

DOCTORAL (PHD) DISSERTATION

Thesis booklet

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AT HOME:  
A MIXED METHODS STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOME  
LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND SELF-REGULATED LANGUAGE  
LEARNING IN HUNGARY

<https://doi.org/10.15476/ELTE.2023.209>

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Budapest, 2023

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# 1 Introduction

Why do students behave the way they do? Why do some students put more effort into schoolwork than others? Why are some learners more effective and successful than others? Many researchers think self-regulation is one of the strongest determinants of learning success (Baumeister et al., 1998; Zimmerman, 2000). The objective of this research is to try to provide a new approach to elaborate on the complex problem of student behaviour, more precisely, self-regulated language learning behaviour.

Specifically, the study aims to find links between the benefits associated with learning in natural environments and self-regulated behaviour. This aim is important because, in today's teacher-oriented and teacher-directed traditional school setting in Hungary, students tend to depend on their teachers (Öveges & Csizér, 2018). The main practical problem is that students expect their teachers to motivate them and to tell them what and how to learn and to what extent, which leads to the fact that they do not know how to organise and regulate their learning; moreover, they do not even feel the urge and need to do so. Most students are satisfied with and accept this passive role in the learning process, put the bare minimum of work into language learning, and do nothing more than the necessary or assigned homework (Bujis & Admiraal, 2013; Curtis & Nourie, 1989).

The main objective of this research is to examine how the home learning environment 1) *shapes* self-regulation supportive practices and 2) is *shaped* by practices committed to supporting self-regulation. Moreover, in order to give a thorough understanding and a broad context for further research on self-regulation within the Hungarian educational system, it also aims to investigate how self-regulation and the role of the home environment are included in the Hungarian National Core Curriculum. The view of student learning taken here supposes that social-contextual factors, among others, influence what and how students learn. The current research emphasises that student learning does not happen in isolation but is exposed to various social and contextual factors that exercise an inhibiting or fostering effect on the whole learning process. Thus, we must examine all the relevant social and contextual influences to analyse student learning.

Panadero's (2017) theoretical paper concluded that even though self-regulation has become one of the most prominent topics in the field of education, it is necessary to apply the existing self-regulation theories in entirely new and specific contexts. Pintrich (2000) also highlighted that there is a clear need for more research on "how self-regulation develops in natural contexts" and "how different features of the context can shape, facilitate, and constrain

self-regulated learning” (p. 493). More precisely, they both suggested examining the role of various educational environments and how these specific contexts affect self-regulated learning. In response to this gap, context-specific research has been conducted.

As the above-outlined framework indicates, this exploratory study focuses on the development of self-regulation in the home environment and intends to gather data from language learners who learn in traditional classroom settings and from homeschooling families who primarily learn languages at home. The study seeks to find which self-regulatory processes appear in students in the home learning environment and whether homeschooled participants show strengths or weaknesses in certain self-regulation processes compared to their school counterparts who study at home only after school ends. Therefore, the current research is designed as a mixed-method exploratory study using qualitative data from interview study and document analysis and quantitative data from a questionnaire to ensure triangulation and allow the different facets of the studied phenomenon to emerge (Creswell, 2003).

The dissertation is divided into two parts. Part I provides an overview of the theoretical background to the study, while Part II details the three studies that were conducted. Part I presents the background, context, and theoretical framework of the study as well as the research niche it tries to fill. Part II of the dissertation involves the methods and results chapters. This dissertation consists of three independent but interrelated studies that deal with self-regulation through various lenses and perspectives and each of which is presented in a separate chapter. Each chapter provides a detailed account of the methodology used, the participant sample and recruitment process, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis techniques employed. In addition, each chapter presents the main results of the study and draws conclusions based on those findings. The reason behind this decision was threefold: 1) to simplify comprehension and, at the same time, minimise confusion between the study findings, 2) to enable readers to fully understand the research process, and 3) to highlight the contribution of each study component.

The current study contributes to the field of education in three significant ways. First, it adds to the body of literature on self-regulated language learning and especially helps fill in some gaps on the role of different contexts in developing self-regulated behaviour. Second, the study chose to examine self-regulated learning behaviour in an underresearched learning environment, the home context. By focusing on an entirely new learning environment, it tries to expand the existing knowledge and framework of self-regulation. In addition, the dissertation hopes to expand the methodological repertoire available for further self-regulation studies conducted in similar contexts.

As Oxford and Lee (2008, p. 315) emphasised, “language learning is a difficult journey across a demanding landscape by extremely complex beings who behave in complicated ways”, and there are still a lot of open issues and questions. This dissertation is an attempt to make this bumpy road easier. It can serve as a kind of map or GPS that tries to speed up and simplify the demanding path of language learning, as – pointed out throughout the dissertation – self-regulation seems the fastest way to success.

## **2 Review of the literature**

Almost 45 years ago, Dansereau (1978, p. 1) stated that to that point, “educational research and development efforts have been directed almost exclusively at the improvement of teaching”, while the learning aspect of education has been neglected. In 1975, during the sixth annual *Conference on Applied Linguistics*, the participants realised that there was a “shift from research that exclusively focused on language teaching to research that investigated language learning” (Larsen-Freeman, 2017, p. 427).

