to say" response option. Convenience sampling was used because participants were enrolled in B2 English classes taught by two members of the research team. The two teacher-researchers implemented the self-study guides as part of the students' regular English coursework.

Self-Study Guides and Implementation

The materials used in the study were formative-independent self-study guides (Olson et al., 2008). These guides were designed to organize learning content and required learners to work independently on tasks using the resources and scaffolding provided to facilitate their work (Wood, 2005).

During the academic year, students completed 12 self-study guides designed by the teachers of the B2 English courses, six during each semester. Students were generally given between two and three weeks to complete each guide. The guides included vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing tasks and provided students with opportunities to work independently on different aspects of their English learning. Students could organize when and how they worked on the guides within the time established for their completion. Although students were expected to complete the tasks independently this did not mean that they had to work in isolation; they could use the resources and scaffolding provided in the guides to support their work. Some exercises included answer keys that allowed students to check and evaluate their own work. Upon completion, each guide was submitted to the teacher, who checked and graded the student's work.

Instrument

Data were collected using selected sections of the questionnaire developed by Chan et al. (2002) to investigate tertiary students' views of autonomous language learning. For this study, Sections 1 and 2 of the original questionnaire were used because they focused on students' perceptions of responsibility and their perceived abilities related to autonomous learning. The resulting instrument consisted of 24 items organized into two sections.

The first section, Responsibilities, consisted of 13 items examining participants' perceptions of responsibility for different aspects of their English learning. For each item, students separately rated both their own responsibility and their teacher's responsibility using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from Not at all to Completely. The items addressed aspects such as ensuring progress, identifying weaknesses, determining learning objectives, selecting learning activities and materials, and evaluating learning (Chan et al., 2002).

The second section, Abilities, consisted of 11 items examining participants' perceived ability to make decisions and perform activities associated with autonomous language learning. These included choosing learning activities, objectives, and materials; evaluating their learning; identifying weaknesses; deciding what to learn next; and determining the amount of time to spend on learning activities. Participants rated their perceived ability on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from Very poor to Very good (Chan et al., 2002).

The questionnaire also collected demographic information regarding participants' year of study and gender.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected on the last day of classes, after students had worked with the self-study guides throughout the academic year. Although completion of the self-study guides formed part of the students' regular coursework, participation in the research was voluntary. The paper-based questionnaire was administered during class by a B2 English teacher who was not a member of the research team. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire. Participants were also assured that any personal information provided would be treated confidentially. Although students could voluntarily provide their telephone numbers if they were interested in participating in further research, this contact information was excluded from the dataset used for the present study. They were also informed that their decision to participate and their responses would not affect their English course grades. The questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

Questionnaire responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns in participants' perceptions of responsibility and their self-reported abilities associated with autonomous language learning. Descriptive statistics are appropriate for organizing, summarizing, and presenting quantitative data in a way that facilitates the identification of patterns within a dataset (Alabi & Bukola, 2023; Ghanad, 2023). Frequencies were calculated for the response categories of each questionnaire item. Responses from male and female participants were also compared descriptively to identify differences in their perceptions of responsibility and their self-reported abilities associated with autonomous language learning.

Main Findings

The results from the questionnaire are presented in three sections. The first two present the findings regarding responsibility and participants' perceived abilities. These sections present students' perceptions of responsibility for different aspects of their English learning and their self-reported abilities associated with autonomous learning after working with self-study guides for one academic year. The third section presents the findings from comparing the responses from women and men who participated in this study regarding these two aspects.

Responsibility

Table 1 presents participants’ perceptions regarding their own responsibility and that of their teacher for different aspects of learning English.

