

## LEARNER AUTONOMY IN THE TURKISH EFL CONTEXT: A META-SYNTHESIS STUDY OF 2009-2019 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH\*

### TÜRKİYE’DE YABANCI DİL ÖĞRENİMİNDE ÖĞRENEN ÖZERKLİĞİ: 2009-2019 NİTEL ARAŞTIRMALARIN BİR META-SENTEZ ÇALIŞMASI

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**Özet:** Türkiye bağlamında yabancı dil öğreniminde öğrenen özerkliği gelişiminin önemini vurgulayan bir dizi nitel çalışma bulunmaktadır, ancak İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrencilerin deneyimleri şimdiye kadar yürütülen çalışmalardan bütünsel bir resim elde etmek için hiç derlenmemiştir. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışma Türkiye’de yabancı dil öğrenme alanında öğrenen özerkliği konusunu ele alan 13 nitel araştırma bulgusunu sentezlemeyi ve alan yazınında araştırma boşluğunu belirleme ve gelecek araştırmalar için önerilerde bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır. ERIC, Taylor & Francis, DergiPark, Google Scholar ve SCOPUS arama motoru ve veritabanları aracılığıyla belirlenmiş anahtar sözcükler kullanılarak bir arama gerçekleştirilmiştir. 2009’dan bu yana hakemli dergilerde yayınlanan 13 tam metin nitel araştırma bu araştırmaya dahil edildi. Verileri analizinde mevcut bulguları sentezlemek için, tümevarımsal tematik analiz kullanıldı. Üç tümevarımsal tema çıkarıldı: (1) özerk öğrencilerin özellikleri, (2) öğrenen özerkliğini teşvik eden yollar ve (3) öğrenen özerkliğini geliştirmedeki zorluklar. Bulgular geç kariyer öğretmenlerin deneyimleri aracılığıyla özerk dil öğrenmesinde nitel çalışmaların eksikliğini göstermektedir. Bulgular bu meta sentez çalışmasının öğrencilere destek verme yolunda Türkiye’de dil öğretmenlerinin düşünce yapısını anlamada yardımcı olabilir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Meta-sentez, öğrenen özerkliği, yabancı dil öğrenimi, nitel araştırma tasarımı, Türkiye bağlamı*

**Abstract:** There are a number of qualitative studies which have emphasized the importance of developing learner autonomy in the Turkish foreign-language learning context but Turkish EFL learners’ experiences have not been synthesized to gain an overall picture of what aspects have been studied to date. This study therefore synthesizes 13 qualitative research findings dealing with the topic of learner autonomy in foreign-language learning settings in Turkey and in so doing identifies research gaps in the literature and makes suggestions for further research. A search using keywords was undertaken through the following databases and academic search engines: ERIC, Taylor & Francis, DergiPark, Google Scholar and SCOPUS. Thirteen full-text, qualitative studies published in peer-reviewed journals since 2009 were identified and included. Inductive thematic analysis was employed to analyse and synthesize the findings. Three inductive themes were developed: (1) characteristics of autonomous learners, (2) ways to encourage learner autonomy and (3) challenges of developing learner autonomy. The findings indicate a scarcity of qualitative research on autonomous language learning through the experiences of late-career teachers. The findings of this meta-synthesis might also help to understand the mindset of language teachers in Turkey towards empowering students.

Keywords: *Meta-synthesis, learner autonomy, foreign language learning, qualitative research design, Turkish context*

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## Introduction

There is an ever-growing number of studies of learner autonomy (LA *hereafter*) in the Turkish EFL context (Harmandaoğlu Baz, Balçıkanlı & Cephe, 2018; Güneş & Alagözlü, 2020; Kılıç Gönen, 2020; Kuluşaklı & Yumru, 2020; Öztürk, 2019) largely due to the attention given to various fields ranging from language learning to individual and professional development, growth and intended goal (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019; Littlewood, 1999; Wang & Ryan, 2020). Holec (1981) stated that LA can be interpreted as taking responsibility for one's own learning. It is noteworthy to state here that learning can be enjoyable and learners can be enthusiastic about learning if they take part in the decision-making processes and take responsibility for their learning (Littlejohn, 1985). From another point of view, Allwright (1990) mentioned about the learner autonomy as a balance 'between maximum self-development and human interdependence' (p. 12). In line with the language learning process, Dafei (2007) stated that there is a close relationship between autonomy and language learning. Based on the norms of LA, it can be stated that there is a precise transition from teacher-based to learner-based control in the learning environment (Benson, 2011). Huang and Benson (2013) handle with the definition of LA by adding a number of key terms such as desire, ability and freedom to gain a deeper understanding of LA, which put emphasis on boosting motivation, planning the learning goal and evaluating the efforts.