The history of research on self-regulation dates back to the late 1970s when Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975) attempted to identify what differentiates good language learners from others. Based on their own experiences, both authors pointed to the fact that there is an apparent difference between good learners and poorer ones. Both of them tried to figure out the main reasons behind this difference. In addition, they postulated that effective learning strategies could be imparted to poorer learners and might help these learners progress faster with learning. However, many researchers challenged the overly simplified and optimistic view that by identifying the learning strategies of good learners, these strategies can be used by poor learners to accelerate their learning progress. In the 1970s, several researchers emphasised that language learning success does not just depend on effective language learning strategies but is much more complex and that individual differences play a significant role in language learning outcomes. These researchers argued that learners are different and that not all learning strategies apply to all good language learners. Since then, researchers have tried to identify the key to language learning success, and the investigation of self-regulation falls into this field of inquiry.

In line with Kormos and Csizér’s (2014) definition, the term self-regulation is used in the current dissertation to refer to “self-regulatory control that involves the use of strategies which are largely conscious processes that students apply to control their learning” (p. 279). Hence, a self-regulated language learner in the following can be characterised as a learner who takes initiative in pursuing learning objectives and thereby actively manages the complete

language acquisition process from cognitive, motivational, and behavioural standpoints (Zeidner et al., 2000). As a result, the notion of self-regulated language learning is perceived as a composite framework consisting of fundamental components such as motivation, cognition, metacognition, and behaviour. The constitution and interplay of these elements, however, are influenced by external factors, including both environmental circumstances (such as school, home, and library settings) and social influences (like parents, peers, teachers, and friends). These external variables intricately shape how the building blocks of self-regulated language learning manifest and interact within an individual's learning journey.

The influence of context on language learning has been a longstanding research area, evidenced by the extensive availability of data pertaining to diverse learning environments. The classroom setting represents only one context where foreign language learning might take place that can be supplemented by out-of-classroom or out-of-school learning (Benson, 2011). Moreover, there is growing evidence that “informal experiences outside the classroom may offer just as meaningful learning opportunities as the structured learning environment established within schools” (Sandberg et al., 2011, p. 1334).

Thanks to advances in technology mainly, nowadays, people have many opportunities outside the classroom to learn languages and to interact with native speakers of the target language (Nunan, 2014). In Hungary, teachers give homework regularly to get students to work with the school material outside the classroom (Imre et al., 2021; Márton, 2019; Mihály, 2003, 2006). In addition to homework, students engage in various forms of independent language learning beyond the classroom. Sundqvist (2011, p. 107) uses the term “extramural English” to refer to “any type of contact that young people (learners) have with English outside the walls of the classroom.”

The home environment requires students to take increased responsibility for their development, making it a learning context that provides an excellent opportunity to extend and supplement our existing knowledge of self-regulated language learning. According to Chik (2012, p. 96), language learning “is no longer only taking place in fixed locales (e.g., schools and classrooms)”, but “new mobilities” have emerged. At home, students can practice and use the target language autonomously through activities they are passionate about. Therefore, the home environment – situated entirely out-of-school and in a learning context where children are free to plan, organise, and evaluate their learning – stands out as an important emerging realm for investigating language learner self-regulation.

### 3 Aims, research gap, research questions

The objective of this research was to provide a new approach to elaborate on the complex problem of human behaviour, more precisely, self-regulated learning behaviour. The main aim of this research project was to:

- Analyse the extent to which the Hungarian National Core Curriculum incorporates self-regulated (language) learning promotion and how it translates into self-regulation supportive practices in the home learning environment
- Examine how the home learning environment is *shaped* by practices committed to supporting self-regulation.
- Explore how the home learning environment itself *shapes* self-regulation supportive practices.

It is evident from the literature review presented above that 1) thanks to technological advancements, the classroom is no longer the only place where a language can be learnt, but there are many opportunities and resources for language learners outside the classroom setting (Benson, 2011), 2) language learning beyond the classroom not only offers opportunities to develop self-regulation but also requires increased self-regulatory awareness and greater responsibility on the part of the students due to the lack of structure and supervision (Sundqvist, 2011), 3) the home environment is as - if not more - important for language learning as the classroom environment (Sandberg et al., 2011), 4) self-regulation is context-specific, i.e., it is affected and influenced by different relationships, events, and experiences (Zimmermann, 2000), 5) self-regulated learning can only be examined in the light of learners' motivations (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and, foremost, 6) self-regulation is believed to play a crucial role in language learning success (Zimmermann, 2000).

According to Boekaerts (1997), learning in a natural context, due to its non-coercive nature, positively affects the application of different self-regulatory strategies and the manifestation of individual characteristics. Understanding how students use various self-regulated (language) learning strategies in personally managed contexts, such as the home environment, 1) may provide an insight into the development of student self-regulation, 2) may help teachers and other education actors to understand how to take advantage of an individual's contextual resources in the teaching process, 3) may uncover principles for designing better resources for language learners, 4) may give teachers ideas on how the home environment can be used to enhance language learning, 5) may provide guidance to teachers about how to use

the home environment effectively in their language teaching process, and 6) may help teachers promote language learning outside the classroom environment.

In alignment with the aforementioned objectives, the following research questions have been formulated:

**RQ1: What does the Hungarian National Core Curriculum say about self-regulated learning?**

**RQ2: What characterises Hungarian primary and secondary school students' self-regulatory strategy use while learning the English language at home?**

RQ2.1: How do language learning experiences at home and self-regulation processes relate to each other in Hungarian school students?

RQ2.2: What components of the self-regulated learning process can be identified in school children's language learning at home while completing their homework assignments?