Table 1
Students’ Perceptions of Responsibility for Different Aspects of English Learning, by Gender

Whose responsibility is to...	Scale	General (26 participants)		Women (22 participants)		Men (4 participants)	
		Yours	Teacher	Yours	Teacher	Yours	Teacher
1. make sure you make progress during lessons?	Not at all						
	A little						
	Somewhat	1	4	1	4		
	Mainly	9	9	9	5		4
	Completely	16	12	12	12	4	
	Total Responses	26	25	22	21	4	4
2. make sure you make progress outside class?	Not at all		3		3		
	A little		5		3		2
	Somewhat	2	8	2	8		
	Mainly	5	2	5	2		
	Completely	19	6	15	5	4	1
	Total Responses	26	24	22	21	4	3
3. stimulate your interest in learning English?	Not at all						
	A little		2		2		
	Somewhat	4		4			
	Mainly	12	8	9	7	3	1
	Completely	10	14	9	11	1	3
	Total Responses	26	24	22	20	4	4
4. identify your weakness in English?	Not at all						
	A little		1		1		
	Somewhat	2	2	2	2		
	Mainly	11	8	9	5	2	3
	Completely	13	14	11	13	2	1
	Total Responses	26	25	22	21	4	4
5. make you work harder?	Not at all	1	1	1	1		
	A little						
	Somewhat	3	4	2	2	1	2
	Mainly	10	11	8	9	2	2
	Completely	12	9	11	9	1	
	Total Responses	26	25	22	21	4	4
6. decide the objectives of your English course?	Not at all	3		3			
	A little	7		5		2	
	Somewhat	4	2	4	2		
	Mainly	6	5	4	4	2	1
	Completely	4	19	4	16		3
	Total Responses	24	26	20	22	4	4

7. decide what you should learn next in your English lessons?	Not at all	7		7			
	A little	1		1			
	Somewhat	5		3		2	
	Mainly	8	5	6	5	2	
	Completely	2	21	2	17		4
	Total Responses	23	26	19	22	4	4
8. choose what activities to use to learn English in your English lessons?	Not at all	4		4			
	A little	4		4			
	Somewhat	7		4		3	
	Mainly	5	4	4	3	1	1
	Completely	3	21	3	18		3
	Total Responses	23	25	19	21	4	4
9. decide how long to spend on each activity?	Not at all	4		4			
	A little	5		5			
	Somewhat	3		2		1	
	Mainly	7	8	4	5	3	3
	Completely	6	18	6	17		1
	Total Responses	25	26	21	22	4	4
10. choose what materials to use to learn English in your English lessons?	Not at all	3	1	3			1
	A little	5	2	5			2
	Somewhat	9	2	6	2	3	
	Mainly	3	4	2	3	1	1
	Completely	3	17	3	17		
	Total Responses	23	26	19	22	4	4
11. evaluate learning?	Not at all	3		3			
	A little	4		3		1	
	Somewhat	7		7			
	Mainly	6	4	4	3	2	1
	Completely	4	21	3	18	1	3
	Total Responses	24	25	20	21	4	4
12. evaluate your course?	Not at all	5		5			
	A little	4		4			
	Somewhat	8		6		2	
	Mainly	3	2	2	2	1	
	Completely	4	24	3	20	1	4
	Total Responses	24	26	20	22	4	4
13. decide what you learn outside class?	Not at all		6		6		
	A little	1	3		2	1	1
	Somewhat	3	7	2	6	1	1
	Mainly	5	4	5	2		2
	Completely	17	4	15	4	2	
	Total Responses	26	24	22	20	4	4

Note. Values represent the number of participants selecting each response category. The total sample comprised 26 students (22 women and 4 men). Response totals may vary because of unanswered items.

Participants were asked who they thought was responsible for making sure they made progress during lessons and outside class. Regarding progress during lessons, 16 participants considered themselves completely responsible, nine mainly responsible, and one somewhat responsible. Regarding the teacher's responsibility, 12 participants considered the teacher completely responsible, nine mainly responsible, and four somewhat responsible. One participant did not answer the item concerning the teacher's responsibility.

In relation to making sure they made progress outside class, 19 participants considered themselves completely responsible, five mainly responsible, and two somewhat responsible. Regarding the teacher's responsibility, six participants considered the teacher completely responsible, two mainly responsible, eight somewhat responsible, five a little responsible, and three not at all responsible. Two participants did not answer the item concerning the teacher's responsibility.

