
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

EFL Learners' Attitudes towards Autonomous Learning: A Comparative Study between Urban and Rural Moroccan High Schools

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| ABSTRACT

Learning a foreign language is no longer confined to the classroom's perimeters, but it has been recently linked to autonomy and self-learning skills, especially using current technological means. Due to the impact of the pandemic crisis on education, learning methods have been reconsidered to embrace other alternative options rather than merely clinging to traditional ways. As such, the present study examines the role of autonomous learning in enhancing students' proficiency in English language. The study explores whether high school students resort to autonomous learning (AL) strategies to improve their English language or they solely rely on what is being taught inside the classroom. More specifically, the paper aims to make an analogy on levels of autonomous learning between high school students of remote and urban areas in El Hoceima city. AL questionnaire items consist of two dimensions: 1- learners' perceptions of their educational responsibilities and 2- the actual autonomous English activities that were practiced by learners in the process of learning English. This scale instrument was adopted by Abdel Razeq (2014) to assess AL within EFL context. The data was gathered through online Google forms and analyzed by comparing the means and using t-test method. The results showed that high school students, belonging to remote areas suffice themselves with the classroom instructions and wait for the teacher to provide them with the language input. The analysis also demonstrated that the same students still need to familiarize themselves with autonomous learning strategies. However, students in urban high schools demonstrated significant abilities to engage in autonomous learning activities and have admitted that their responsibilities to learn English are mutually shared between learners and their instructors. Such results provide important implications for learners' perceptions of their use of autonomous learning skills.

| KEYWORDS

Autonomous Learning, English Activities, Urban and Rural Areas, EFL Context.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The recent technological breakthrough has had a huge impact on individuals' lives and daily interactions with each other. One of the interesting fields that this advent has reshaped is education. This latter has, moreover, witnessed some changes in its forms of learning, especially with the unexpected emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This latter, according to Livari et al. (2020), initiated a drastic and unforeseen digital transformation in the practices of the entire society. Education has also had its share of impact after the pandemic as well as the current, accelerated technological alterations. Therefore, numerous countries resorted to encouraging online teaching and learning also known as "online home-schooling trend" by using virtual apps and developing technological learning platforms (Al-husban & Waghid, 2022, 64). A positive and lasting outcome can be deduced from all these changes is that students will foster the ability to learn and study on their own (Chabbott & Sinclair, 2020). This, in turn, empowers them to think critically and reflect on their learning process. Here comes the concept of learner autonomy, which has allured the attention of language learning and teaching specialists and researchers, such as (Aldosari & Alsager, 2023; Chong & Reinders, 2022).

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Additionally, as ELT (English Language Teaching) has witnessed certain changes to enhance its theory and practice (Oussou & Kerouad, 2024), the need for modern approaches to replace the outdated ones, which regarded the learner as the receiver of knowledge, has become mandatory. Various research papers have been published on the issue of present-day teaching approaches, especially learner autonomy and the possible ways to promote it. Here, we mention few examples, mainly (Little, 1991; Nunan, 1996; Benson, 1997; Healey, 2014; Padmadewi, 2016; Toporek, 2021; Pratiwi & Waluyo, 2023).

Thus, it is plain that students all over the world need to be equipped with the essential skills and competencies that would prepare them for the future and its challenges. Technology is an indispensable tool today, which can help students learn independently without constant teacher supervision. However, as was revealed during the COVID-19 pandemic, students did not equally have access to the digital means that were proposed as an alternative method of classroom learning (Nóvoa & Alvim, 2020). Therefore, any plans to boost learning among students in times of crises should bear in mind that not every learner has the required ICT-tools that will help him/her learn as his peers. Irrespective of health crises, as Covid-19, the world is now witnessing a tremendous and unprecedented technological revolutions led by AI platforms, which questions the efficiency of actual learning that takes place inside the classrooms. In Morocco, there have been a few studies on the topic of autonomous learning raising different issues (Lotfi et al., 2025; Kharroubi & El Mediouni, 2024; Oussou, 2020). Within the same line of research, with regard to autonomy, this paper tries to analyze learners' perceptions towards autonomous learning between rural and urban Moroccan high schools. In other words, given the geographical and technological discrepancies between learners in rural and urban areas, who displays more autonomy and self-learning of the English language?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Autonomous Learning

The concept of autonomous learning has come to the fore because of its centrality for the teaching and learning process in today's world. The concept, autonomy, essentially refers to "a capacity - for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (Little, 1991, p. 4). In a similar vein, autonomy implies the freedom that the learner may enjoy. Further, it should be noted that autonomy in the educational milieu and specifically adult education is among the first issues that was raised back in the seventies.