In today's changing educational environment especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which burst onto the world stage at the end of 2019, the shift in the changing roles of learners and teachers can be seen not only in Turkey and but also across the world (Jones & Kessler, 2020; Orhan & Beyhan, 2020). MacIntyre et al. (2020) elaborate that it poses an enormous challenge for language teachers in balancing personal and professional roles as online teaching blurs the physical, temporal and psychological boundaries between school and home. Especially in the past two decades, a teacher's role has become that of a facilitator or mentor rather than a giver or transmitter of knowledge (Elizondo & Garita, 2013; Zhuang, 2010). For the purpose of clarifying the target issue, it should also be noted that as learners move towards independence and taking an active role in their learning journey, they become aware of their capacity for interaction and raise their motivation and awareness. In the previous literature, much has been written about LA, its aspects and roles, the correlations of autonomy and motivation and enhancing autonomy through strategy training apart from teachers' perceptions and practices, and the relationship between LA and academic success in Turkey (Balçıkanlı, 2010; Güneş & Alagözlü, 2020; İnözü; 2011; Kuluşaklı & Yumru, 2020; Tılfarlıoğlu & Çiftçi, 2011; Yıldırım, 2013; Yükselir & Özer, 2020) as well as in the global context (Ahmadianzadeh et al., 2020; Coterall, 1995; Dickinson, 1987; Jones; 1995; Shih, 2020; Smith et al., 2018; Tran, 2020) in terms of the importance of integrating LA into the classroom in order to promote foreign-language learning and the effects of LA on reflection, self-evaluation and metacognitive knowledge in individual and collaborative learning logs. The existing literature hints at some ways to enhance the learning climate, thereby enhancing student learning both inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, students' capacity of making independent decisions should be increased and this can be achieved by gaining further insights into autonomy-

supportive teaching practices (Doğan & Mirici, 2017; Furtak & Kunter, 2012; Vázquez, 2018) and autonomous learning behaviours (Bekleyen & Selimoğlu, 2016; Lenkaitis, 2020; Üstünlüoğlu, 2009). To acquire a thorough understanding of learners' and teachers' roles for the promotion of LA in the language classroom, qualitative data collected across a broad range of EFL settings can be looked at. However, despite the growing literature on learner autonomy, there is a need to draw inferences deriving from the existing qualitative data and to be able to identify research gaps. Using the method of qualitative meta-synthesis, this study therefore provides an in-depth and comprehensive picture of previous research into LA in the Turkish EFL context by using the selected thirteen full-text qualitative studies.

Qualitative meta-synthesis is considered a richer way of theorising about the phenomenon under study (Hon, 2013) and it is especially useful in identifying research gaps (Tong et al., 2012). It has also shown to be a useful way of promoting a phenomenological understanding of participants' meanings and experiences. In the last decade, an increasing trend in meta-syntheses has been witnessed in educational studies, yet there is still a limited body of meta-synthesis research in the Turkish context. Despite a few meta-syntheses conducted in the field of educational studies (Ceylan, Uştuk & Çomoğlu, 2017; Çiftçi & Karaman, 2019; Kaleli Yılmaz, 2015; Taner & Karaman, 2013; Yükselir, 2017), no study has yet focused on the role of LA in foreign-language teaching and learning. One of the purposes of this current meta-synthesis is to address this gap in the literature. Given that LA serves an ultimate educational purpose as claimed by many educators (for example, Benson, 2009), this study is designed to investigate teachers' and learners' beliefs about autonomous language learning. Littlewood (1999) said that taking responsibility is one of the most important aspects of LA. In this study, we therefore present the results of a meta-synthesis of qualitative studies which have investigated LA in the foreign-language learning processes in order to gain insights into the case of autonomous language learning among Turkish EFL learners and thereby identifying the common concepts about LA. Thus, the rationale behind carrying out this research is to fill the gap in Turkish EFL context to provide more comprehensive view about LA and the central research questions that drove this study were:

1. How is learner autonomy handled in the selected articles in the Turkish context?
  - 1a. What insights can be developed about learner autonomy in the Turkish context?

