

66. Revisiting EFL students' language learning autonomy and lifelong learning tendencies

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Abstract

The need to learn English is increasing more and more to keep up with the changes caused by globalization. However, what you learn is as important as how you learn it because the way you learn it influences the efficiency, permanence and sustainability of learning. One of these ways in undoubtedly is autonomous language learning. Taking the responsibility of one's own learning could make the process more concrete and conscious, thus paving the way for lifetime learning. Having such traits gains greater importance at tertiary level where students are expected to be autonomous and lifelong learners. Hence, the present study dwelled upon the probable relationship between language learning autonomy and lifelong learning tendencies of EFL university students. The participants were both English-majoring and non-English majoring students. The data were collected and analyzed quantitatively. The study revealed a positive and significant relationship between language learner autonomy and lifelong learning. EFL students were found to have high beliefs of these constructs. The relation with age, gender and major was also investigated. Pedagogical implications were discussed at the end of the study.

Keywords: Language learning autonomy, lifelong learning, EFL students

İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrencilerin özerk öğrenme ve hayat boyu öğrenme eğilimlerinin yeniden değerlendirilmesi

Öz

Küreselleşmenin neden olduğu değişikliklere ayak uydurabilmek için İngilizce öğrenme ihtiyacı gittikçe artmaktadır. Ancak ne öğrenildiği nasıl öğrenildiği kadar önemlidir, çünkü öğrenme şekli öğrenmenin verimi, kalıcılığı ve sürdürülebilirliğini etkiler. Öğrenme şekillerinden biri de şüphesiz otonom dil öğrenmedir. Kişinin kendi öğrenme sorumluluğunu alması süreci daha somut ve bilinçli hale getirir, ki böylece hayat boyu öğrenmenin yolunu açar. Bu özellikler, öğrencilerin özerk ve hayat boyu öğrenci olmaları beklenen üniversite düzeyinde daha da önem kazanmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışma üniversite öğrencilerinin özerk dil öğrenme ve hayat boyu öğrenme eğilimleri arasındaki olası ilişkiye odaklanmıştır. Katılımcılar, branşı İngilizce olan ve olmayan öğrencilerden oluşmaktadır. Veriler, nicel yöntemlerle toplanıp analiz edilmiştir. Çalışma, özerk dil öğrenme ve hayat boyu öğrenme arasında olumlu ve anlamlı bir ilişki elde etmiştir. İngilizce öğrenen öğrencilerin bu kavramlar konusunda oldukça olumlu inançları olduğu bulunmuştur. Yaş, cinsiyet ve branş ile olan ilişki de incelenmiştir. Çalışmanın sonunda, pedagojik çıkarımlar tartışılmıştır.

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Anahtar kelimeler: Dil öğrenme özerkliği, hayat boyu öğrenme, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenenler

Introduction

'Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach a man how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.'(Chinese Proverb)

Globalization and innovations in the 21st century have raised the importance of communication across cultures, which has inevitably evoked the necessity of learning a foreign language. Since learning occupies a pivotal role throughout humans' life, language learning needs to be considered not as a short-term activity but as a lifetime act, instead. However, what makes language learning sustainable seems to be the active involvement in the process. As D'mello (2022) states, dynamic knowledge is not possible without active involvement of the students in education process. Similarly, active engagement renders the learning process more meaningful (Zohud, 2015). Active involvement in the process increases the sustainability of learning; therefore, a lot of teachers have started to step away traditional teaching approaches since modern students have now more than the traditional roles of passive learners (Namaziandost & Çakmak, 2020). Changing roles of the students and the teachers presents itself as learner autonomy in language classrooms.

