

## L2 Learning Effort of Students Majoring in English Language and Literature

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### Abstract

The present study aimed to explore the foreign language (L2) learning effort of students studying English language and literature. The research was designed as a descriptive cross-sectional survey that was administered to a total of 150 undergraduate students. The Foreign Language Learning Effort Scale (FLLES) was used to measure the effort levels of the participants and the research data were analyzed through both parametric and nonparametric statistical tests depending on the normality of population distribution for the FLLES and its subscales. The results revealed that the students often expended effort in their studies, and the dimension of effort with the highest frequency of exertion was the *procedural effort*. As regards the effects of the learner characteristics determined for the study, the students' age and perceived English language proficiency did not result in differences in their L2 learning effort levels whereas gender and year of study influenced the frequency of the exerted effort. Female students scored higher than their male peers did, and the L2 learning effort the student expended decreased as the years of study advanced, excluding that of the seniors who scored highest in overall FLLES and the subscales. The results are discussed and recommendations are provided for further research.

**Keywords:** effort, foreign language learning effort, EFL

## İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Öğrencilerinin Yabancı Dil Öğrenme Çabası

### Öz

Bu çalışma, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı bölümü öğrencilerinin yabancı dil öğrenme çabalarını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Betimsel tarama deseninde gerçekleştirilen araştırmaya toplam 150 lisans öğrencisi katılmıştır. Araştırmaya katılan öğrencilerin yabancı dil öğrenme çabasını ölçmek için Yabancı Dil Öğrenme Çabası Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Araştırma verilerinin analizi ölçek ve alt ölçekler için popülasyon dağılımının normalliği göz önünde bulundurularak parametrik ve parametrik olmayan testler ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler doğrultusunda, öğrencilerin dil öğrenme çabasını sıklıkla gösterdiği ve prosedürel çabanın en yüksek düzeyde gösterilen çaba olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Belirlenen öğrenci özelliklerinin çaba üzerindeki etkisine bakıldığında, yaş ve algılanan yabancı dil düzeyinin anlamlı bir etkisi görülmezken cinsiyet ve eğitim yılı değişkenlerine göre öğrenci cevaplarında anlamlı farklılaşma olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Kız öğrencilerin çaba düzeyi erkek öğrencilere oranla daha yüksek bulunmuş; gösterilen dil öğrenme çabasının eğitim yılı ilerledikçe düştüğü, yalnızca son sınıf öğrencilerinin tüm öğrenci grupları arasında en yüksek çaba düzeyine sahip sınıf olduğu belirlenmiştir. Sonuçlar tartışılarak öneriler sunulmuştur.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** çaba, yabancı dil öğrenme çabası, İngilizce öğrenimi

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## INTRODUCTION

Individual effort has been identified as one of the critical factors holding strong association with learning (Carbonaro, 2005) and making substantial contribution to the attainment of academic outcomes (Arratibel & Bueno-Alastuey, 2015; Young, 2011). Students expending higher effort and persistence in classroom tasks are identified with using motivational strategies in higher frequencies (Wolters, 1999). In foreign language (L2) learning context, successful language learners are characterized with acknowledging the necessity of effort in developing effective methods and approaches to learning (Yağcıoğlu, 2015). Student effort has been affiliated with active engagement (Carbonaro, 2005; Noels et al., 2018), and it is further asserted that strategic efforts are typically employed by effective language learners to make the necessary alterations in their learning environments and to enhance their language learning autonomy (Gao, 2010). Since learning effort is evaluated as an internal and controllable construct (Carbonaro, 2005), it is advocated that it should receive higher emphasis over other motivational agencies (Yeung, 2011).

It is quite noticeable in L2 learning literature that effort has commonly been approached as an output of learner traits such as motivation and attitude (Genç & Köksal, 2021; Özer, 2020), and it has been situated as one of the fundamental components of several theories in second language acquisition (SLA) research. According to the Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1985), for instance, effort is recognized as one of the dominant causal determinants credited for past achievements and failures. The Self-Efficacy Theory of Bandura (1977), as another example, discusses the amount of effort as one of the essential indicators of self-efficacy. The learners with higher self-efficacy exert greater effort to attain their learning goals by monitoring, directing and evaluating their own learning processes with higher self-satisfaction and self-worth (Bandura, 2001). Another theoretical approach to L2 learning that highlights effort as an important factor in success is the Goal Orientation Theory. According to the theory, mastery goal orientation, which may be described as the pursuit of knowledge acquisition in order to improve and master skills (Yeung et al., 2014), is grounded on the belief that effort brings success (Ames, 1992). Finally, yet equally importantly, Gardner's (1985) theory of L2 motivation involves effort as one of the fundamental indicators of L2 learning motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Within the framework of the socio-educational model, Gardner (2006) identifies effort as one of the three major components of motivation, the other two being the desire to learn L2 and the attitudes towards learning L2. It is advocated that as learners become more motivated, they expend greater effort for the attainments of their learning goals (Gardner, 2006), and in turn, as they acknowledge the positive relationship between effort and learning outcomes, learners will have long-reaching motivation (Oxford & Shearin, 1994).