### **Methodology**

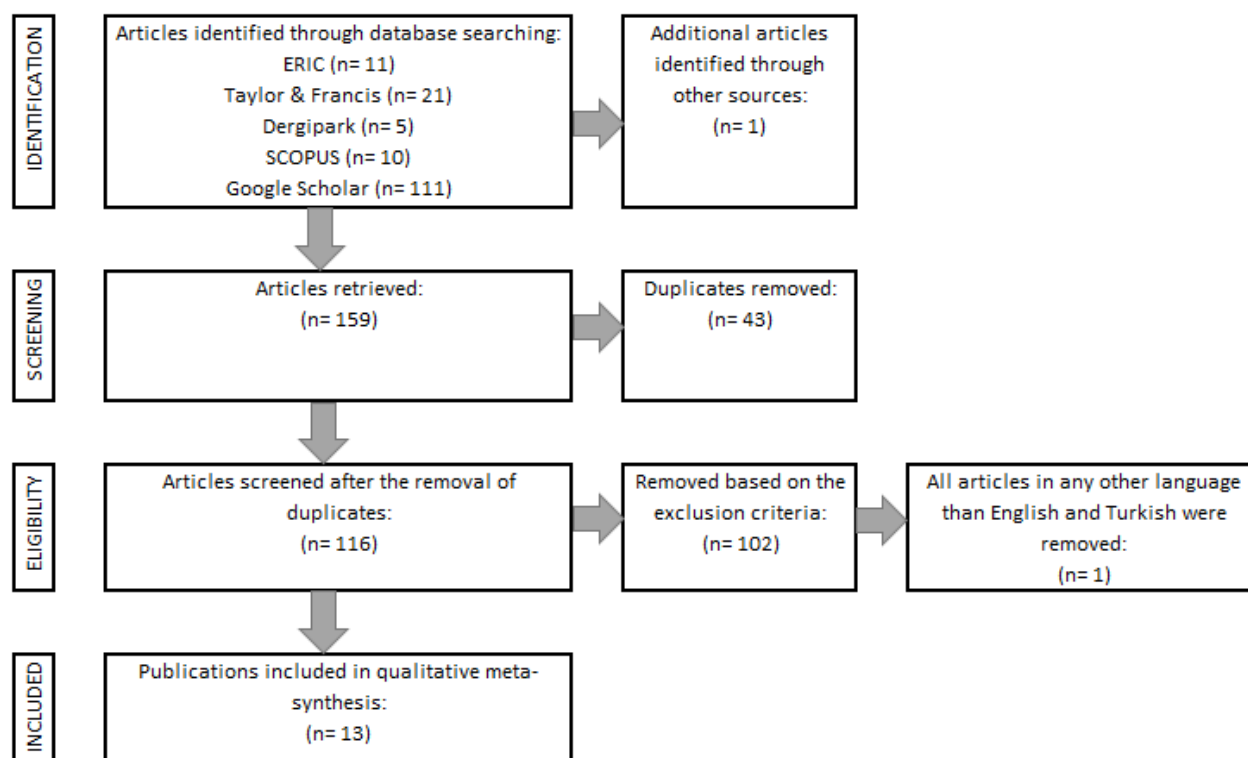
This review study is a meta-synthesis, a method of inquiry which seeks to generate new insights by synthesising qualitative research findings (Hoon, 2019). Inductive thematic analysis was employed to analyse and report the themes arising from the existing findings. Guest et al. (2012) described inductive thematic analysis as “... a rigorous, yet inductive, set of procedures designed to identify and examine themes from textual data in a way that is transparent and credible”. In the present study, we show the results of a meta-synthesis of qualitative studies which have investigated LA in the foreign-language learning processes. To that end, literature searches were conducted across the ERIC, Taylor & Francis, DergiPark, Google Scholar and SCOPUS databases

and academic search engines using the terms ‘LA’, ‘autonomous language learning’, ‘autonomous learning’, ‘language learning’, ‘foreign language learning’, ‘EFL’, ‘Turkish’ and ‘Turkey’ and their Turkish equivalents. The research team used title and keyword to search for relevant sources. Studies were included if they were carried out in the Turkish context and if LA was the variable under study. Only non-experimental qualitative articles in peer-reviewed journals were considered. The qualitative findings of mixed-method studies were also included. Dissertations, book chapters and conference papers were excluded from examination.

The first combined search in Google Scholar produced 111 entries which were relevant for the purpose of the present study. Subsequent combined searches in ERIC, SCOPUS, Taylor & Francis and DergiPark yielded 47 hits which were relevant in addition to the first literature search. References to articles resulting from the above-mentioned searches were examined and this led to the selection of one additional article. Overall, therefore, the searches on LA in the Turkish context produced 159 articles, and 43 duplicates were later removed. Before the thematic analysis, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to the remaining 116 studies in order to ensure that the sample of articles used for the analysis was appropriate for the meta-synthesis. The inclusion criteria for the qualitative component were that: (1) the publication was qualitative in research design; (2) the publication applied mixed-method research; (3) the publication was academic and peer reviewed; (4) the publication dealt with LA among Turkish EFL learners; (5) the study had used primary data (6) it had been published in full-text in either English- or Turkish-language journals and (7) it was published between 2009 and 2019. Exclusion criteria were applied to (1) papers with an entirely theoretical background and no research design; (2) quantitative studies with no qualitative element and (3) studies without a well-defined sample. The application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria to the 116 articles yielded thirteen articles which were eligible for the qualitative meta-synthesis. All of the included articles had been written in English.

Figure 1

*The Process of Selecting Articles for the Meta-Synthesis*



The data gathered from the selected studies were separately read and re-read by the researchers and they later identified the emerging themes. Ethical approval was not required for this study as it involved secondary analysis of published data rather than the collection of primary data. The themes were later merged and then were read by the researchers until they came to an agreement. Based on the results of the meta-synthesis, emerging analytical themes were discussed. The majority of included studies had been conducted with a sample of teachers and instructors of English. The analysis involved a series of steps, namely the process of becoming familiar with the data, coding, the generation of initial themes, naming the themes, reviewing the initial themes and defining and renaming the emerging themes.

Table 1

*A Description of the Included Autonomous Language-Learning Studies: 2009-2019*

| Article                                     | Objective  | Method                       | Sample  |
|---|--|------------------------------|---|
| Balçıkanlı (2010)                           | to investigate student-teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy in the Turkish educational context             | semi-structured focus groups | twenty undergraduates majoring in English-language teaching |
| Harmandaoğlu Baz, Balçıkanlı & Cephe (2018) | to find whether there is a relationship between the stories of English-language teachers as learners and their | semi-structured interviews   | two experienced and five novice English teachers            |