Moreover, the literature explains that Henri Holec's Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning was the founding document of autonomy in language learning (Little, 1991). Holec defines autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's learning "(1981, p.3). That is, [...] to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning " (p.3). What should be noted is that there is no consensus upon the exact definition of autonomy but different versions of its relation and effectiveness to the process of learning in general. For example, Benson (2011) views autonomy as the process by which learners take more control over their learning. In fact, there has been a proliferation of research on the subject of autonomy in different contexts and domains, which revolves around the basic idea of autonomy as the ability of learners to be responsible for their own learning. In another definition, Hedge (2000, p.410) regards learner autonomy as "the ability of the learner to take responsibility for his or her own learning and to plan, organize, and monitor the learning process independently of the teacher ". Nonetheless, Little (1991, p. 3-4) does not give a definition of autonomy, but he opts for revealing what may be considered as wrong ideas or misconceptions of autonomy. For instance, he argues that:

1. Autonomy is not synonymous with self-instruction; that is, autonomy is not about a learning without a teacher.
2. The intervention of the teacher is refused as it may ruin whatever autonomy learners have attained.
3. Autonomy is not something that teachers do to learners; that is, it is not a new teaching method.
4. Autonomy is not a steady state achieved by certain learners. There is no perfect autonomous learner but autonomy is of degrees.

Now that the definition of autonomous learning has begun to take a shape, it is apparent that learners, under learning autonomy (LA) paradigm, need to independently organize and plan their learning without the assistance and guidance of their teacher. Students are required to act on their own as they are no longer spoon-fed, for the emergence of lifelong learning and learning centered-approaches in the current century regarding English education has brought up new difficulties as substantiated by Yang et al. (2022). Autonomous learning as an educational approach, as it were, seeks to empower individual learners and take them to a new world of their own where they can select what suits their objectives and needs, as if they are being liberated from the pressures of the old system.

2.2 The New Technologies and the Promotion of Autonomous Learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Classrooms

Modern technology has brought about myriad changes on people's lives as well as different fields of social and professional life. With the rise of digital education, educators are increasingly turning to technology to support independent learning (Baxtiyarovna, 2025).

Also, through digitalization, education becomes more adaptable and personalized. This transformation facilitates autonomy and encourages independent learning (Ribahan & Muslimin, 2025). The different technological tools offer learners valuable opportunities to learn the language autonomously (Yu, 2023). More than ever, using technology to become autonomous learners, particularly in language learning area, has frequently been stressed (Reinders & White, 2016). Furthermore, making use of the evolving technology in the EFL classrooms may boost the effectiveness of the learning process and enhance student's control of the English language (Melvina & Julia, 2021). In the same vein, Warni et al. (2018) explored the use of technology for learning English outside the classroom as a part of learner autonomy.

Certainly, the inclusion of new technologies in teaching and learning English has contributed to the emergence of autonomous language learning. Learners can have access to unlimited number of resources in their smart phones or laptops which avail them to learn new vocabulary or practice their English. Likewise, Squire & Dikkers (2012, p. 447) elucidate how learners use mobile devices for learning purposes inside and outside the formal context of school and what type of activities they engage in the most. Additionally, language learning through smart phones can enable students to step outside the routine of the class instructions and embrace informal learning whereby students can access extra materials on their own, seeking clarifications or additions about ideas explained by their tutors (West & Voslo, 2013). Further, Platforms such as Duolingo, Quizlet, Moodle, Google Classroom, and Edmodo demonstrate potential in enhancing learner engagement, promoting collaboration, and supporting autonomous language practice (Nurbek, 2025).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The current research employed a quantitative analysis instrument, using Google form questionnaire. This research was carried out on February 2024 in Al Hoceima city, Morocco. The survey was administered to high school students who study in remote and urban areas and sent out to colleague teachers in different high school institutions to be shared later with their students as some teachers have contact with students through social media platforms. The researcher demanded consent from his students to respond to the questionnaire. The google form was shared with different classes to account for all educational levels and distinct majors. The questionnaire was initially written in English and translated to Arabic to be comprehensible for all students since students' native language is Moroccan Arabic. The original version and the translated one were provided in the Google form.