Regarding who participants considered was responsible for stimulating their interest in learning English, 10 participants considered themselves completely responsible, 12 mainly responsible, and four somewhat responsible. Regarding the teacher's responsibility, 14 participants considered the teacher completely responsible, eight mainly responsible, and two a little responsible. Two participants did not answer the item concerning the teacher's responsibility.

When asked to state who they believed was responsible for identifying their weaknesses in English, 13 participants considered it completely their responsibility, 11 mainly their responsibility, and two somewhat their responsibility. Regarding the teacher's responsibility, 14 participants considered the teacher completely responsible, eight mainly responsible, two somewhat responsible, and one a little responsible. One participant did not answer the item concerning the teacher's responsibility.

Participants were also required to give their opinions regarding who was responsible for making them work harder. Twelve participants considered themselves completely responsible, 10 mainly responsible, three somewhat responsible, and one not at all responsible. Regarding the teacher's responsibility, nine participants considered the teacher completely responsible, 11 mainly responsible, four somewhat responsible, and one not at all responsible. One participant did not answer the item concerning the teacher's responsibility.

Participants were asked who they thought should decide the objectives of the English course. Four participants considered themselves completely responsible for making this decision, six mainly responsible, four somewhat responsible, seven a little responsible, and three not at all responsible. Two participants did not answer this item. Regarding the teacher's responsibility, 19 participants considered the teacher completely responsible, five mainly responsible, and two somewhat responsible.

Regarding who should decide what should be learned next in their English lessons, two participants considered themselves completely responsible, eight mainly responsible, five somewhat responsible, one a little responsible, and seven not at all responsible. Three participants did not answer this item. Regarding the teacher's responsibility, 19 participants considered the teacher completely responsible, five mainly responsible, and two somewhat responsible.

Participants were also asked who they considered should choose the activities used to learn English in their classes. Three participants considered themselves completely responsible, five mainly responsible, seven somewhat responsible, four a little responsible, and four not at all responsible. Three participants did not answer this item. Regarding the teacher's responsibility,

21 participants considered the teacher completely responsible and four mainly responsible. One participant did not answer the item concerning the teacher's responsibility.

With reference to how long students should spend on each activity, six participants considered themselves completely responsible for making this decision, seven mainly responsible, three somewhat responsible, five a little responsible, and four not at all responsible. One participant did not answer this item. Regarding the teacher's responsibility, 18 participants considered the teacher completely responsible and eight mainly responsible.

When asked who they thought was responsible for choosing the materials used to learn English in their lessons, three participants considered themselves completely responsible, three mainly responsible, nine somewhat responsible, five a little responsible, and three not at all responsible. Three participants did not answer this item. Regarding the teacher's responsibility, 17 participants considered the teacher completely responsible, four mainly responsible, two somewhat responsible, two a little responsible, and one not at all responsible.

Finally, participants gave their opinions regarding who was responsible for evaluating their learning and the English course. Regarding the former, four participants considered themselves completely responsible for evaluating their learning, six mainly responsible, seven somewhat responsible, four a little responsible, and three not at all responsible. Two participants did not answer this item. Regarding the teacher's responsibility, 21 participants considered the teacher completely responsible and four mainly responsible. One participant did not answer the item concerning the teacher's responsibility.

In relation to evaluating the English course, four participants considered themselves completely responsible, three mainly responsible, eight somewhat responsible, four a little responsible, and five not at all responsible. Two participants did not answer this item. Regarding the teacher's responsibility, 24 participants considered the teacher completely responsible and two mainly responsible.

In addition, participants' opinions were gathered in relation to who was responsible for deciding what to learn outside class. Seventeen participants considered themselves completely responsible, five mainly responsible, three somewhat responsible, and one a little responsible. Regarding the teacher's responsibility, four participants considered the teacher completely responsible, four mainly responsible, seven somewhat responsible, three a little responsible, and six not at all responsible. Two participants did not answer the item concerning the teacher's responsibility.