Defined as the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec, 1981), learner autonomy embodies various dimensions (Nguyen, 2012; Tuan, 2021). It could be viewed as the learners' ability and willingness to make choices independently (Littlewood, 1996), the capacity for self-reflection, decision-making and independent act (Little, 1999) and their active participation in regular processes of their learning (Benson, 2007). Therefore, learners have the capability to plan, organize, monitor and assess their own learning in an independent fashion, which also constitutes the advanced stage of self-direction (Dickinson, 1987). However, it seems not possible to develop learner autonomy in a short time without any effort. In fact, it is a process that is cultivated through appropriate approaches. Sharle and Szabo (2005) divided the development of responsible learners into three stages as raising awareness, changing attitudes and transferring roles. Thus, getting insight into the nature of the concept, gaining new perspectives related to the issue and being ready to assume new roles in learning and teaching processes appear to be the key steps on the path to achieve autonomy in different educational contexts including language education. Autonomy focusing on learner responsibility and reflection has become a paramount interest in language teaching (Pichugova, Stepura & Pravosudov, 2016) and promoting learner autonomy has been one of the principal goals of English language curriculum (Tanyeli & Kuter, 2013). Language learning needs to include active engagement in the task, reflection and concentration on the intellectual work and development of favorable feelings (Sang & Hiver, 2021) and active learning boosts the quality of students' learning since they construct meaning rather than memorizing and depending solely on the information transmitted by the teacher (Er, Altunay & Yurdabakan, 2012). Therefore, language courses integrated with responsibility transfer from teacher to learner in such aspects as goal-setting, selection of learning strategies and evaluation of progress could promote learner autonomy (Cotterall, 2000). Allowing learners to have the sense of responsibility, awareness and self-reflection where they can self-manage their studies more efficiently, autonomy is essential for powerful language learning (Balçıklı, 2008). And autonomous language learners are not only more motivated and more committed but also they move learning beyond classroom walls and take more risks (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). With such a significant position in language learning and teaching setting, learner autonomy was explored in various respects in different studies in both global and Turkish contexts.

Several studies detected significant and positive relationship between learner autonomy and students' English proficiency (Dafei, 2007; Myartawan, Latief & Suharmanto, 2013). Apart from academic success, Tilfarlioğlu and Ciftci (2011) found a positive relationship between learner autonomy and self-efficacy. In terms of language learning strategies, positive relationship was detected between strategy use and the practices of autonomous English language learning outside the class (Daflizar, Sulistiyo & Kamil, 2022). Moreover, technology was also seen to have a positive effect of autonomous learning (Janah, Retnaningdyah & Mustofa, 2022; Parvaneh, H., Zoghi, M., & Asadi, 2022). On the other hand, the study (Üstünoğlu, 2009) conducted among university students and instructors within EFL setting revealed that students did not take the responsibility of their own learning although they had capacity for this, and believing that students could not fulfill their responsibilities, the instructors assumed most of the responsibility. The other study focusing of understanding and practices of teachers and students in Turkish EFL context revealed lacks of clarity and consistency in their views of autonomy (Kocar, 2020); therefore, enabling teachers and students to conceptualize autonomy appropriately and increasing their awareness could be a stepping stone in enhancing it. Based on the perceptions of students and instructors, another study (Farahi, 2015) found a gap between desirability autonomy and feasibility of autonomy in ELT departments. Similarly, differences were identified between the instructors' beliefs and actual practices in EFL setting due to the students' tendency to passive learning and educational system (Azin, Biria & Ameri Golestan, 2018; Chang, 2020; Mansooji & Ghaleshahzari, 2022).

Considering that learner autonomy constitutes not only a way to boost learning ability but also a basis for lifelong learning (Gocić & Jankovic, 2021; Iamudom & Tangkiengsirisin, 2020), adoption of autonomous learning behaviours could pave the way for learning that can continue a lifetime, conducting both fruitful learning and empowerment for the individuals. Moving beyond classroom walls, lifelong learning is a lifetime, autonomous and free-willed quest of knowledge for personal and professional goals (Diker Coşkun & Demirel, 2010). Lifelong learning is also associated with continuous improvement of skills and competencies, appreciation of learning itself and contributions to the others, as well (Longworth, 2003). Concerning lifelong learning, Lee (2014) noted that it could render educational opportunity accessible to everyone, empower individuals as active learners and facilitate their functioning better in society and prepare individuals to fulfill the changing needs. Furthermore, it is essential in self-actualization, adaptation to society, professional development and fulfillment of the requirements of the information society (Şen & Yıldız Durak, 2022). And as a core value of lifelong learning, educational actors' autonomy ensures their constant personal development and keeps them upgraded in their field, thus enabling lifelong learning (Gavrilyuk, 2018), and learner autonomy sustains its presence even after completing the formal education and equips individuals with lifelong learning (Huyen & Cang, 2021). Given that language learning is a lifelong endeavor, and needs to move beyond the classroom walls (Najeeb, 2013), it is safe to say that achieving autonomy in language learning could contribute to gaining habits of lifelong learning. As a matter of fact, the initial purpose of the autonomy, which entered into the field through the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project in early 1970s, was associated with lifelong learning (Gökgöz, 2008). According to Saeed (2021), learner autonomy is deemed as one of the most critical elements contributing to lifelong learning for language learners since it increases their motivation and engagement through the freedom of taking responsibility of the learning. Additionally, one of the important goals of language education is to train autonomous learners for lifetime learning apart from teaching effective communication (Agadzhanova, 2020). Within a general framework, lifelong learning was explored with different variables such as motivation (McCombs, 2010), social capital (Field, 2005), self-efficacy (Garipağaoğlu, 2013), confidence (Norman & Hyland, 2003), social media (Kind & Evans, 2015), e-learning (Mouzakitis & Tuncay, 2011) and the