3.2 Research Instrument

The content of the questionnaire was mainly derived from a study conducted by Abdel Razeq (2014) which targets students' autonomous learning. The original questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part deals with demographic information, such as gender, introductory course, whereas the adopted questionnaire uses different demographic information, such as educational level, major, school setting and gender as well. The second part is essentially made of three interrelated sections. The first section addresses participants' perceptions of their own and their teachers' responsibilities during university English classes consisting of 10 items.

The second Section is composed of 10 statements highlighting the learners' abilities to act autonomously while learning English both in school and at home. The third section suggests 23 items derived from students' actual autonomous learning practices. The current research adopted the questionnaire items except the second section. This section is discarded as it may lead to monotony with other items; it can also cause perplexity to students since the research context is entirely different from the original study. The remaining two sections are related to autonomous learning. The first section examines learners' attitudes about their and teachers' responsibilities to learn English; participants have to choose from three different options which reflect teachers' responsibility, learners' responsibility, or both share the same responsibility. The third section examines student's actual practices of autonomous learning activities. Students rate 21 statements on a five-point Likert scale, (5= always done, 4= usually done, 3= sometimes done, 2= Rarely done, 1= never done).

3.3 Participants

The sample was chosen randomly throughout different high schools located in both rural and urban areas. The total number was 124 participants reached out within two weeks. 55 (44.3%) students are male and 69 (55.7%) are female. As for educational levels, 76 (61.3%) of students are in 12th grade (2 baccalaureate), 42 (33.9%) are in 11th grade (1 baccalaureate), and 6 learners (4.8%)

are in 10th grade (common core). Students' major differ with 71 (57.3%) affiliated to science and 53 (42.7%) to humanities and art. Lastly, students are divided in two categorical groups where 71 (57.3%) participants study in rural areas, whereas 53 (42.7%) study in urban regions.

3.4 Data Analysis

After collecting students' responses from Google form, the data were inserted into the computer to be analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 29. The descriptive analysis was initially performed by comparisons of means using Sacricoban and Oz (2014) classification of means distribution based on the score level of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) while this study focuses on autonomous learning scale (table 1). Another analysis was conducted using inferential statistical method. A Sample T-test was employed to examine any significant differences in the level of autonomous learning scale between learners of remote and urban zones, gender and major.

Table 1. Classification of Means based on Autonomous Learning Activities Scale

Autonomous learning level	Mean	Options
High	4.5-5.0	Always done
	3.5-4.4	Often done
Moderate	2.5-3.4	Sometimes done
Low	1.5-2.4	Rarely done
	1.0-1.4	Never done

4. Results of the study

4.1 Responsibility and Autonomous Learning Practices

The results of the table 2 below demonstrates the frequency of students' attitudes towards their own and their teacher's responsibilities while taking English classes. Students strongly admit that they are responsible for making progress outside class; furthermore, their responsibility encompass other tasks, mainly stimulating interest in learning English; identifying weaknesses in English; deciding how long to spend on each activity; deciding the objectives of English course, and deciding what they should learn next in English lessons.

Table 2. Students' Perceptions of theirs and their Teacher's Responsibilities during English Classes

Responsibilities	Yours	Your teacher's	Both
1-To ensure you make progress during English lessons	27,4%	26,6%	46%
2- To ensure you make progress outside class	91,9%	6,5%	1,6%
3- To stimulate your interest in learning English	52,4%	30,6%	16,9%
4- To identify your weaknesses in English	54,0%	30,6%	15,3%
5- To choose what activities to use to learn English in your English lessons	26,6%	53,2%	20,2%
6- To decide how long to spend on each activity	48,4%	42,7%	8,9%
7- To choose what materials to use to learn English in your English lessons	28,2%	47,6%	24,2%
8- To evaluate your learning of English	32,3%	50,8%	16,9%
9- To decide the objectives of your English course	42,7%	37,9%	19,4%
10- To decide what you should learn next in your English lessons	54,0%	33,9%	12,1%

6 items out of 10 significantly stand for the total responses of students' responsibility to learn English; students, therefore, are highly aware of their responsibility to become autonomous learners and be less dependent on the teacher when picking up the language. Meanwhile, students assign responsibility to teachers in three inside classroom activities, namely choosing what activities to use to learn English in English lessons; choosing what materials to use to learn English in English lessons; and

evaluating students' learning of English. These tasks exemplify the teacher's roles that are included in the teaching practices. Students believe that making progress during English lessons is a shared responsibility with their teachers.