|                                |   |  |   |
|--------------------------------|---|--|---|
|                                | attempts to encourage learner autonomy  |  |   |
| Course (2017)                  | to investigate the role of using reading diaries and strategy instruction to foster greater learner autonomy  | reading diaries and group interviews             | 65 first- and second-year students majoring in English-language teaching              |
| Doğan & Mirici (2017)          | to investigate EFL instructors' perceptions and practices of learner autonomy in the schools of foreign languages in nine geographically diverse public Turkish universities  | a questionnaire and interviews                   | 96 EFL instructors (17 interviewees)  |
| İnöz (2011)                    | to analyse the issues which emerged during the process of implementing learner autonomy in language learning with specific reference to the case study conducted  | unstructured interviews with the teacher         | a non-native English teacher with twelve years of teaching experience                 |
| Kartal & Balçıkanlı (2019)     | to investigate ELT student-teachers' culture of learning and their readiness for becoming autonomous and promoting their students' learner autonomy in a Turkish context  | semi-structured interviews                       | 110 fourth-year students majoring in English-language teaching                        |
| Mede, İnceçay & İnceçay (2013) | to report on foreign-language learners' and teachers' perceptions regarding oral book report to promote learner autonomy in extensive reading courses across the English curriculum   | reflection papers and semi-structured interviews | five randomly selected students and two instructors at the Preparatory Year Programme |
| Orakçı & Gelişli (2019)        | to reveal students' opinions about the learning activities aiming to promote LA   | observation and semi-structured interview form   | 65 sixth grade students   |
| Öztürk (2019)                  | to investigate the impact of a course specially designed to foster learner autonomy among pre-service teachers and their opinions regarding this process  | reflection papers and semi-structured interviews | 25 first year pre-service EFL teachers  |
| Tanyeli & Kuter (2013)         | to examine freshman law students' perceptions as regards their autonomy in writing classes and their teachers' perceptions of the writing skill area of the curriculum in promoting learner autonomy in the Foreign Language and English Preparatory School | interview protocols                              | six non-native instructors of English   |
| Üstünlüoğlu (2009)             | to investigate the perceptions of university students and teachers regarding responsibilities and abilities related to autonomous learning, and the autonomous activities both inside and outside the classroom   | semi-structured interviews                       | twenty-five students and eight language instructors at the Preparatory Year Programme |

|                         |  |   |   |
|-------------------------|--|---|---|
| Yiğit & Yıldırım (2018) | to investigate the perceptions of ELT students related to learner autonomy in language learning.       | semi-structured interviews  | twenty undergraduate students majoring in English-language teaching                   |
| Yıldırım (2013)         | to explore the potential effect of using portfolios for enhancing ELT major student-teachers' autonomy | semi-structured interviews, graded goal sheets, reflection reports, and cover letters | twenty-one third year pre-service teachers in an English-language teaching department |

Table 1 shows descriptions of the thirteen autonomous language learning related publications which were included in the meta-synthesis and the characteristics of the selected articles. It can be seen that a variety of data collection methods were used in the included studies, but overall, semi-structured interviews and reflection papers were the most frequently used methods.

## Results

All the narrative data collected from the thirteen selected articles enabled the researchers to identify the common features. Inductive thematic analysis enabled researchers to form three overarching themes which were related with learner autonomy: (1) characteristics of autonomous learners, (2) ways to encourage learner autonomy and (3) challenges of developing learner autonomy.

Table 2

### *Characteristics of Autonomous Learners: Sub-themes and a Selection of Verbatim Quotes*

| Sub-themes   | Verbatim quotes   |
|--|---|
| collaboration with more capable peers                  | 'I think the language learners have started to enjoy the idea of preparing oral book reports rather than written ones, because they had the opportunity to become more reflective while sharing their ideas and exchanging them with their peers.' (Mede et al., 2013, p. 23)   |
| making independent decisions about their learning      | 'This week I decided to change my study team because I think I'm done with vocabulary. It [new vocabulary] doesn't prevent me from reading and I think there'll always be some words that I don't know the meanings of.' (Course, 2017, p. 134)   |
| have an understanding of the purpose of their learning | '... I used to think that learning is something transferred. I mean, there is a teacher who is more knowledgeable, he/she teaches and we simply learn. However, [...], I see that learning is more than this. It is not a simple transition from teachers to students, but a more detailed process with its own elements.' (Öztürk, 2019, p. 310)   |
| monitoring and evaluating their own learning           | 'Students should not depend on teachers for everything. Of course, the role of the teachers and their responsibility is important, but teachers need to take students' needs into consideration.' (Kartal & Balçıkanlı, 2019, p. 36)<br>'While I was reading the news, I realised that I have difficulty in guessing the meanings of unknown words.' (Course, 2017, p. 134)<br>'They try to learn with an awareness of themselves as a learner. They observe their own improvement.' (Doğan & Mirici, 2017, p. 177) |

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| critical thinking | 'Learners should not believe what teacher says is always true. They need to be critical thinkers. It is OK that we do not teach them something wrong, but they need to think critically all the time. I think that autonomous learners are critical thinkers.' (Doğan & Mirici, 2017, p. 178) |
|-------------------|---|

The synthesis of the findings of the selected studies led to the identification of a theme. This theme shows the characteristics of autonomous language learners and comprises five sub-themes. Based on the analysis, it can be said that it is important for autonomous learners to be made aware that they play a role in the learning of their peers. They are also expected to make independent decisions in relation to their learning, set their own learning goals, monitor and evaluate their own learning and think critically.