role of higher education (Brooks & Everett, 2008; Schuetze & Slowey, 2013). Within EFL context, there are studies on lifelong learning through lens of pre-service and in-service EFL teachers (Aprianti, 2018; Badak & Şenel, 2022; Navidinia, 2021; Palacios-Hidalgo, Huertas-Abril & Gómez-Parra, 2020). Despite the growing number of studies related to lifelong learning, there still need to be more studies melting the learning autonomy and lifelong learning in the same pot within EFL settings. Different from other studies, the role of learner autonomy and lifelong learning as mutually-complementary components also needs to be investigated in both English-majors and non-English majors within EFL environment to draw a clearer picture. Therefore, given the significant place of learner-centeredness in language learning process and the critical role of such autonomy on the path to gaining lifelong learning habits, the present inquiry set out to revisit and gain greater insight into English learning autonomy and lifelong learning tendencies at tertiary level. To address this aim, the study tried to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the levels of English learning autonomy and lifelong learning tendencies among EFL students at university level?
2. Do age, gender and major cause a difference in EFL students' levels of autonomous and lifelong learning tendencies?
2. Is there statistically significant correlation between English learning autonomy and lifelong learning tendencies among EFL university students?

Methodology

Research Design and Participants

This present inquiry utilized quantitative research design. The participants were composed of the 226 EFL students at a state university in the Turkish context. They were two groups as English-majoring students (n=99) and non-English majoring students (n=127). The groups were selected with purposive sampling method to specify the probable difference between them; however, the questions were distributed to the participants in each group randomly.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participants

Variables		f	%
Age	17-20	158	69.9
	21-24	53	23.5
	25 and over	15	6.6
Gender	Female	119	52.7
	Male	107	47.3
Major	English-major	99	43.8
	Non-English major	127	56.2

Majority of the participants were between 17 and 20, and nearly one fourth of the students ranged from 21 and 24 in terms of age. As for the gender, the participants had more balanced numbers; that is, the number of female students was 119 while that of males 107. The participants were divided into two

groups in terms of major. There were 99 English-majoring students and 127 non-English majoring students in the study.

Data collection tools

The quantitative data were gathered through two different scales. Learner Autonomy Scale (LAS) developed by Orakçı and Gelişli (2017) was used in order to reveal the participants level of autonomous learning towards the English language. It was Likert-type scale with five points ranging from *strongly agree to strongly disagree*. This 14-item scale had one factor structure, with the Cronbach alpha coefficient as .96. The highest score of the scale was 70 while the lowest was 14; thus, higher scores meant high levels of learner autonomy among the students.

As another tool, Lifelong Learning Trends Scale (LLLTS) (Gür Erdoğan & Arsal, 2016) was administered to the participants to identify their tendencies towards lifelong learning. This Likert type scale was comprised of 17 items, and it had two-factor structure as willingness to learn and openness to improvement. The first eleven items were related to willingness to learn whereas the last six items to openness to improvement. The Cronbach coefficient of the scale was .86.

Data analysis

The data collected through the scales were subjected to the quantitative analysis, which was performed via SPSS program. The data were examined using different analysis methods. The descriptive data were presented in means and percentages. In addition, the relations of the learner autonomy and lifelong learning with different variables such as age, gender and major were analyzed with through non-parametric tests such as Mann Whitney-U and Kruskal Wallis because the scores of scales could not pass the normality tests. The relationship between learner autonomy and lifelong learning tendency was revealed through Spearman rank correlation.

Findings

The findings related to learner autonomy and lifelong learning trends were incorporated to provide a general picture and to compare the results in a more comprehensive way.