Table 3 demonstrates the total mean score of student's autonomous English activities practices inside and outside classrooms. Unexpectedly, the results reveal low and moderate scores in all items according to the mean classification suggested in Table 1. However, statements are classified based on the score attained between items within Table 3. To begin with, most outside classroom activities that scored moderately are the following items: 'noted down new words and their meanings outside class' (M= 2.93), 'listened to English songs' (M= 2.93), 'used the Internet to study and improve English' (M= 2.91), and 'watched English TV programs' (M= 2.90). Whereas, 'used extra hours with other English teachers in private language centers to improve English' (M= 1.52), and 'made suggestions to the English teacher' (M= 1.90) had the lowest mean scores compared to other low score items.

Table 3. Students' Actual Practices of Autonomous English Activities

Activities	Mean Score
11- Done assignments in English which are not compulsory during holidays	2,45
12- Noted down new words and their meanings outside class	2,93
13- Read short stories, books or magazines in English	2,08
14- Visited your teacher in office hours to ask about your work	1,82
15- Watched English TV programs	2,90
16- Listened to English songs	2,93
17- Talked to foreigners in English	2,17
18- Used the Internet to study and improve English	2,91
19- Practiced using English with friends	2,48
20- Done grammar exercises outside class	2,37
21- Done group studies in English lessons	2,02
22- Asked the teacher questions when you didn't understand	2,60
23- Made suggestions to the English teacher	1,90
24- Planned your lesson/study	2,81
25- Summarized your studies while studying	2,47
26- Taken notes of your teacher without telling that while studying	2,53
27- Used outside resources when revising	2,73
28- Worked cooperatively with your friends	2,90
29- Taken opportunities to speak in English inside the classroom	2,58
30- Discussed learning problems with classmates	2,57
31- Used extra hours with other English teachers in private language center to improve English	1,52

As for the in-class activities, the most moderate scores are primarily given to 'worked cooperatively with friends' (M= 2.90), 'asked the teacher questions when students do not understand' (M= 2.60). On the other hand, the lowest items are reflected in the following activities: 'visited your teacher in office hours to ask about your work' (M= 1.82), 'done group studies in English

lessons' ($M = 2.02$), and 'summarized your studies while studying' ($M = 2.47$). Although most learners are familiar with their responsibility to learn and study English, it seems that they are not strongly capable of practicing autonomous learning tasks inside and outside classroom context regardless of belonging to urban or rural areas.

4.2 Responsibility for Autonomous Learning

Another result aims at investigating the relationship between students of rural and urban areas in relation to their perceptions of autonomous learning responsibilities and actual practices. As illustrated in Table 4, the perceptions of responsibilities among students in urban and rural areas show few differences. Students in the city assign responsibility to teachers in 'choosing what activities to use to learn English in English lessons' by 41.5% and 62% by students in remote regions. Further, students in the city hold responsibility in 'making progress during English lessons' whereas students in the village perceive it as a shared responsibility with the teacher.

Table 4. Learners' Perceptions of Their Own and Their Teachers' Responsibilities based on the area of their schooling