Table 3

*Ways to Encourage Learner Autonomy: Sub-themes and a Selection of Verbatim Quotes*

| Sub-themes  | Verbatim quotes   |
|---|---|
| reflective practice   | 'One of our teachers at the university used to have us make one sentence about what we have learnt in that lesson before we left the class. I do this also in my classes.' (Harmandaoğlu Baz et al., 2018, p. 624)<br>'Presenting a book orally helps us get immediate reaction and response from the audience. We exchange our ideas and learn how to become more reflective learners who plan and assess their own learning.' (Mede et al., 2013, p. 22)  |
| importance of teacher's guidance and feedback in helping students overcome difficulties | 'Although I believe that it was hard to prepare an oral book report at the beginning, I changed my mind once I have been introduced to certain guidelines showing how to identify the key points and support them with my own ideas. I feel more comfortable and motivated now while presenting in front of my peers.' (Mede et al., 2013, p. 22)   |
| encouraging students to set a goal to address their needs                               | 'It was probably one of my biggest problems as a learner, not being able to create a purpose for myself. I was always studying, but for what, I never questioned it ... That was probably the biggest benefit for me, to learn how to set clear and rational goals for myself, in accordance with my strong sides and capacity.' (Öztürk, 2019, p. 309)<br>'When I set my goals for a lesson on my own I try to reach them more eagerly than when my teacher sets them for me. So, in this process, I could evaluate my progress more objectively ... .' (Yıldırım, 2013, p. 102) |
| allowing choice   | 'Making effort [and] ... making choices.' (Yiğit & Yıldırım, 2018, p. 83)<br>'My friend affected me in choosing activities. We also decided to choose difficult activities with my group of friends. Because we thought we would learn a lot more if we learned difficult topics.' (Orakçı & Gelişli, 2019, p. 285)<br>'Teachers gave us the opportunity to choose. They allowed us to choose the materials, but those materials were only related to preparation tests for the university entrance exam.' (Kartal & Balçıkanlı, 2019, p. 36)                                     |

Another theme which synthesized the findings of the selected qualitative studies was ways to encourage learner autonomy includes guided reflection, the use of oral presentations in the classroom, the importance of the teacher's guidance and feedback in helping students to overcome



difficulties, encouraging them to set a goal to address their needs, and allowing learners to have a choice. Even though a teacher's regular monitoring and guidance is key to fostering learning autonomy, language teachers should exercise caution when dealing with learners who rely strongly on their teacher's support when making independent learning decisions.

Table 4

*Challenges of Developing Learner Autonomy: Sub-themes and a Selection of Verbatim Quotes*

| <b>Sub-themes</b>   | <b>Verbatim quotes</b>  |
|---|---|
| lack of curriculum flexibility and time constraints         | <p>'The teachers allowed us to choose materials and activities, but they were only about grammar and reading.' (Kartal &amp; Balçıkanlı, 2019, p. 36)</p> <p>'They [the students] get used to memorization and that's because of the curriculum in the educational system.' Tanyeli &amp; Kuter, 2013, p. 27)</p> <p>'We are aware of our needs and want to share these needs with teachers. However, they say that they already have objectives set by the school and they cannot change this.' (Üstünlüoğlu, 2009, p. 159)</p> <p>'We used to choose materials and activities in the high school, but they were directly related to the university entrance exam.' (Kartal &amp; Balçıkanlı, 2019, p. 38)</p> |
| ineffective learning habits and overreliance on the teacher | <p>'I would really want to provide learners with autonomy but it is impossible for me to do that in Turkey. First, students of Turkish background are conditioned to be spoon-fed by the teacher. It is really difficult to end this vicious cycle.' (Doğan &amp; Mirici, 2017, p. 182)</p> <p>'My students do not trust themselves. They show me every single sentence they write and get my approval before writing the second sentence.' (Tanyeli &amp; Kuter, 2013)</p>   |
| teacher's mindset   | <p>'As I was also trained in a traditional way just like my students, I could not promote autonomy in my classes as much as I desire.' (Doğan &amp; Mirici, 2017, p. 183)</p> <p>'... How possibly could anyone expect students to become autonomous where the teacher is the main authority?' (Balçıkanlı, 2010, p. 97)</p>  |
| resistance to the teacher's role as facilitator of learning | <p>'Today one of my students criticised me for not being authoritative enough, and he wrote in his diary that it should be me, not the students, who decides what to study.' (Inozu, 2011, p. 527)</p> <p>'Honestly, we are very happy with the current system because teachers take on most of the work.' (Üstünlüoğlu, 2009, p. 159)</p>  |
| physical environment  | <p>'Everything was pre-determined. The classroom design was unfit to allow the teacher to do the job truly. I was in the USA in elementary and middle school. There they had round tables to make group work easier. There was also a rug in the class for different activities. In the high school in Turkey, the classroom environment was not suitable for autonomy.' (Kartal &amp; Balçıkanlı, 2019, p. 36)</p> <p>'There are several obstacles to the development of learner autonomy in the learning process, such as crowded classrooms, lack of equipment etc.' (Balçıkanlı, 2010, p. 98)</p>   |

The synthesis of the existing findings led to the development of another theme which describes the challenges of developing LA. The theme also has five sub-themes. Fostering LA is an arduous journey and requires the teachers' timely manoeuvres and interventions when they sense that learners' decisions are leading them into a dead end, as suggested by Little (2007). In short, based on 13 qualitative studies included in this study, three overarching themes are drawn, and this shows that the authors of the selected studies attempted to find out the common points of LA and having an idea about the characteristics of autonomous learners, last but not least the challenges to pave the way for developing autonomy. Each theme is interconnected to one another in that they give insights and common features of LA in the Turkish context.