These results indicate that participants perceived themselves as having considerable responsibility for several aspects of their learning, particularly making sure they made progress during and outside lessons, stimulating their interest in learning English, identifying their weaknesses, making themselves work harder, and deciding what to learn outside class. On the other hand, participants attributed greater responsibility to the teacher for deciding the objectives of the English course, deciding what should be learned next, choosing learning activities and materials in class, deciding how long to spend on activities, and evaluating their learning and the English course. Overall, the findings indicate that participants' perceptions of responsibility varied according to the particular aspect of learning considered.

Abilities

The second section of the questionnaire inquired about participants’ perceptions regarding their ability to perform different actions that are common in autonomous learning. Table 2 presents the results obtained in this section.

Table 2
Participants’ Self-Reported Abilities Associated with Autonomous Learning

If you have the opportunity, how good do you think you would be at...	Participants	Very Poor	Poor	OK	Good	Very Good	Total
14. choosing learning activities in class?	General		2	10	8	6	26
	Female		2	9	6	5	22
	Male			1	2	1	4
15. choosing learning activities outside class?	General		1	3	15	7	26
	Female			3	13	6	22
	Male		1		2	1	4
16. choosing learning objectives in class?	General		4	9	7	5	25
	Female		4	8	5	4	21
	Male			1	2	1	4
17. choosing learning objectives outside class?	General		2	8	11	5	26
	Female		2	5	11	4	22
	Male			3		1	4
18. choosing learning materials in class?	General		5	4	10	6	25
	Female		5	3	7	6	21
	Male			1	3		4
19. choosing learning materials outside class?	General		2	5	12	6	25
	Female		2	4	10	5	21
	Male			1	2	1	4
20. evaluating your learning?	General		3	8	8	7	26
	Female		3	8	4	7	22
	Male				4		4
21. evaluating course?	General	2	2	12	4	6	26
	Female	2	1	10	3	6	22
	Male		1	2	1		4
22. identifying your weakness in English?	General		2	4	13	7	26
	Female		1	3	12	6	22
	Male		1	1	1	1	4
23. deciding what you should learn next in your English lessons?	General		2	11	10	3	26
	Female		2	9	8	3	22
	Male			2	2		4
24. deciding how long to spend on each activity?	General		2	11	9	4	26
	Female		2	9	7	4	22
	Male			2	2		4

Note. Values represent the number of participants selecting each response category. The number of responses may vary across items because some participants did not answer every question. N = 26.

When asked how good they considered themselves at choosing learning activities in class, six participants considered themselves very good, eight good, 10 okay, and two poor. None of the participants considered their ability very poor. Regarding choosing learning activities outside class, seven participants considered themselves very good, 15 good, three okay, and one poor.

Regarding their ability to choose learning objectives in class, five participants considered themselves very good, seven good, nine okay, and four poor. None rated their ability as very poor. One participant did not answer this item. In relation to choosing learning objectives outside class, five participants considered themselves very good, 11 good, eight okay, and two poor. None rated their ability as very poor.

Regarding their ability to choose learning materials in class, six participants considered themselves very good, 10 good, four okay, and five poor. None rated their ability as very poor. One participant did not answer this item. In relation to choosing learning materials outside class, six participants considered themselves very good, 12 good, five okay, and two poor. None rated their ability as very poor. One participant did not answer this item.

Regarding their ability to evaluate their own learning, seven participants considered themselves very good, eight good, eight okay, and three poor. None rated their ability as very poor. In relation to evaluating the English course, six participants considered themselves very good, four good, 12 okay, two poor, and two very poor.

Regarding their ability to identify their weaknesses in English, seven participants considered themselves very good, 13 good, four okay, and two poor. None rated their ability as very poor.

Regarding their ability to decide what they should learn next in their English lessons, three participants considered themselves very good, 10 good, 11 okay, and two poor. None rated their ability as very poor.

Regarding their ability to decide how long to spend on each learning activity, four participants considered themselves very good, nine good, 11 okay, and two poor. None rated their ability as very poor.