**RQ3: What are the views of homeschooling parents in Hungary on developing their children's self-regulatory skills while learning languages at home?**

RQ3.1: How can the homeschooling experience be used by homeschooling parents to enhance their children's self-regulation?

RQ3.2: How do Hungarian homeschooling parents integrate the development of self-regulated learning strategies into language teaching?

**RQ4: What characterises Hungarian homeschoolers' self-regulatory strategy use in English language learning?**

RQ4.1: What components of the self-regulated learning process can be identified in Hungarian homeschooled children's language learning?

RQ4.2: How does the home environment influence Hungarian homeschooling children's self-regulated English language learning?

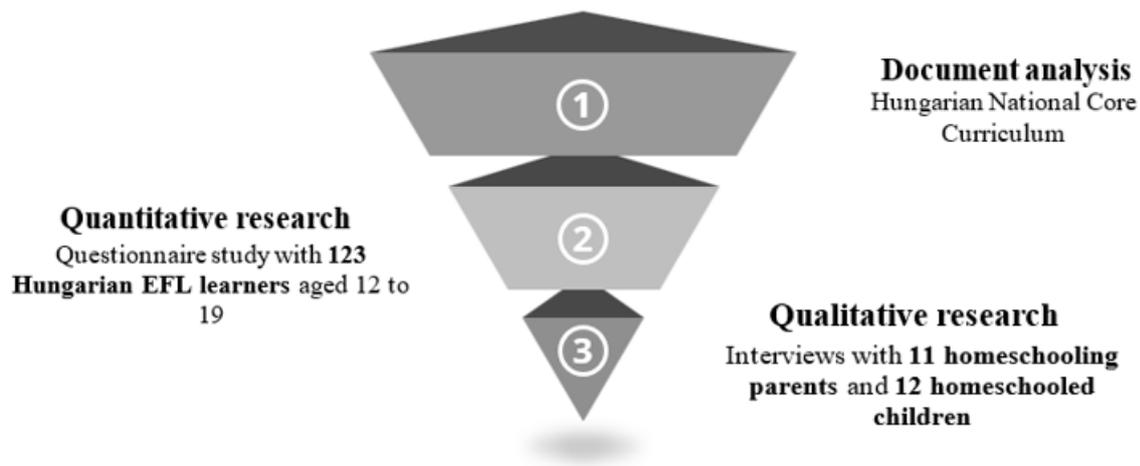
#### **4 Overall research design**

To fully understand the language learning experiences of homeschooled learners and students who are enrolled in traditional schools and learn at home only after their lessons, a variety of data sources were employed to identify both the commonalities and distinctions in these experiences. As this study aimed to understand and gain first-hand experiences directly from study participants, eliciting information happened through interviews and questionnaire studies, not through outsider observations.

My research project involves three independent but interrelated studies dealing with self-regulation through various lenses and perspectives (see Figure 1 for the visual representation of the conducted studies). Therefore, the current research was designed as a mixed-method exploratory study using qualitative data from interview study (conducted with homeschooling parents and their homeschooled children who learn languages at home), document analysis (the previous and most recent Hungarian National Core Curricula), and quantitative data from a questionnaire survey study (conventional school English language learners aged 12-19 years old) to ensure triangulation of data and allow the different facets of the studied phenomenon to emerge (Creswell, 2003). Thus, in addition to data triangulation, this research project also used methodological triangulation, i.e., multiple methods within a research project (Denzin, 1978).

**Figure 1**

*Visual Representation of the Overall Research Design*



The subsequent chapters present the studies using top-down processing, visualised as an inverted pyramid, moving from a general to a specific topic. At first, the results of the Hungarian National Curriculum analysis from a self-regulated learning perspective are detailed, followed by the results of the questionnaire study with traditional school students ( $N = 123$ ). Finally, the results of the interview study with homeschooling parents ( $N = 11$ ) and their children ( $N = 12$ ) are presented.

## **5 The results of the individual research studies**

### **5.1 National Core Curriculum analysis results**

Specifically, the following research question was addressed in Study 1: What does the Hungarian National Core Curriculum say about self-regulated learning? This study investigated the place of self-regulation in Hungarian educational sources using content analysis and tried to offer a better understanding of the approaches to self-regulation in the Hungarian context. As argued, the successful development of self-regulation also depends on curricular factors.

The analysis has shown that numerous references to self-regulation and its associated components are present throughout the examined documents. From a self-regulatory perspective, *effective independent learning*, *foreign language competence*, and *digital competence* turned out to be the most relevant key competence and *learning to learn* was identified as the most relevant educational goal. As underpinned in the results and discussion chapter, the description of these competences and goals contains multiple references to various self-regulation components: so cognitive, affective, motivational, behavioural and contextual self-regulation processes could be identified (Pintrich, 2000).

After reviewing the NCC documents, it can be seen that both teachers and parents are seen as playing an essential role in developing self-regulation. Teachers should guide pupils in planning their work, setting goals, and evaluating the chosen working method and strategy. They should help students to recognise those ways of learning – those strategies and techniques – which suit them the best and guide them to use these consciously. In addition, they should direct students through the learning process by encouraging them and giving them constant assessment. Therefore, the primary role of teachers is to guide students, develop their self-regulatory skills, and prepare them for lifelong learning and future careers.

In line with this finding, an increased parental role and involvement could be identified and is required. The importance of open school was emphasised in the 2007 version for the first time; it pinpointed that effective pedagogy can only be achieved with the active involvement of parents. The 2020 version emphasises: 1) the objective information of parents, 2) the preparation of textual assessments for parents on subject progress; in addition, it covers the relationship between students, teachers and parents based on mutual respect and open dialogue and highlights the continuous involvement of parents in the learning process at school.