Overall, the results show that the autonomous language-learning environment is dynamic in nature, so learners, as Little (2020) suggested, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate their own learning progress. Despite the challenges faced in developing LA in EFL settings, there are effective ways which teachers can adopt to encourage learners to take charge of their learning.

### **Discussion**

This meta-synthesis investigated learner autonomy with its common points and attempts to give insights about its characteristics, the ways of developing LA and the challenges of LA based on the data from thirteen qualitative studies published between 2009 and 2019 in the Turkish EFL context. Looking into the overarching and sub-themes, it can be said that there were no notable inconsistencies across the findings of the studies. It was found that a broad consensus exists over the passive roles which students often play. Students' passivity can be a significant problem for teachers who are trying to develop LA in their classes, especially during online teaching. Wong (2020) commented that peer relationships and overall interactions are not actively present in online classrooms. The analysis also showed that LA is discussed in the previous studies mostly employing semi-structured interviews and reflection papers. Clearly there is continuous interest in LA given that there have been several studies since 2019 in the Turkish EFL context, which is a sign of increasing interest in autonomy, self-regulation and self-direction in the educational field. Common themes developed in this meta-synthesis are the impact of teaching/learning practices on sample groups, consisting mainly of university students and instructors working in different universities. This shows that there have been few studies conducted with qualitative data to address autonomy among young learners, high school students and their teachers (Kartal & Balçıkanlı, 2019) and this might be due to the fact that university students are a population on hand and readily available, in contrast with young learners and high-school students.

Doğan and Mirici (2017) suggested that Turkish EFL learners generally lack the behaviours generally attributed to autonomous language learners. Both barriers and challenges seem to commonly exist across the themes. Fixed syllabuses and examinations not only put pressure on learners but also might hinder their AL. There is no question about the importance of syllabuses and examinations in education, but there are principles which language teachers can use to relieve the stress caused by examinations as well as to update the course syllabus to promote LA in their

classes. In relation to this, Balçıkanlı (2010) stated that the Turkish education system requires learners to keep their heads up, that is, it is more teacher-centred which prevents learners from developing autonomous learning skills, creativity and individuality (Çakıcı, 2017; Yumuk, 2002). At the beginning of their language-learning journey, few students are able to identify their own learning goals and be motivated, self-aware and self-directed, but they are expected to develop these identifying characteristics over time and these characteristics can be used to judge the development of learners' autonomous learning ability. In language classes, there are many barriers to autonomous language learning and the teacher should make learning interesting and also take into account each student's personality and needs (Doğan & Mirici, 2017; Feryok, 2013).

The meta-synthesis of the thirteen articles provided some noteworthy characteristics to mention with one of them is the plurality and varying depths of experiences as students' educational and learning levels advance. However, there are two common features which autonomous learners exhibit: they (1) monitor and evaluate their own learning and (2) make independent decisions about their learning. Little (2007) suggested that learning self-management in learning is a difficult task for most learners and that the teacher's task should be to identify learners' needs and to make them ready to make their own decisions about their learning from a very early stage. It is also clear from the findings that culture clash in terms of the attributed roles of teachers is a common theme in the selected studies. Knowing that teachers play an important role in the achievement of autonomy in an EFL classroom, empowering them is an effective way to solve the autonomy problems of language classrooms in Turkey. Teachers should be given the flexibility and freedom to enhance their students' learning and the progressive shift in teachers' role from that of transmitting information to that of facilitating learning is an ultimate goal which should also be associated with administrative support (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Autonomous learning brings about changes in the language classroom in which the teacher transfers his/her role as the sole authority to the students in terms of making independent decisions (Little, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study is important because it is the first meta-synthesis of LA and is expected to frame the process of the development of LA in a language-learning setting and how LA is approached from the perspectives of language teachers and learners. The role of the teacher in a language classroom is not easy. During the first classes, most students will not be ready to take responsibility for their learning, but the teacher should nevertheless prepare them to take decisions from very early on (Little, 2007) and gradually relinquish his/her control in some areas as soon as the students are ready to take over the control of their own learning in those areas. The findings of the present study have emphasized that the control and facilitator/mentor role which a language teacher has in class is a powerful tool which can be used to promote LA. In this regard, teachers, who assume responsibility for planning all the classroom activities and take an active role in managing the desirable change from students being passive learners to learning by constructing their own knowledge, are the key agents in the language classroom. However, enabling learners'

active and independent involvement in an EFL classroom is anything but easy, and could be even more challenging for language teachers when they are faced with unexpected circumstances. Wong (2020) emphasized the increased risk from face-to-face classes being moved to online classes and its potential effect on students in the form of a lop-sided development of autonomy and competence. This could imply that when they are forced to teach virtually, language teachers might easily lose the educational progress in transforming their classes by engaging student autonomy.

The present study also suggests one key issue, that language teachers must be taken into consideration in order to be able to encourage AL. Having a group of autonomous language learners depends heavily on the attitude and role of the teacher. However, not every educator currently teaching a foreign language at various grade levels has learned the foreign language in the way that students should learn today. Teacher education and in-service training for teachers can be regarded as two important opportunities for the promotion of LA in language classrooms.