Table 2. EFL Students' Level of Learner Autonomy and Lifelong Learning Tendencies

Variables	General score	\bar{x}	SD
Learner Autonomy	55.09	3.93	0.034
Lifelong Learning	71.00	4.17	0.281

The learner autonomy scale did not have structure factors; therefore, the general score and mean value of the scale was calculated to identify the level of learner autonomy that EFL students have in learning English. The score was found to be 55.09, which indicated relatively high level of autonomy since the highest score to be taken from the scale was 70. Mean score (3.93) also confirmed this finding. As to the lifelong learning, students seemed to have high level of tendency for lifelong learning with a mean score of 4.17. In terms of sub-dimensions of lifelong learning trends, students were found to have mean scores of 4.05 and 4.40 for *willingness to learn* (WL) and *openness to improvement* (OI) respectively.

Table 3. Mean Scores of the Items in LAS

Items	Min.	Max.	\bar{x}	Sd
LAS1	1	5	4.37	.757
LAS3	1	5	4.34	.812
LAS13	1	5	4.20	.807
LAS2	1	5	4.07	.874
LAS6	1	5	4.03	.928
LAS5	1	5	4.02	.973
LAS11	1	5	3.95	.873
LAS4	1	5	3.93	1.015
LAS9	1	5	3.92	1.078
LAS7	1	5	3.88	1.154
LAS10	1	5	3.74	1.061
LAS8	1	5	3.65	1.115
LAS14	1	5	3.58	1.241
LAS12	1	5	3.40	1.076

The mean scores in Learner Autonomy Scale ranged from 4.37 to 3.40. Students' responses revealed that nearly 80 % of the students wanted to take responsibility in learning English. More specifically, great majority of them wanted to choose the activity (91.6%) and to be given a chance to select the activity in learning English (88.5%) and to express their own opinions in learning process (87.6%). When it comes to selection of the topics to be taught in English class, this number decreased a bit (68.1%). As personal evaluation, they believed that they could identify their own weak (77.5%), strong (77%) points and learning needs (77.4%). As to the study skills, roughly 70% of the students preferred using multimedia tools outside class and reading appropriate books voluntarily. However, although nearly 60% of the students were seen to take risk to communicate in English, about 30% of them remained undecided. Additionally, regarding the teacher-dependent learning, more than half of the students disagreed with the inability to English without teacher.

Table 4. Mean Scores of the Items in LLLTS

Items	Min.	Max.	\bar{x}	Sd
LLTS1 (WL)	2	5	3.99	.709
LLTS2 (WL)	2	5	3.86	.824
LLTS3 (WL)	2	5	4.24	.765
LLTS4 (WL)	2	5	3.50	.949
LLTS5 (WL)	2	5	3.93	.811
LLTS6 (WL)	2	5	3.91	.763
LLTS7 (WL)	2	5	3.82	.830
LLTS8 (WL)	2	5	4.46	.673
LLTS9 (WL)	2	5	4.08	.869
LLTS10 (WL)	2	5	4.15	.749
LLTS11 (WL)	2	5	4.66	.535

LLTS12 (OI)	2	5	4.50	.694
LLTS13 (OI)	2	5	4.54	.626
LLTS14 (OI)	2	5	4.23	.817
LLTS15 (OI)	2	5	4.32	.670
LLTS16 (OI)	2	5	4.26	.781
LLTS17 (OI)	2	5	4.55	.646

Within the frame of *willingness to learn* (WL), almost all of the students viewed learning new things as a way to improve them, and most of them (85.4%) appeared to need continuous learning to update their knowledge and they enjoyed this (90.7%). Likewise, nearly 85 % of the students deemed learning as their own responsibility. Despite some uncertain ideas, more than half of the students perceived themselves as self-confident (70.8%), self-motivated (74.8%) and persistent (65.9%) in learning. Even though more than 70% of the students claimed to set learning goals and prepare necessary sources, only half of them (50.9%) were found to make study plan. As for their profession-related perceptions within the scope of *openness to improvement* (OI), most of the students listed their wish to get trainings for personal and professional development (93.8%) and professional incompetency (84.5%), their effort to solve the probable problems in the profession (91.1%) and their positive attitude towards advancing in the career (82.5%).

Table 5. Kruskal Wallis Test Results for Age

	Age	N	Mean Rank	Df	X ²	p
Learner Autonomy	17-20	158	100.40	2	21.149	.000
	21-24	53	144.25			
	25 and over	15	142.90			
Lifelong Learning	17-20	158	103.34	2	13.195	.001
	21-24	53	140.03			
	25 and over	15	126.80			
WL	17-20	158	102.78	2	14.776	.001
	21-24	53	141.63			
	25 and over	15	127.03			
OI	17-20	158	106.09	2	7.002	.030
	21-24	53	132.22			
	25 and over	15	125.40			

The levels of learner autonomy, lifelong learning tendency and its sub-dimensions were examined in terms of age, and students between 21 and 24 were found to have higher levels of learner autonomy in learning English and lifelong learning. It was followed by those who were 25 and over. This difference was also found as statistically significant for autonomy, lifelong learning in general and willingness to learn specifically ($p < .005$).