To sum up, the analysis revealed that the newest NCC documents are explicitly modern in terms of self-regulated learning development. The NCC 2020 document's contents, goals, requirements, and recommendations can enhance students' self-regulation. The NCC

documents suggest that self-regulation can be developed through teaching in a self-regulatory way (teachers modelling self-regulated behaviour), teaching for self-regulation (planning and developing lessons which foster self-regulation), and creating an environment which helps self-regulation development (creating an atmosphere where students are open to help-seeking, believe in their learning skills, and involve modern IT resources). The document emphasises the importance of learning outside the classroom as it provides sufficient space for 1) practising school material, 2) improving study skills, and 3) creating study habits. In addition, learning outside the classroom allows autonomous work as students can use the school material independently in situations of their choice. The document acknowledges that by teaching students how to self-regulate their learning, they will be equipped with the tools they need to succeed within and beyond the classroom setting.

## 5.2 Questionnaire study results

This study sought to explore and understand students' self-regulated language learning behaviour in the home learning environment, particularly while completing homework assignments. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the participants' perceptions of the home environment's role in language development and how self-regulation strategies are utilised during homework completion.

Participants aged 16 and above were found to perceive homework assigned by their teachers as less valuable for language learning purposes ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = .49$ ) and indicated fewer negative consequences of not doing homework ( $M = 2.48$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) than younger participants. Older students, however, perceived the usefulness of the home environment significantly higher ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = .57$ ) than younger respondents ( $M = 4.1$ ,  $SD = .67$ ), suggesting that older students are aware that language learning success depends highly on what they do at home beyond the school walls; however, they perceive homework (usually performed at home) as not entirely influential for their language learning development. These findings are consistent with those of Albert et al. (2018), who found that students in upper secondary schools were more likely to seek opportunities to practice a foreign language outside the classroom than their primary school counterparts.

The results of the analysis showed that even though younger participants attached higher value to their homework ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 0.4$ ), they reported significantly lower levels of self-belief ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = .31$ ) in homework completion than their older counterparts ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ). This might be caused by the fact that older participants feel competent enough to perform the tasks because of their experience. Trautwein et al. (2006, p. 1102) also inferred that

for older students, homework completion “may less be a question of whether they are able to do the homework than of whether there is any point in doing it.” As students get older, they form an opinion about various elements of the educational process. Drakulić (2022, p. 283) also pointed out that younger students initiate foreign language learning “with very positive attitudes and motivation which are later shaped by the language learning environment and the experience.” The results indicate that although older students are more intrinsically motivated than younger students, homework completion is not among those activities which they rate highly in terms of importance and value.

The findings regarding the relationship between self-regulatory strategies and age or learning experience among the participants were surprising and contradicted the initial expectations. Older students and those with more extended learning experience did not demonstrate significantly higher usage of self-regulatory strategies compared to younger participants and those with shorter learning experiences. This suggests that the assumption that older students would be more proficient in self-regulation due to their accumulated learning experience might not hold true in the specific context of language learning and completing homework assignments at home. In fact, the research revealed that younger participants and those with less experience scored higher on each self-regulatory scale, and many of these differences were statistically significant.

The study results indicate that although homework is generally perceived as a beneficial activity for improving English language skills – especially by younger participants – there is a strikingly low usage and frequency of self-regulatory strategies during homework completion. This is evident from the mean scores of the self-regulation strategy scales, which all fall below the midpoint value. In fact, the mean scores for all strategies are close to each other, suggesting that students do not frequently utilise self-regulated strategies while working on their homework. Surprisingly, despite valuing the importance of homework, most respondents seem to adopt a passive approach to homework completion, with many making minimal use or virtually no use of the listed self-regulation strategies. The actual engagement in self-regulatory behaviour appears to be limited, with only occasional or sporadic utilisation of specific strategies. In other words, the findings suggest that a significant proportion of respondents adhere to a “get-over-with-it” principle when completing their homework, lacking a systematic or conscious approach to self-regulated learning.

The findings of this research are concerning, as they suggest that self-regulation in the context of homework completion is often driven by fear of negative consequences. It appears that students’ task-related self-regulation is influenced by a “you have to do it” attitude,

indicating a lack of thoughtful and well-constructed self-regulation. The findings of this study have shown that the more students perceive homework control, the more task-related self-regulatory strategies they reported using. This kind of control positively and negatively affects students' homework activities. On one hand, students may interpret homework control as something useful and beneficial, as it can enhance and stimulate their learning. However, even in this case, the self-regulation employed by the students does not appear to be fully intentional and purposeful. Instead, it seems to be driven by external pressures and expectations. On the other hand, this control and pressure, projected from school to the home environment, may undermine students' intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and sense of competence – all of which are fundamental human needs according to Deci and Ryan (2000).

The primary and most significant finding of this study is the crucial role of teachers in influencing learning motivation, self-regulation and the perceived usefulness of the home environment. The role of the teacher determines self-regulated homework completion in various aspects: Firstly, respondents' assessment of how well the teacher selects (homework quality scale) and integrates homework into the learning process (homework value scale). The second aspect is related to task completion, where self-regulatory strategies are used solely to avoid feelings such as guilt, shame, and fear of failure and to protect one's ego (introjected motivation scale). Thirdly, self-regulation strategies were closely associated with teachers' perceived motivational responsibilities (teacher motivation responsibilities scale). Another intriguing result was that non-completion of homework (homework control scale) positively correlated with self-regulation. The results indicate that teachers have a direct impact by providing motivation and effective lessons, as well as an indirect influence through appropriate homework assignments. These factors contribute to students' engagement in self-regulated learning behaviours both in and outside the classroom.