This meta-synthesis also offers pedagogical implications with future research directions. Today, teacher education programmes include emphasis on LA (Little, 2007), but we do not know the case for experienced teachers. Given that most of the papers synthesized in this study dealt with early-career teachers and university students, this calls for further inquiry into this topic. There is a particular need for qualitative research which focuses on LA and the case of late-career language teachers and young learners. Future research might examine teachers who have less autonomy or teach heterogeneous groups in secondary and high schools. Furthermore, despite a few qualitative studies published in 2020 (Kılıç Gönen, 2020; Kuluşaklı & Yumru, 2020), there has been a paucity of peer-reviewed research in general into middle- and high-school students' experiences in the field of autonomous language learning in the Turkish context as the available evidence was often obtained from quantitative data; thus more qualitative research is also required to gain insights into the common points of LA as well as perceptions and attitudes of young language learners and their teachers regarding LA. This fact comes to the fore in the light of Turkey's Education Vision 2023 (MNE, 2019), which clearly pinpoints the need for collaboration between teachers and academics in the universities. Finally, there is a need for case studies in the Turkish context to present longitudinal qualitative data, with the help of which future studies can discuss change over time in language classrooms. One last observation: it is important to state that this meta-synthesis was limited to thirteen qualitative studies which met the chosen selection criteria. By setting different inclusion criteria, future studies could include more studies in order to gain a broader perspective on LA.

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### Uzun Özet

Son yıllarda pek çok bağlamda olduğu gibi Türkiye bağlamında da sıklıkla çalışılmaya başlanan öğrenen özerkliği öğrenme motivasyonu ve öğrenmenin niteliğiyle doğrudan ilgili bir kavramdır. Nitel meta-sentez araştırılan olgu hakkında çözümleme yapmanın ve çıkarımlarda bulunmanın oldukça etkili bir yolu olarak görülmektedir. Alanyazınındaki boşlukları tespit etmede özellikle etkili bir yöntem olarak değerlendirilen meta-sentez nitel çalışmaların bulgularını inceleyerek üzerinde araştırma yapılan katılımcıların deneyimleri ve bakış açıları üzerinde olgubilimsel sonuçlara ulaşmayı sağlamaktadır. Meta-sentez çalışmalarının her geçen gün daha yaygın bir şekilde kullanılması ve öğrenen özerkliği kavramının eğitim açısından kazanmakta olduğu haklı önem bu çalışmanın yürütülmesinin arkasında yatan önemli iki itici güç olurken aynı zamanda öğrenen özerkliği ile ilgili günümüze kadar herhangi bir meta-sentez çalışmaması yapılmamış olması da bu çalışmanın yürütülmesinin altında yatan diğer bir nedendir. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışma Türkiye'de yabancı dil öğrenme alanında öğrenen özerkliği konusunu ele alan 13 nitel araştırma bulgusunu sentezlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu derlemin incelenmesi sonucunda alan yazınındaki araştırma boşluğunu belirleme ve bu sayede gelecek araştırmalar için yol gösterebilecek öneriler geliştirmek de bu çalışmanın amaçları arasında yer almaktadır.

Yöntem olarak metasentez araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Çalışma, ERIC, Taylor & Francis, DergiPark, Google Scholar ve SCOPUS veri tabanı ve akademik arama motorları aracılığıyla araştırmacılar tarafından belirlenmiş anahtar sözcükleri kullanarak aramalar yapılmıştır. Yapılan her arama sonucunda kaç sonuç elde edildiği ve ulaşılan yayınlar araştırmacılar tarafından derlenmiştir. Önceden belirlenen ölçütler üzerinden ulaşılan yayınlar incelenmiş ve ölçütleri



karşılama yayınlar çözümleme öncesinde yayın havuzundan çıkarılmıştır. Yapılan ölçüt değerlendirmesi sonucunda 2009 ve 2019 yılları arasında bilimsel hakemli dergilerde yayımlanan nitel veri kullanan 13 tam metin makale bu araştırmaya dahil edilmiştir. Verilerin çözümlenmesi ve bu şekilde mevcut bulguları sentezlemek amacıyla tümevarımsal tematik analiz kullanılmıştır. Yapılan çözümleme sonucunda üç tümevarımsal tema çıkarılmıştır. Bunlar: (1) özerk öğrencilerinin özellikleri, (2) öğrenen özerkliğini teşvik eden yollar ve (3) öğrenen özerkliğini geliştirmedeki zorluklar. Bulgular kariyerlerinin ileriki aşamalarında olan öğretmenlerin deneyimleri aracılığıyla özerk dil öğrenmesine yönelik nitel çalışmaların eksikliğini göstermektedir. Şu an çalışmakta olan öğretmenlerin aldıkları üniversite eğitimi ve hizmet içi eğitim farklılıklarını göz önüne aldığımızda çok farklı profillerden dil öğretmenlerinin katılımıyla yürütülecek çalışmalara gereksinim bulunmaktadır. Buna karşın ilgili alanyazınında, kariyerinin başında ve ortasındaki öğretmenlerin katılımıyla yürütülen çalışmalara sıklıkla karşılaşılmasına karşın kariyerlerinin ileriki aşamalarındaki öğretmenlerin yer aldığı çalışmaların eksikliği dikkat çekmektedir. Bulgular ayrıca bu meta-sentez çalışmasının öğrencilere destek verme yolunda Türkiye’de dil öğretmenlerinin düşünce yapısını anlamada yardımcı olabilir. Üç tümevarımsal tema doğrultusunda alt temalar da çalışmanın bulgularına dayalı olarak çıkarılmıştır. Özerk öğrencilerinin özellikleri ana temasının alt temaları şu şekilde belirlenmiştir; özerk öğrencilerin akranlarıyla iletişimi, kendi öğrenmeleri hakkında bağımsız karar verebilme, öğrenmelerinin amacını anlayabilme, kendi öğrenmelerini gözlem yapma, değerlendirme ve eleştirel düşünmedir. İkinci ana tema olan öğrenen özerkliğini teşvik eden yolların ise alt temaları; yönlendirilmiş yansıma, sınıf içi sözlü sunumların kullanımı, öğretmen rehberliğinin önemi ve öğrencilere zorlukları aşmada yardım etme konusunda geribildirim verme, öğrencilere hedeflere ulaşma noktasında teşvik etme ve seçim yapma olarak bulunmuştur. Son ana temanın alt temaları ise şöyledir; öğrenen özerkliğini geliştirmedeki zorluklar müfredat esnekliği ve zaman sınırlandırması eksikliği, etkin olmayan öğrenme alışkanlıkları ve öğretmene aşırı bağlılık, öğretmenin zihin yapısı, öğrenmeyi kolaylaştırıcı olarak öğretmenin rolü ve son olarak fiziksel çevredir.