Table 6. Mann Whitney-U Test Results for Gender

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Learner Autonomy	Female	119	118.40	14090.0	5783.0	.234
	Male	107	108.05	11561.0		
Lifelong Learning	Female	119	119.68	14242.5	5630.5	.133
	Male	107	106.62	11408.5		
WL	Female	119	121.30	14435.5	5437.5	.058
	Male	107	104.82	11215.5		
OI	Female	119	116.20	13827.5	6045.5	.509
	Male	107	110.50	11823.5		

Although not statistically significant ($p > .005$), another finding indicated that female students had higher levels of learner autonomy, lifelong learning tendencies including it two dimensions.

Table 7. Mann Whitney-U Test Results for Major

	Major	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Learner Autonomy	English	99	132.89	13156.0	4367.0	.000
	Non-English	127	98.39	12495.0		
Lifelong Learning	English	99	122.15	12093.0	5430.0	.079
	Non-English	127	106.76	13558.0		
WL	English	99	123.10	12186.5	5336.5	.051
	Non-English	127	106.02	13464.5		
OI	English	99	119.88	11868.5	5654.5	.191
	Non-English	127	108.52	13782.5		

The major that students were enrolled in also caused difference; that is, English-majoring students were found to have greater levels of learner autonomy and lifelong learning tendencies. The difference in learning English autonomously presented itself as statistically significant, as well ($p < .005$).

Table 8. Correlation between Learner Autonomy and Lifelong Learning

Variables	N	R	p
Learner Autonomy Lifelong Learning	226	.583	.000

The relationship between learner autonomy and lifelong learning was found to be positive and moderately strong. Thus, the greater autonomy in learning English students had the higher tendencies for lifelong learning they would show. This positive relationship was also identified as statistically significant ($p < .005$).

Discussion

The present study revisited the notions of English learning autonomy and lifelong learning tendencies at tertiary level in the Turkish context. Both English-majoring and non-English majoring students

participated in the study. The levels of English learning autonomy and lifelong learning tendencies, the probable differences that age, gender and major caused in those levels and the relationship between learner autonomy and lifelong learning were presented quantitatively.

The participating students seemed to have relatively high levels of English learning autonomy and not to prefer teacher-dependent learning. This could result from being a university student since higher education encourages students to take greater responsibilities for their learning compared to middle or high schools and to sustain their learning habits beyond classroom walls. This finding was in line with the other studies in Turkish and global contexts with the undergraduates who had high levels of beliefs about language learning autonomy (Orawiatnakul and Wichadee, 2017; Tran, 2020; Ünal, Çeliköz & Sarı, 2017; Yıldırım, 2008). In the present study, most of the students were willing to assume responsibilities in learning English and to take part especially in selection and decision-making process. Involvement in negotiation process increases sense of responsibility, promotes closer bonds between learner and teacher and makes learning more meaningful and purposeful process (Martin Celis & Cárdenas, 2014); therefore, students should be given opportunity to voice their choices related to their own learning and this could also allow them to enjoy the process more. Actually, such an involvement in decision making increases not only students' sense of motivation and ownership but also their tendency to obey the rules and academic performance (Mati, Gatumu & Chandi, 2016). They also perceived themselves as capable of self-evaluation. As in learner autonomy, university students had high levels of lifelong learning and highly positive beliefs about it. They viewed continuous learning as essential to update their knowledge and also gave importance to professional development and advancing in their career. Students construct and shape their own conceptions about their future profession and career better while studying at university; thus, higher education institutions need to promote students' readiness for lifelong learning both in theory and practice. Given that the construction of lifelong learning strategy at university level is quite significant (Milic, 2013), higher education is supposed to enable students to self-regulate their own learning not only in classrooms but also in real-life vocational environments (Cremers, Wals, Wesselink, Nieveen & Mulder, 2014) and integrate lifelong learning skills into educational objectives (Güven, 2020). However, when it comes to making study plans, the students in the present study did not show high tendency. Actually, making plan is one of the important steps in managing and regulating one's own learning. Students may not be aware of its role in learning and not accustomed to planning their studies; therefore, the instructors could help them to gain this habit through simple exercises embedded into daily activities. This way, students could understand planning before starting could be time-saving, instead of being time-consuming.