### **5.3 Interview study results**

Most of the studies conducted up to date have focused on self-regulation from a static perspective and examined it only in relation to various learning processes, like homework completion (Cadime et al., 2018) and classroom learning (Mezei, 2012), therefore focusing on a single scene during the learning process without considering its dynamic nature. One of the special features of the present study is that it focused on homeschooling students' self-regulation holistically, and it tried to capture the long-term language learning experiences of homeschooling students.

One of the most important findings of the parent interviews (RQ3) is that a conducive environment alone does not guarantee fast and effective language learning. The availability of different resources is not enough to ensure adequate language learning, but targeted efforts need to be made to enhance the children's intrinsic motivation to learn languages. Addressing motivating factors for language learning, making the learning completely student-driven and personalised, and pointing out the importance and usefulness of foreign languages are strategies homeschooled parents highlighted using to make the learning process more meaningful. Therefore, the parents acknowledge that homeschooling alone cannot guarantee language learning success.

Homeschooling includes a high level of language learning resources and incorporates activities which help the development of self-regulation processes. In addition, it is designed to be student-led but still rich in learning support. Homeschooling offers personalised support for student learning. There are no pre-defined topics and processes in homeschooling, no restrictions on the resources they want to use, and no limit on where to learn, when and how. Homeschoolers explore topics and issues that stimulate their interest. As a result, children are actively engaged in the learning process and have a strong desire to gain more knowledge. This latter issue, active participation, is key in homeschooled learners' self-regulated behaviour. Numerous sources in the literature emphasise that our behaviour can be influenced by how we perceive our role and impact within a specific context (Bandura, 1997, 2006). Homeschooled participants are fully aware of their active role, and the homeschooling experience (re)shapes their learning process.

Hence, the results showed that homeschooling enables, supports, moreover demands students to take responsibility for their learning. Since they are free to plan their days, decide what to study, how to study and to what extent, and do not have to worry about school exams and grades constantly, and so monitoring their development and reflecting on it is even more important. Therefore, homeschooling necessitates advanced self-regulatory abilities and requires evaluating the effectiveness of the different components of self-regulation present before, after, and during the learning process.

From a self-regulatory perspective, an important finding is that homeschooling encourages learner autonomy from the very beginning. This discovery aligns with the outcomes presented in studies conducted by Riley (2015) and Jackson (2016), wherein it was identified that homeschooling students encounter a higher degree of autonomy while learning at home when compared to their school-attending peers. Because children have to make their own

decisions concerning their learning process, homeschooling helps them realise their responsibility for their learning and development, increasing their motivation.

One of the most prominent themes in the interviews with homeschooled students (RQ4) was that students do not consider their language development a real learning experience. Zsuzsi stated that English language learning was an “exception” for her. She characterised her experience the following way: “So it was not a sitting down with a book type of learning. It just became part of my life. I read books, listened to videos, watched movies, and played lots of online games.” She thinks that these activities gave her enough motivation to be better. However, as further analysis of the data showed, homeschooling students are fully aware of the educational potential of these activities and so consciously engage in them.

The data allowed us to create learner profiles containing the overall picture of the language-learning trajectory of each participant. This issue was taken into account when interpreting the findings. Each interviewed student has a unique list of learning experiences. Therefore, their learning trajectories vary considerably. They all agree that language learning is a complex, long-term experience made up of ups and downs and lots of challenges. The participants reported changing their learning styles, goals, methods, tools, and resources, as well as their interests, characteristic features, motivation, autonomy, and responsibility level for learning kept changing.

The data further revealed that students predominantly employed conscious self-regulation strategies in response to challenges (i.e., upcoming exams), failures (i.e., failing to express themselves), and experiences of shame (i.e., being made fun of). Hence, it became evident that self-regulation is prompted by necessity. These instances motivated them to prove themselves and others wrong, leading them to pay closer attention to their learning process. Additionally, self-regulated preconditions, such as long and short-term goals, were found to be commonly present in students, activating self-regulation when necessary or when positive events occurred, driving their desire for improvement.

The results also uncovered that not only individual differences but also individual experiences play a crucial role in shaping self-regulation. The results showed that past events and experiences affect students’ self-regulatory behaviour. Almost all interviewees shared a positive and negative story that changed or shaped their learning process, meaning they became aware of the importance of self-regulation because of a particular situation or event. Because of these events, they started consciously controlling how they learn, making language learning more efficient and effective. Therefore, the data revealed that students refine their learning process as they learn from the mistakes that led them to some demotivating experiences.

Moreover, experiencing hard times, upcoming exams, and assignments all activate self-regulatory behaviour, so the method of the learning process is modified for success. Thus, the findings support the theory that self-regulation is a learned, dynamic behaviour (Zimmerman & Moylan, 2009).