Tartışma olarak, bu meta-sentez çalışması dil öğretmeni ve öğrencilerinin öğrenen özerkliği hakkında algı ve deneyimlerini belirlenmiş belirli ölçütlere göre Türkiye bağlamında 2009-2019 yılları arasında yayımlanan 13 tam metin makale çerçevesinde incelemiştir. Bulgulara bakıldığında, incelenen çalışmalar ışığında katılımcı öğrencilerin çoğunlukla pasif bir rol üstlenmesi ortak bir sonuç olarak görülmektedir. Fakat öğrencilerin eğitim ve öğrenme seviyeleri arttıkça deneyimlerinin derinliği ve çeşitliliği de değişmektedir denilebilir. Çalışmalar ayrıca yapılan araştırmaların daha çok yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler ve yansıma yöntemiyle uygulandığını göstermiştir. Uzun soluklu nitel çalışmalar aracılığıyla gelecek çalışmalar tasarlanıp geniş yönlü araştırmalar yürütülebilir. Ayrıca, sentez yapılan çalışmaların katılımcıları çoğunlukla üniversite öğrencileri ve öğretim elemanlarından oluşmaktadır, bu anlamda ilkokul, ortaokul ve lise öğrencilerinden de katılımcı olarak yer aldığı çalışmaların eksik olduğu çok aşikârdır. Bulgular ayrıca, 2019 yılından sonra Türkiye bağlamında öğrenen özerkliği hakkında giderek artan sayıda çalışma olduğunu belirlemiştir.

Sonuç olarak, bu meta-sentez çalışması öğrenen özerkliği konusunda yapılan ilk çalışmadır. Çalışma öğretmenin sınıf içindeki kolaylaştırıcı/mentor/danışman rolünün öğrenen özerkliğini artırmada önemli olduğunu vurgulamıştır. Ayrıca, öğretmenin gerekli materyalleri hazırlayarak, öğrencilerini etkinliklere dahil ederek, öğrencileri pasif rolden aktif bir role girdirmesinde önemli bir rolü vardır denilebilir. Bu meta-sentez çalışması gelecek çalışmalar için birkaç pedagojik öneri de sunmaktadır. Bunlar öğrenen özerkliği konusunda çok daha kapsamlı nitel çalışmalar yapılması gerektiği, kariyerlerinin ilk aşamasında değil de tecrübeli öğretmenler aracılığıyla veriler toplanarak daha kapsamlı bulgular elde edilmesi gerektiği ve genç katılımcılara yönelik öğrenen özerkliği konusunda daha fazla araştırmalar yapılması gerektiği şeklinde ifade edilebilir. Gelecek araştırmalar daha farklı yayın seçme ölçütleri belirleyerek öğrenen özerkliği konusunda farklı çalışmalar yapılabilir. Ayrıca, öğrenenlerde bireysel farklılık ve öğrenme stratejisi kullanımına yönelik çalışmalar bulunsa da bunların neredeyse hiçbiri boylamsal desende araştırmalar değildir. Gelecek çalışmalar için diğer bir önemli husus da yürütülecek çalışmalarda gözlem tekniğinin kullanılarak öğrencilerin öğrenme davranışlarının bu şekilde raporlanabilmesidir.

**ETİK BEYAN:** *"Learner Autonomy in the Turkish EFL Context: A Meta-Synthesis Study of 2009-2019 Qualitative Research"* başlıklı çalışmanın yazım sürecinde bilimsel, etik ve alıntı kurallarına uyulmuş; toplanan veriler üzerinde herhangi bir tahrifat yapılmamıştır. Karşılaşılacak tüm etik ihlallerde "Mehmet Akif Ersoy Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi Yayın Kurulunun" hiçbir sorumluluğunun olmadığı, tüm sorumluluğun Sorumlu Yazara ait olduğu ve bu çalışmanın herhangi başka bir akademik yayın ortamına değerlendirme için gönderilmemiş olduğunu taahhüt ederim.