Findings show that participants generally perceived themselves positively in several of the abilities associated with autonomous learning. The strongest perceptions were found in choosing learning activities outside class and identifying their weaknesses in English. More than half of the participants also perceived themselves as good or very good at choosing learning materials both in and outside class and choosing learning objectives outside class. Their perceptions were less positive regarding choosing learning objectives in class, deciding what they should learn next, deciding how long to spend on learning activities, and evaluating the English course. Evaluating the English course received the fewest good or very good ratings. Overall, the results suggest that participants' perceptions of their abilities varied according to the particular aspect of autonomous learning considered.

Comparison of results across genders

The responses of the 22 female and four male participants were compared descriptively to explore possible differences in their perceptions of responsibility and their self-reported abilities associated with autonomous learning. Regarding responsibility, although some differences were observed between the two groups across individual items, these patterns should be interpreted

cautiously because of the unequal group sizes, particularly the small number of male participants. However, both female and male participants also attributed considerable responsibility to the teacher for several aspects of learning. Overall, no consistent pattern indicating clear gender-based differences in perceptions of responsibility was observed.

Regarding their self-reported abilities associated with autonomous learning, female and male participants generally reported positive perceptions across several of the activities examined, although some descriptive differences were observed. Female participants reported particularly positive perceptions regarding choosing learning activities outside class and identifying their weaknesses in English. Among male participants, choosing learning materials in class received three good ratings, while the responses to the remaining items varied. Overall, no consistent pattern indicating that one group perceived itself as more capable than the other was observed. Given the unequal group sizes, particularly the small number of male participants, these differences should be interpreted cautiously and are presented only as descriptive patterns.

Discussion

The results indicate that after learning with self-study guides for one year, participants perceived themselves as having considerable responsibility for several aspects of their learning, including making sure they made progress during and outside lessons, stimulating their interest in learning English, identifying their weaknesses, making themselves work harder, and deciding what to learn outside class. On the other hand, participants attributed greater responsibility to the teacher for deciding the objectives of the English course, deciding what should be learned next, choosing learning activities and materials in class, deciding how long to spend on activities, and evaluating their learning and the English course. These findings suggest that participants did not perceive themselves as equally responsible for all aspects of their learning. Becoming responsible for one's own learning is a major tenet of autonomous learning (Boggu & Sundarsingh, 2019). The findings therefore suggest that participants perceived themselves as assuming responsibility for some aspects associated with autonomous learning, although the degree of responsibility varied according to the particular aspect considered.

It is important to point out that the researchers did not expect all participants to adapt to autonomous learning after working with self-study guides for one year. Implementing autonomous learning takes time (Alonazi, 2017), particularly when it entails changes in students' established learning habits. One possible explanation for the participants' tendency to attribute greater responsibility to the teacher for classroom decisions may be their previous experiences with more teacher-centered approaches to language learning. However, participants' previous learning experiences were not examined in this study; therefore, this interpretation should be considered cautiously.

Regarding how participants felt about performing activities common in autonomous learning, their perceptions varied according to the particular ability considered. They perceived themselves particularly positively in choosing learning activities outside class and identifying their weaknesses in English. They also generally perceived themselves positively regarding choosing learning materials both in and outside class and choosing learning objectives outside class. However, their perceptions were less positive regarding choosing learning objectives in class, deciding what they should learn next, deciding how long to spend on learning activities, and evaluating the English course. These findings are partially consistent with Isabeles Flores et al. (2023), whose participants perceived themselves as becoming more independent when working with self-study guides because they had greater opportunities to control aspects of their

learning. Similarly, Dofs and Hobbs (2011) found that self-study guides supported skills associated with autonomous learning, including planning, awareness raising, and reflection. The findings of the present study, however, suggest that participants did not perceive themselves as equally capable across all aspects associated with autonomous learning.

The findings regarding responsibility also show both similarities and differences with previous research. Cass Zubiria et al. (2022) and Dofs and Hobbs (2014) found that working with self-study guides helped students become more responsible for their learning, while Khabaz-Mafinejad et al. (2014) reported improvement in students' independent learning skills after using study guides. In the present study, participants also perceived themselves as responsible for several aspects of their learning; however, this responsibility was not perceived equally across all aspects. Participants perceived considerable personal responsibility for making progress during and outside lessons, stimulating their interest, identifying their weaknesses, making themselves work harder, and deciding what to learn outside class. In contrast, greater responsibility was attributed to the teacher for decisions concerning course objectives, what should be learned next, classroom activities and materials, time spent on activities, and evaluation. Thus, the present findings are consistent with previous research concerning self-study guides and learner responsibility, while also suggesting that students may perceive different degrees of responsibility depending on the particular decision involved.