The data showed that both social-contextual factors and individual factors matter in self-regulated behaviour. As emphasised by Hoyle and Moshontz (2018, p. 25) “the process and individual-difference perspectives must be integrated with a yet-to-be-articulated perspective on the role of environment, including other people, to provide a full account of effective self-regulation.” Among the contextual variables, the influence of people in the child’s immediate environment stands out, i.e., parents, siblings, friends, and rarely teachers. These people seem to have a major influence on the homeschooled learners’ motivation towards language learning, including self-regulated behaviour, and play a role in generating stimulating environments. People around homeschooled children play an essential role in all respects, including encouraging self-regulatory strategies, modelling self-regulatory behaviour, strengthening motivation, developing self-esteem, challenging them to invest effort and energy in learning, and instilling the love of learning in general. Therefore, the findings suggest that the social environment around the learners shapes their views and perceptions of the learning process. The current research results confirm and complement the findings of previous qualitative and quantitative studies. According to Pintrich (2000), most self-regulated learning research is based “on the social cognitive assumption that how students construct their own cognition, motivation, behaviour and perceptions of the environment is central to understanding their academic performance and achievement” (p. 493). The results support his view because, as it turned out, participants actively shape their learning environment and are shaped by it too.

## **6. Conclusion**

### **6.1 Summary of the most important findings**

Out-of-school learning contexts received increased attention and appreciation recently “not only in terms of the time learners spend learning, practicing and of course using the language in non-formal learning environments, but also in the ways in which educators can prepare learners for, as well as guide them in such learning” (Reinders & White, 2011, p. 1). In Hungary, the home environment is integral to the learning process as it serves as a fundamental setting where students engage in various academic activities. It is within the confines of their

homes that students diligently tackle their assigned homework, allowing them to reinforce their understanding of concepts learned in school and develop independent study habits.

The present dissertation aimed to examine self-regulation in an environment that has never been dealt with before and tried to analyse the role and influence of the home learning environment on students' self-regulated language learning behaviour and vice versa. Thus, the dissertation aimed to uncover the possible links between the home environment, self-regulation, and language learning and examined whether there are any perceived differences between self-regulatory strategies used in the chosen educational contexts: the home environment among homeschooled and traditional school students. The whole study was led by the idea that social and contextual circumstances contribute to language learners' self-regulated language learning behaviour.

Three separate studies were conducted — the first examined the Hungarian National Curricula Documents, the second targeted Hungarian language learning who learn the English language at home (this study drew 123 responses), the third study involved homeschooling families (11 homeschooling parents and 12 homeschooled students). The results showed that although the National Curriculum is very progressive and forward-looking regarding self-regulation development (Study 1), students do not consciously use self-regulatory strategies while working on their homework assignments at home. However, the results showed that students value the home environment as a useful context for their language learning development (Study 2). The interviews with homeschooled students and their parents suggest that the home environment can promote or hinder self-regulation, just as learners can shape their learning environment (Study 3), to achieve their goals.

Two schools of thought exist on self-regulation: one argues that self-regulation is a fixed, inborn capacity of the individual that changes little over time, while the other suggests that people develop self-regulation over time with practice. The results support the latter view, so the dynamic nature of self-regulation. While people are born with many fixed traits, self-regulation is not one of these. The literature agrees that there is a certain amount of self-regulation even in babies (for an overview, see Rosanbalm & Murray, 2017), but this “brought material” can be modified and amplified by environmental factors, such as what they learn from their parents about self-regulation.

From the results, it is clear that the student's method of operation - the actual learning process - needs to be examined with caution. The method of operation can stay the same because it works, but it also continually evolves, grows, and changes over time. The interviewees themselves highlighted that the way they learn has evolved and changed a lot in their language

learning, while the questionnaire study results also indicated that students apply various self-regulatory strategies based on the motifs, beliefs and values they attach to specific tasks. As students do homework assignments without teacher supervision and guidance, they regulate homework completion and choose their own task-related strategies (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011).

The present research is unique because it explored the role of the home environment in self-regulated learning from two perspectives. The second study focused on self-regulated learning while students complete their homework assignments, a compulsory activity. The third study concentrated on the self-regulation of homeschooled children who freely plan and direct the whole learning process. The results showed that, while doing homework, momentary, task-related self-regulation during learning was dominant among younger students. From these results, it is clear that: 1) an individual's momentary self-regulation is affected by the characteristics of the experience (Blume et al., 2021), and 2) various "in-person" characteristics and contextual features activate self-regulation. The data showed that the most likely type of students to use task-related self-regulatory strategies at home while completing their homework are students between 12-15, who fear the negative consequences of not doing their homework, are highly motivated to avoid shame and guilt (introjected motivated) and value homework as a task that would improve their learning. Therefore, a reactive type of self-regulation could be identified when completing homework, which happens spontaneously and usually ends quickly.

When taking into account the homeschooling experience, self-regulation is more instrumental in nature, goal-oriented, premeditated, and longer-lasting, making immediate success is not always their goal. In the interview study, motives for self-regulating learning include but are not limited to achieving personally important goals, searching for an answer to a question and reacting to negative and positive learning experiences, and completing a personally important task.

The results suggest that self-regulated learning can take many forms and demonstrate that students often engage in self-regulated learning in response to individual and circumstantial needs. A shared finding is that both – homeschooled and school students – reported higher usage of self-regulation tasks when faced with difficulties because of a sudden situation or due to a specific event or occasion, e.g., homework assignments, fear of upcoming exams, as an answer to some positive and negative experience. Therefore, the data pinpointed that most of the self-regulatory strategies in participants activate if the opportunity or necessity occurs in their routine of daily life.