Responsibilities	City			Village		
	Students	Teachers	Both	Students	Teachers	Both
1-To ensure you make progress during English lessons	49,1%	24,5%	26,4%	11,3%	28,2%	60,6%
2- To ensure you make progress outside class	92,5%	5,7%	1,9%	91,5%	7,0%	1,4%
3- To stimulate your interest in learning English	54,7%	26,4%	18,9%	50,7%	33,8%	15,5%
4- To identify your weaknesses in English	52,8%	30,2%	17,0%	54,9%	31,0%	14,1%
5- To choose what activities to use to learn English in your English lessons	30,2%	41,5%	28,3%	23,9%	62,0%	14,1%
6- To decide how long to spend on each activity	50,9%	39,6%	9,4%	46,5%	45,1%	8,5%
7- To choose what materials to use to learn English in your English lessons	37,7%	35,8%	26,4%	21,1%	56,3%	22,5%
8- To evaluate your learning of English	34,0%	49,1%	17,0%	31,0%	52,1%	16,9%
9- To decide the objectives of your English course	43,4%	32,1%	24,5%	42,3%	42,3%	15,5%
10- To decide what you should learn next in your English lessons	56,6%	32,1%	11,3%	52,1%	35,2%	12,7%

The former believes that 'choosing what materials to use to learn English' as a teacher's responsibility while students in urban settings perceive it as their own responsibility. Furthermore, most responses are strongly attached to students' responsibility in making progress outside class'. The remaining statements indicate student's responsibility except item 8 which is viewed as the teacher's responsibility. Thus, the results indicate small differences between the two groups in assigning responsibility for items 1, 5 and 7; however, they hold responsibility in the remaining items except item 8.

4.3 Autonomous Learning and School Settings

Table 5 portrays the level of the mean score between students of rural and urban areas in relation to autonomous learning practices. The results show slight differences in the mean score between the two groups. Students in remote areas received the highest mean score in 'watched English TV programs' (M= 3.03) while students in urban regions had the highest mean scores in 'asked the teacher questions when you didn't understand' (M= 2.94), and 'worked cooperatively with your friends' (M= 2.94). Both groups had the lowest score in 'used extra hours with other English teachers in private language center to improve English' (M= 1.49) and (M= 1.55). The following table 6 depicts the relationship between students' autonomous learning activities and their school settings as compared in the Table 5. The results revealed statistically insignificant differences ($\text{sig} = .556 \geq .05$) among students of remote areas (mean= 2.42, n= 71) and urban ones (mean= 2.50, n= 53). The setting of learning has no significant effect on students' autonomous learning activities, yet the mean score shows that students in urban regions fairly outperform students in remote areas (Table 6).

Table 5. Students' practices of Autonomous Learning Activities based on their schooling Settings

Autonomous Learning Activities	mean	
	City	Village
11- Done assignments in English which are not compulsory during holidays	2,32	2,55
12- Noted down new words and their meanings outside class	2,91	2,94
13- Read short stories, books or magazines in English	2,13	2,04
14- Visited your teacher in office hours to ask about your work	1,98	1,70
15- Watched English TV programs	2,74	3,03
16- Listened to English songs	3,00	2,87
17- Talked to foreigners in English	2,26	2,10
18- Used the Internet to study and improve English	2,81	2,99
19- Practiced using English with friends	2,60	2,38
20- Done grammar exercises outside class	2,40	2,35
21- Done group studies in English lessons	2,08	1,97
22- Asked the teacher questions when you didn't understand	2,94	2,35
23- Made suggestions to the English teacher	2,23	1,65
24- Planned your lesson/study	2,87	2,77
25- Summarized your studies while studying	2,21	2,66
26- Taken notes of your teacher without telling that while studying	2,43	2,61
27- Used outside resources when revising	2,75	2,72
28- Worked cooperatively with your friends	2,94	2,86
29- Taken opportunities to speak in English inside the classroom	2,79	2,42
30- Discussed learning problems with classmates	2,70	2,48
31- Used extra hours with other English teachers in private language center to improve English	1,49	1,55

Table 6. Learners' Practices of Autonomous English Learning Activities and School Settings

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig.
Practices of Autonomous Activities	City	53	2,5040	,81207	,11155	.556
	age	1	2,4286	,77818	,135	

4.4 Autonomous Learning and Major

The following table 7 demonstrates the mean score of autonomous learning activities based on students' major variable. In the Moroccan educational context, it is commonly believed that students of science major are more motivated and dedicated to learning in class compared to students of humanities and art major. The results indicate that students of science major scored higher than humanities major in all items except 17 and 31. The highest rate of score differences were marked in favor of science major students in the following statements: 'Listened to English songs' (M=3.24) (M=2.51); 'Planned your lesson/study' (M=3.06) (M=2.49); 'Used outside resources when revising' (M=2.94) (M=2.45); 'Worked cooperatively with your friends' (M=3.11) (M=2.60). Additionally, to determine the causation between the major variable and students' autonomous learning practices, a Sample T-test was employed in which a statistically significant difference was found ($\text{sig} = .039 \leq .05$) between the two variables. As the table 8 shows, the difference was in favor of science major students due the high mean score attained in the autonomous learning activities scale (M= 2.56, n= 71) compared to students of humanities major (M= 2.31, n= 53).