Regarding gender, some descriptive differences were observed in participants' perceptions of responsibility and their self-reported abilities; however, no consistent pattern indicating clear gender-based differences emerged. These findings should be interpreted cautiously because of the unequal group sizes and particularly the small number of male participants. Further research with larger and more balanced samples would be necessary to examine whether gender is associated with students' perceptions of responsibility or their perceived abilities related to autonomous learning.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study was that it focused only on participants' perceptions regarding responsibility and abilities related to autonomous learning. Therefore, the investigation did not examine whether students actually improved their English language proficiency or developed autonomous learning skills as a result of working with self-study guides. In addition, because data were collected only after participants had worked with the self-study guides, without a pre-intervention measure or comparison group, it was not possible to determine whether their perceptions or abilities changed as a result of using the guides. Data were also collected only through a questionnaire, which limited the possibility of obtaining more detailed information about students' experiences while learning with these materials. Another limitation was that students worked with the self-study guides for only one academic year, which may not have been enough time for them to become accustomed to taking greater responsibility for their learning. In addition, the unequal number of female and male participants, particularly the small number of male participants, limits the conclusions that can be drawn from the gender comparison. Finally, the study was conducted with a small sample of students in a specific educational context, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other educational settings.

Future research could address these limitations by examining students' perceptions and autonomous learning abilities before and after working with self-study guides and, when possible, including a comparison group. The use of interviews, learning journals, or classroom observations could also provide more detailed information about how students experience responsibility

and decision-making while working with these materials. Future studies could also examine the use of self-study guides with larger samples and in different educational contexts. Studies examining gender differences should include larger and more balanced groups of female and male participants.

Main Applications and Impact of the Research

The main findings of this study have implications for teaching and learning. Teachers who are interested in helping students become more autonomous in their learning can introduce self-study guides to give students some control over their learning. Because students can decide when and how they work on the guides within the time established for their completion, these materials provide opportunities to practice some behaviors associated with autonomous learning. Although this strategy cannot be expected to make students fully autonomous in their learning, it may provide opportunities for them to take greater responsibility for some aspects of their learning. This research contributes knowledge regarding students' perceptions of responsibility and their perceived abilities related to autonomous learning after working with self-study guides. These findings are relevant because they highlight the potential of self-study guides as a tool that teachers may use to provide opportunities for autonomous learning.

Conclusions

Based on the results obtained, it can be concluded that, after learning English as a foreign language with self-study guides for one academic year, participants did not perceive themselves as equally responsible for all aspects of their learning. They perceived themselves as having considerable responsibility for several aspects of their learning, while greater responsibility for other aspects was attributed to the teacher. Similarly, participants perceived themselves as more capable of performing some activities associated with autonomous learning than others. Their strongest self-perceptions included choosing learning activities outside class and identifying their weaknesses in English, while their perceptions were less positive regarding other abilities, particularly evaluating the English course, choosing learning objectives in class, deciding what they should learn next, and deciding how long to spend on learning activities.

These findings suggest that students' perceptions of responsibility and their perceived abilities associated with autonomous learning may vary according to the particular aspect of learning involved. These findings are consistent with the notion that implementing autonomous learning is a process that takes time (Alonazi, 2017). Regarding gender, some descriptive differences were observed in the perceptions of female and male participants regarding both responsibility and abilities; however, no consistent pattern indicating clear gender-based differences emerged. These findings should be interpreted cautiously given the small and unequal gender groups. Overall, the findings provide insight into how university EFL students perceive their responsibility and abilities related to autonomous learning after working with self-study guides and suggest that these materials may provide opportunities for students to exercise greater responsibility and practice abilities associated with autonomous learning.

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