The studies showed that self-regulation extends beyond the actual process of studying, therefore, supports Pintrich's (2000) cyclical model of self-regulated learning. When studying self-regulation, a holistic view of a particular individual has to be considered, representing the individual's totality of learning-related behaviour. These results reflect those of Jarvis (2006, p. 206), who also found that "it is the person, the whole person, who learns all the time." The data suggest that students are likely to learn in a particular or similar pattern. Basically, all participants have a unique way of learning that encompasses the habits, techniques, and peculiarities of their behaviour. A student's learning process involves prior preparation, careful planning, monitoring, and evaluating progress on several levels: emotional, cognitive, and behavioural. The preparation contains all the processes that prepare students for active learning, such as environmental structuring, reducing distractions, and setting learning outcomes. The chosen methods and strategies while learning are all unique to the individuals. Moreover, doing a follow-up and follow-through are essential parts of the self-regulation process, which occur during or after learning. Self-regulation involves the student's pre-learning behaviour (preparing and leading up to the learning process), the actual learning (strategies, manners, procedure and methods of learning certain subjects), and post-learning behaviour (reflection, evaluation of the whole process). It is in these prior and post-learning arrangements and responses, quite as much as in the technique of the actual learning process, that self-regulation is found.

What are the main findings of the dissertation? One cannot separate contextual and personal factors when trying to understand self-regulation. Self-regulation does not depend on contextual *or* personal factors; contextual *and* personal factors need careful examination. In self-regulatory research, one cannot understand the contextual influence without considering the personal factors. Similarly, one cannot focus only on intrapersonal influences without analysing relevant social features, as the boundaries of personal and contextual features are blurry. Csapó (2005, p. 30) is completely right in stating that students "will need knowledge in adulthood that does not exist today. They will use tools that have not yet been invented. They will express themselves in terms that are unknown today." Therefore, it is vital to prepare students for lifelong learning, focusing on their role in language learning, which is essential to adapt to the changing needs of the labour market (Jarvis, 2006).

## **6.2 Limitations**

A key strength of the present research is also its weakness. While the questionnaire study focused on self-regulation during the completion of a specific activity (homework), the

interview research addressed the topic in a broader sense. I considered it essential to focus on a specific activity because homework is one of the primary forms of learning in the Hungarian context, about which all the interviewees can give meaningful statements and comparative experiences. When anyone hears the word learning, homework assignments immediately come to mind. At the start of the research, I assumed that I could collect similar data from homeschooled students, for whom learning is a homework assignment, as they prepare for exams independently at home. Thus, comparing questionnaire and interview data was challenging because self-regulation had a definite beginning and an end for homework completion in the questionnaire study; such an activity could not be identified among homeschooled students. In their case, self-regulation is not focused on one activity but on the whole language learning experience. This might be interpreted as a possible weakness. The fact that these two experiences were compared shed light on some new findings that could be overlooked and pinpointed that self-regulation research is a complex process. The interview study dealt with higher-order self-regulation, while only specific task-related self-regulation was used in the questionnaire study. However, as both of these experiences happen at home, it is possible to examine the home environments' influence, which was among the principal foci of the present research.

In addition, all three studies have their own specific limitations. First, document analysis has inherent weaknesses. As Carley (1993, p. 83) emphasised, “determining what information is irrelevant is in itself a choice that must be made by the researcher.” The main limitation is the complex nature of self-regulated learning, which means that the analysis might have missed some important points. The diversity of conceptual understanding can cause “confusion when trying to understand research results [...] as well as contribute to inconsistencies in the results” (Collett, 2014, p. 432). In order to eliminate this limitation, 1) the study sought to gain a deep understanding of the topic, and 2) another independent researcher was involved in the data analysis.

One of the main limitations of the questionnaire study is that it focused mainly on homework completion, so the findings are limited in scope and depth. Also, the sample may not be reflective of the many students who similarly face homework completion and, for a myriad of reasons, approach these differently. Teachers assign various homework for their students, and it is possible that 1) some teachers pay more attention to homework selection, 2) certain schools place more importance on homework completion, and 3) some students are more inclined to do their homework assignments. For these reasons and due to the relatively small sample size, the findings cannot be generalised beyond the participants.

Lastly, the interview study has several limitations as well. First, it has limitations connected to methods selection and study design. The findings are solely based on the personal narratives of the participants. The participating families were asked to share their homeschooling experience, but no additional observations were made to increase the trustworthiness of the findings. Thus, the study is limited by its retrospective nature; therefore, the participants' ability to verbalise and recall their homeschooling experience correctly. The participants may have consciously or unconsciously presented themselves in the best possible light, so the findings might not accurately reflect reality. Future research should be complemented by other methods, especially observation, which might give credibility to the results and validate the interview findings.

### **6.3 Pedagogical implications**

The study examined self-regulated learning behaviour in an underresearched learning environment, the home context. Therefore, the findings of this study have important practical implications for teachers and parents wishing to implement self-regulated learning. It should be mentioned that I do not believe that the home environment is the best setting for self-regulation practice, nor is it the only setting for learners to practice their self-regulation abilities. It only implies that the home environment is an inseparable part of students learning, affecting each aspect of the learning process. When teachers try to find a reason for learning behaviour, evaluate children's academic ability, performance and behaviour, and find an answer to sudden behaviour change, many answers can be found at home. Even the newest NCC document (2020) highlights that teachers should use the home environment in their teaching practice to show students that learning is not confined to the classroom and should work with the parents to improve children's academic achievement.