Table 7. Students' practices of Autonomous Learning Activities based on student's major

Autonomous Learning Activities	Mean	
	Humanities and Art	Sciences
11- Done assignments in English which are not compulsory during holidays	2,43	2,46
12- Noted down new words and their meanings outside class	2,81	3,01
13- Read short stories, books or magazines in English	1,89	2,23
14- Visited your teacher in office hours to ask about your work	1,72	1,90
15- Watched English TV programs	2,79	2,99
16- Listened to English songs	2,51	3,24
17- Talked to foreigners in English	2,26	2,10
18- Used the Internet to study and improve English	2,72	3,06
19- Practiced using English with friends	2,26	2,63
20- Done grammar exercises outside class	2,32	2,41
21- Done group studies in English lessons	2,00	2,03
22- Asked the teacher questions when you didn't understand	2,47	2,70
23- Made suggestions to the English teacher	1,74	2,01
24- Planned your lesson/study	2,49	3,06
25- Summarized your studies while studying	2,30	2,59
26- Taken notes of your teacher without telling that while studying	2,40	2,63
27- Used outside resources when revising	2,45	2,94
28- Worked cooperatively with your friends	2,60	3,11
29- Taken opportunities to speak in English inside the classroom	2,40	2,72
31- Used extra hours with other English teachers in private language center to improve English	1,66	1,42

Table 8. Practices of Autonomous English Learning and Major

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig.
Practices of Autonomous Activities	Humanities and Art	53	2,3172	,91425	,12558	.039
	Sciences	71	2,5681	,67061	,07959	

4.5 Autonomous Learning and Gender

The last variable considered in this study is gender; Table 9 points out to the mean score of students' autonomous learning practices based on their gender. According to some widely preconceived norms held in Moroccan educational milieu, female students show more discipline and commitment inside as well as outside classrooms by participating and doing assignments compared with male students who are more reluctant to perform better inside and outside classroom settings. The results demonstrate that female students score higher than male students do in all items except items 14 and 17. The highest mean score between the groups is primarily attributed to the following statements in favor of female students: ' Done assignments in English which are not compulsory during holidays' (M= 2.72) (M= 2.11); ' Noted down new words and their meanings outside class' (M= 3.17) (M= 2.62); ' Read short stories, books or magazines in English' (M= 2.36) (M= 1.73); ' Used the Internet to study and improve English' (M= 3.17) (M= 2.58), and ' Used outside resources when revising' (M= 3.01) (M=2.38).

Table 9. Students' practices of Autonomous Learning Activities based on Gender

	Mean	
	Male	Female
11- Done assignments in English which are not compulsory during holidays	2,11	2,72
12- Noted down new words and their meanings outside class	2,62	3,17
13- Read short stories, books or magazines in English	1,73	2,36
14- Visited your teacher in office hours to ask about your work	1,85	1,80
15- Watched English TV programs	2,87	2,93
16- Listened to English songs	2,65	3,14
17- Talked to foreigners in English	2,18	2,16
18- Used the Internet to study and improve English	2,58	3,17
19- Practiced using English with friends	2,27	2,64
20- Done grammar exercises outside class	2,16	2,54
21- Done group studies in English lessons	2,00	2,03
22- Asked the teacher questions when you didn't understand	2,56	2,64
23- Made suggestions to the English teacher	1,76	2,00
24- Planned your lesson/study	2,55	3,03
25- Summarized your studies while studying	2,04	2,81
26- Taken notes of your teacher without telling that while studying	2,04	2,93
27- Used outside resources when revising	2,38	3,01
28- Worked cooperatively with your friends	2,71	3,04
29- Taken opportunities to speak in English inside the classroom	2,35	2,77
30- Discussed learning problems with classmates	2,53	2,61
31- Used extra hours with other English teachers in private language center to improve English	1,42	1,61