Different factors had roles in differences in terms of students' perceived levels of English learning autonomy and lifelong learning orientations. For instance, age caused statistically significant difference. Students between 21 and 24 had the highest learner autonomy and lifelong learning levels, and they were followed by those who were 25 and over. It showed that university experience had a positive effect on gaining autonomous and lifelong learning habits. They could also be unaware of the importance of these constructs, and as they got more conscious and adjusted to the university life, they perceived themselves as more autonomous individuals. As Fazey and Fazey (2001) noted, students could be cautious and unsure about their capabilities to fulfill the demands of higher education in the first year, and in fact students arrive at university with a potential for autonomous learning; thus, cultivating undergraduate potential could yield in learner autonomy.

Likewise, students' levels of autonomous and lifelong learning demonstrated differences in terms of gender though not statistically significant. Female students had higher English learning autonomy and

lifelong learning tendency. Other studies (Varol & Yilmaz, 2010) investigated the relationship between learner autonomy and gender and concluded that though there were no significant differences between the types of autonomous learning activities that males and females participated, females tended to engage in a greater number of activities than males. Also, the meta-analysis conducted by Öz (2022) for 51 studies indicated that lifelong learning tendencies were significant, positively correlated and in favor of females. The reasons behind such results in favor of females could be that females are given greater responsibilities since their childhood and they would like to obtain more opportunities through effort and persistence in learning and especially through higher education. This way, they could make more changes in the society.

As for the major, English-majoring students had higher level of language learning autonomy than non-English majoring students and this difference was statistically significant. Cabugsa (2022) also found English-major students highly autonomous in learning English, and thus ready for lifelong learning. Actually, doing well in learning English encourages students to be more accountable and to assume some control over their learning; hence, enhancing students' achievement in English is paramount to motivate and consequently allow them to turn into autonomous learners responsible for their own learning or at least sharing the responsibility with their instructors (Abdel Razeq, 2014). Higher lifelong learning propensity belonged to the English-majoring students, as well, although this difference was not statistically significant. This result was also in line with the study conducted by Elaldı (2015). Therefore, it is possible to note that higher level of English knowledge could act as a catalyst for lifelong learning. Given that learning English cannot be confined to a specific period of time, it is safe to say that motivation to learn English could be an indicator of motivation for lifetime learning.

The present inquiry also found a positively moderate and statistically significant relationship between English learning autonomy and lifelong learning tendency. Similarly, in other studies (Badak & Şenel, 2022; Yurdakul, 2017) autonomous learning had a positive and significant interaction with lifelong learning. As a matter of fact, they are so interrelated that lifelong learning could be used partly synonymous with autonomous learning (İnez, 2006) and autonomy in learning helps students to get equipped with lifelong learning skills (Chakim, Widiati & Prayogo, 2022). In other words, one of the principal goals of learner autonomy is to boost lifelong learning competencies because development of autonomy increases students' tendency to assume their learning and professional development as a lifetime act (Vázquez, 2016).

All in all, university students had high and positive perceptions about language learning autonomy and lifelong learning. The significant and positive relationship between these constructs displayed that the more learner autonomy the more lifelong learning. The students also seemed to be motivated to assume responsibilities, be a part of language learning process and to consider professional development important. As a consequence, cultivating their tendencies for autonomous language learning constitutes an essential step in encouraging lifelong learning in this globalized and digitalized century.

Conclusion

University graduates equipped with autonomous learning skills are believed to have the ability to compete in professional life during the period of Industrial Revolution 4.0 (Melvina & Julia, 2021). Therefore, learner autonomy should be emphasized and valued not only in theory but also in practice. Given the increasing need to learn English in this era, autonomous language learning presents itself more; thus, both students and instructors should be conscious of language learning autonomy and actual

level of autonomy students have. As Begum (2019) states, lack of awareness about students' own responsibilities could hinder effective language learning in EFL classrooms. Such awareness could promote not only efficiency but also sustainability of learning for a lifetime. To address this issue, instructors should provide students appropriate activities to encourage their autonomy gradually. They could adopt and construct learner-centered classroom climate and volunteer to change their roles where appropriate or share their responsibility. Moreover, an instructor who internalizes the notion of lifelong learning in his/her own life could be a great role-model for the students.

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