The national core curriculum analysis study contributes to the pedagogical implications by providing insights into self-regulated learning within the educational system. The findings can inform curriculum developers, policymakers, schools, and teachers in designing and revising curriculum frameworks that foster self-regulated learning skills. For example, incorporating explicit and direct instruction on self-regulation, creating supportive learning environments, and integrating self-assessment and reflection activities.

The research showed that providing students with opportunities to learn outside the school setting helps the development of self-regulation skills. A carefully given and chosen homework might facilitate these skills in students. The data showed that younger students value homework more than their older peers. However, they engage in self-regulated learning mainly

because they fear the negative consequences of not doing these tasks. In contrast, older students do not value homework as a task that would help their learning development. Therefore, a more carefully planned homework selection is needed for older learners, as they already believe in themselves and value the home environment but not their homework.

An important finding that teachers should implement is that older students are aware of the fact that their language learning depends on what they do outside the school setting, so they should reinforce this line of motivation by giving them tasks which would enhance the conscious (self-) regulation of their learning. Educators can tailor assignments that promote self-regulation by understanding how Hungarian English language learners engage in self-regulated learning while completing homework. This may involve providing clear instructions, offering choices, scaffolding self-regulation skills, and fostering (meta)cognitive awareness in homework-related tasks. In addition, the results pinpointed the importance of individualised instruction, i.e., recognising the diverse needs, preferences, and learning styles of students. Teachers can implement strategies such as differentiation, personalised goal-setting, and student-driven learning tasks to promote self-regulated learning in their students.

The interview study with Hungarian homeschooling families shed light on the experiences of homeschooling families and their approaches to supporting self-regulated learning. Educators can learn from these experiences and adapt strategies for supporting self-regulation in other educational settings. This can include promoting parental involvement, creating opportunities for self-directed learning, and fostering a positive and nurturing learning environment at home. From a self-regulation perspective, students could benefit from a learning environment similar to the home environment. Therefore, teachers should try to create an atmosphere that allows students to 1) incorporate their personal spin in the learning process, 2) involve students in lesson planning and lesson preparation, 3) ask for help, 4) believe in their skill, 5) work independently as well as in groups, and 6) evaluate their own and the work of others. Of course, not each student will benefit from and recognise the benefits of such an atmosphere, but it might signal that the teacher is open to such involvement; in fact, active student participation is more than desired.

#### **6.4 Future research directions**

The study findings have generated several questions that could be addressed in future studies. The need for more 1) longitudinal investigation of self-regulation and 2) task-specific and task-related self-regulation has clearly emerged.

A longitudinal study would shed further light on the development and stability of self-regulation over time, as well as a deeper understanding of how various environments impact and influence the self-regulation of language learners. Future studies are needed to further explore the overall learning experience at home, including actual learning as well as other formal or less formal tasks that learners consciously or intentionally choose to improve their language proficiency (i.e., playing video games, watching movies, talking to native speakers). Therefore, there is a clear need for more qualitative and quantitative research to explore the relationship between various language learning experiences and self-regulation development.

Another potentially interesting issue would be exploring how coursebooks - still considered to be the primary sources of language teaching and learning in Hungary (Albert et al., 2018) - incorporate the development of self-regulation. In an English language classroom, students are told what to do directly by their teacher and indirectly by their course book, especially at home (Dam, 2012). A document analysis on those course books which are used most frequently in Hungarian English classes at the lower and upper secondary school level would shed light on whether there are tasks that specifically and directly try to enhance self-regulation in students, examine whether there are any tips, ideas highlighted as how to be more effective when learning languages. To sum up, a coursebook analysis could investigate the manifestation of self-regulation in the learning aids students use in class and at home.

Future research could include observations of actual student behaviour at home – both traditional school students and homeschooled students - to complement the interview study and questionnaire study findings, i.e., students really do what they say they do and so to examine the accuracy of the picture presented in them (Friedman, 2012). As Whitebread et al. (2009) highlighted, the main efficiency of observation lies in the fact that observation data comes from the actual learning environment and captures the relevant conditions rather than the participants recalling all the events. According to Boekaerts and Corno (2005), observation is one of the most reliable methods to measure self-regulation as it helps the researcher to become familiar with the social context of the classroom and record all the social processes (such as teachers' and peers' facilitation) involved in the development of self-regulatory behaviour. The focus of future observational studies could be: 1) on how self-regulation appears in the classes (if at all), 2) how students regulate their learning at home, and 3) how self-regulation changes when students face and deal with various tasks and engage in activities.

Last but not least, a further research direction could be the analysis of the framework curricula, as the “principles, objectives, development tasks and literacy content of foreign language education formulated in the NCC are embodied in the framework curricula, which are

documents that are elaborated in several versions according to the specificities of the training phase” (NCC 2012: 13). The results suggest that self-regulation is addressed through the documents, so the problem is not in the content but in the practice of language teaching. It would, therefore, be important to look at the issue from a practical approach, i.e., how teachers apply what is said in the NCC and to what extent and how they incorporate it into their language lessons so that theory and practice can be compared. Therefore, an observation study could be useful to examine how the guidelines and goals of the NCC documents, which are highly focused on self-regulation, are implemented and promoted in and out of the classroom setting. Knowing more about what determines the promotion of self-regulated learning would help determine which teacher characteristics should be addressed when training teachers. Such understanding would also offer explicit and implicit instructional intervention and support opportunities. Overall, much remains to be done in developing our understanding of self-regulation development and, in turn, developing effective pedagogical interventions.

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