Table 10. Practices of Autonomous English Learning and Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig.
Practices of Autonomous Activities	Male	55	2,2554	,74323	,10022	.863
	Female	69	2,6246	,79386	,09557	

Despite scoring higher on autonomous learning activities scale, the t-test result reveals statistically no significant differences ($\text{sig} = .863 \geq .05$) between males and females as shown in the table 10 above. The difference in the mean score is higher in favor of female students ($M = 2.62, n = 69$) compared to male students ($M = 2.25, n = 55$); however, this difference is randomly and not systematically achieved.

5. Discussion

This study reveals important points of discussion in light of students' responsibility during English lessons. The results show a tendency for students to hold responsibility of learning English, especially activities conducted outside class. Thanks to the fascinating development of technological tools, students can resort to a plenty of learning alternatives to enhance their academic performance. However, students assign responsibility to their teachers for some pedagogic tasks such as, choosing what activities to use to learn English; choosing what materials to use to learn English and evaluating students' learning of English. It is evident that students are acquainted with regular tasks that they should perform while taking English classes. In addition, they leave a space for their teachers to hold responsibility of other activities that concur with teacher roles inside the class.

The level of autonomous learning activities is not significantly high for all students. Despite holding responsibility in different stages of the learning process, students fail to demonstrate autonomous abilities while learning English inside and outside class. Such findings reflect the Moroccan educational system, which is based on traditional teaching methods. The teacher is the only source of knowledge provider and students are passive recipients of such knowledge. Even the learning environment does not spur curiosity within learners to be autonomous and rely more on the teacher when building up knowledge. Another deterring factor that may affect students' ability to learn by themselves is the pressure of exams with abundant curriculum and excessive school subjects. Students since childhood have been directed to attend school regularly as malleable automatons to revise lessons and prepare for exams. This process engenders several educational issues, such as cheating, lack of motivation to learn which is directly affecting student's autonomous learning. Previous studies have already mentioned external factors that hinder students' autonomy, such as adapting traditional teaching methods (Yasmin & Naseem, 2019; Alrabai, 2017; Nakata, 2011) and implementing rigid teacher-dominant modes to address students' behaviors in class (Earl et al. 2017; Du, 2011; Jin, 2019; Wu & Tarc, 2016). Thus, the context of learning has a great impact on student's ability to develop autonomous skills. The result also shows that students prefer doing activities outside the classroom, which stimulate their interest in learning English; activities like listening to English songs, using the internet to study and improve English and watching English TV programs are usually valued by students due to the cultural output that these entertainment means provide. On the other hand, activities related to studying, visiting the teacher in office hours or forming group studies to provide assistance among students are perceptibly absent.

The study also addresses autonomous learning differences among students of urban and remote regions. As it has been suggested previously that the teaching methods and the teacher's training background might affect autonomy among students, the geographical differences between schools could significantly influence not just autonomous learning but also the academic path of students. Schools situated in urban regions are always given the first priority in equipment supply and pedagogical appliances whereas schools in rural areas are neglected. These regional discrepancies are also perceptible in the infrastructure and leisure centers. Thus, students might not have similar opportunities to study within a positive atmosphere that encourages creativity and passion for learning.

The result of educational responsibility demonstrates slight differences between students of urban and rural regions. Both groups admitted their responsibility to learn English. However, Students in the village assign responsibility to teachers in 'choosing what activities to use to learn English, and 'choosing what materials to use to learn English' while they perceive 'making progress during English lessons' as a shared responsibility with the teacher. Students in urban regions claim responsibility for the above statements, except for 'choosing what activities to use to learn English' in which teachers are held responsible for performing such a task, but with less score compared to students in rural areas. The implication of this result suggests that students in rural regions still rely on their teachers in the majority of classroom instructional choices. Differences exist in the way teachers in both rural and urban settings deliver their lessons in terms of activities, materials, and equipment. Students in urban regions are actively involved in the school environment where they can improve their skills and talents. These

kind of activities are positively reflected on the students' profile within classrooms where their participation is significantly influential and determining to what activities and materials should be employed to match student's expectations whereas in rural areas, students are not dynamic and don't push their teachers to prepare materials and content that is appealing to their interests. For such reason, they show reluctance to take part in choosing activities that would stimulate their motivation and curiosity to learn. Some external factor could be influential in the process of extending their cultural knowledge about English such as social habitus and limited cultural contact with the outside world (Wu & Tarc, 2021). Thus, students in urban schools consider the value of learning as a highly significant factor to gain knowledge and develop life skills. On the other hand, students in rural settings perceive education as a regular habit to spend time and expect everything to be done by the teacher.

The study focuses on the regional differences between students and its impact on their autonomous learning strategies. The result provides no strong evidence on how students in rural or urban areas can show different abilities in learning autonomously. Despite geographical disparities, students demonstrate unsatisfactory autonomous learning scores. The context of public secondary schools in Morocco is strongly predicated on content-based approach in practical terms in spite of claiming competency-based approach theoretically speaking. The fact that the curriculum is massively charged with outdated contents and demotivating activities questions the reforms made in Moroccan education, which have already been reprimanded. In addition, the absence of technological literacy as a systematic cohort to be integrated within the teaching practices makes the learning conditions for autonomy out of reach for many students. Many studies endorse the importance of integrating technological tools in a foreign language learning classroom since the same complex network of technologies are utilized by students outside the classroom context to promote autonomy (Tsai, 2019; Lenkaitis, 2019; Lai, Yeung & Hu, 2016). However, excessive use of such technological gadgets may lead to internet addiction. A study conducted by Garmah and Bernouss (2019) shows that students' use of technological devices has been detracted from a purposeful instrument to do research into an amusing tool, leading mainly to internet addiction and a decrease in scholastic performance.

It is commonly believed that in Moroccan public schools, students belonging to science major are always performing better and behaving appropriately in class; unlike students with literature major who encounter learning difficulties due to their fluctuating level and misconduct. The findings in this study show strong causation between students' major and their level of autonomous learning. Students in the science major have shown more abilities to engage with activities outside the classroom context to learn and improve their English levels. The interpretation of such results reflects the influence of orientation on students' performance. On societal level, especially within the Moroccan educational circles, some pre-conceived ideas are inculcated within students' mind, suggesting that only science major have prosperous future in the job market. Put differently, literature and humanities majors are ostracized. With this in mind, students in those marginalized majors feel incompetent, insignificant and unequal to other students with science major. Even at the level of schools, practitioners have always appreciated working with classes of scientific major. All such factors contribute to demotivating other students from developing autonomous skills to learn inside and outside classrooms.

Another variable was also tested to show any significant differences between autonomous learning practices and gender. The context of Moroccan education recently gave more opportunities to female students for schooling after they had been neglected and excluded especially in remote regions. Female students have always shown more discipline and good behavior in classroom than male students. In this study, female students scored higher than male students in most activities done outside classroom context, such as 'done assignments in English which are not compulsory during holidays' or 'noted down new words and their meaning outside class'. It could be strongly argued that female students demonstrate curiosity and study discipline outside the classroom, which directly influences their abilities to learn on their own. However, the result of the t-test provides no strong relationship between gender and autonomous learning abilities. Thus, the fact that female students score higher than their counterparts is considered arbitrary with no supporting evidence. Yet, in another study, it was found that gender variable was influential in that females practiced more autonomous activities to learn English than males in tertiary educational context (Abdel Razeq, 2014).

6. Conclusion

This study contributed to understanding the impact of regional disparities between students' urban and rural areas and their levels of autonomous learning abilities. Although students of both regions perceived autonomous activities to learn English as their responsibility, the findings unearthed low levels of actual autonomous learning practices regardless of geographical discrepancies. Learning English autonomously within Moroccan high schools lacks conducive conditions and a strong will to improve systematically all the flaws that inhibit opportunities for autonomous learning. The educational system is having permanent inertia and a desultory strategy to addressing the core issues facing education. Thus, the panacea for such educational issues is making pivotal reforms, starting with the English curriculum, which should direct the right method for teaching students how to learn autonomously. This approach should include activities that encourage critical thinking and incite a flame within students to continue learning outside classroom contexts. Finally, this study did not include students' performance

in relation to regional differences. Future research is directed to investigate the impact of autonomous learning on students' performance.

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