Learning effort has so far been conceptually elucidated in two works. In one of these works, Carbonaro (2005, p. 28) defines effort as "the amount of time and energy that students expend in meeting the formal academic requirements established by their teacher and/or school." He conceptualizes learner effort as a multifaceted construct and determines its dimensions as rule-oriented, procedural and intellectual effort. Rule-oriented effort stands for students' complying with the basic school and classroom regulations. Procedural effort refers to students' behaviors intended to meet the requirements of a specific class determined by the teacher. Lastly, intellectual effort is displayed when students are cognitively and intellectually engaged with learning. In another work focusing on learning effort as an independent construct, Bozick and Dempsey (2010, p. 40) define it more concisely as learner behaviors where cognitive and behavioral engagement is manifest. Based on their comprehensive literature review, they contend that effort should be evaluated on two terms: degree and specificity. Based on its degree, learner effort might be procedural or substantive. Procedural effort refers to compliance behaviors, such as following rules at school, behaving in class or submitting an assignment on time. Substantive effort, on the other hand, pertains to more sophisticated student actions such as leading project assignments or arranging extra time for examination preparation. The researchers also acknowledge a third measure of effort: noncompliance. As the name suggests, noncompliance refers to the lack of effort, as in not participating in classes or failing to submit assignments on time. As regards the specificity of effort, learner behaviors are identified as task-oriented or general achievement behaviors. Task-oriented effort is observed when the learner's focus is on a specific task or problem in a particular class while general achievement effort appertains to all endeavors exerted to succeed in school or in a specific class overall (Bozick & Dempsey, 2010).

### Literature Review

Student effort has almost consistently been associated with higher academic performance (Carbonaro, 2005). Despite very few contradictory results (Patron & Lopez, 2011), research has commonly pinpointed a

positive relationship between learner effort and success. For instance, Kelly (2008), who aimed to determine the relationship between learning effort, achievement and grades, confirmed the hypothesis that the substantive engagement and active effort of students produced higher student grades. Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2013) aimed to examine the effects of academic effort on the literacy scores of Canadian science students. The students' academic achievement was positively correlated with both their academic effort and their beliefs about the contributions of effort to their achievement. Examining the relationship between individual effort besides socio-economic background and motivation and student academic achievement in EFL learning, Arratibel and Bueno-Alastuey (2015) concluded that personal effort and motivation correlated more with student achievement than socio-economic background. Lastly, scrutinizing the influence of individual study effort on L2 learning performance in a digital language learning platform, namely Duolingo, Ersoy (2021) determined that effort increased the test scores of the students in that online setting.

In addition to the above-mentioned research measuring the actual effort-success relationship, student perceptions regarding the influence of effort on performance have also been subjected to academic scrutiny. Focusing on the success and failure attributions of tertiary-level Turkish EFL students, Genç (2016) concluded that effort was among the factors to which academic achievement was attributed. It was further determined as the most influential factor attributed to underachievement.

Other studies on learning effort in EFL context have been descriptive in nature. This is exemplified in the study of Özer (2020), who conducted a descriptive survey on the L2 learning effort levels of a group of students taking vocational English course. The study results indicated that the overall L2 effort level of the students was at a moderate-to-high level, and the students displayed moderate-to-high focal effort and procedural effort, moderate substantive effort, and very little non-compliance. The female students reported greater, though not significant, effort. In another descriptive study in a Turkish context of EFL learning, Genç and Köksal (2021) studied foreign language learning effort of digital natives, i.e. a recent term used to refer to those individuals born into the digital technology era and use technology efficiently, and the effects of new media and some learner characteristics on learner effort. Their results revealed high levels of EFL learning effort in general for more than half of the digital natives and significant effects of inclination towards EFL learning, perceived academic success, and the use of media tools and social media sites on effort.

EFL learning effort has also been researched in regard to its relationship with some learner traits and beliefs. Yetkin and Ekin (2018) explored the intended effort and L2 motivation levels of Turkish EFL students and measured the predicting effect of motivational tendencies on the intended effort for L2 learning. The results suggested that the students considered intended effort as the most significant factor in learning English language. Furthermore, the intended effort was mostly predicted by the L2 learning experiences, the ought-to L2 self (an L2 self-image intended to meet the expectations of the outer world) and the ideal L2 self (an idealized self-image competent in the target language with integrative intentions), respectively. Özer and Başarır (2020) examined the correlation between L2 learning effort, self-efficacy and perceived success of EFL learners and the mediator role of effort in self-efficacy and perceived success relationship. Their analysis results indicated that a significant correlation existed between all three constructs and that the L2 learning effort partly mediated the effect of self-efficacy on perceived success.

There still exists a paucity of scholarly work addressing learner effort theoretically in its own right (Bozick & Dempsey, 2010) and as obvious from the literature reviewed above, published empirical research available to date on learner effort in the context of EFL learning is insufficient despite its evidenced association with academic achievement. This paper examines a specific group of EFL learners, more specifically the English philology students, with the purpose of determining their learning effort levels besides the effects of some learner characteristics on learning effort. The study is significant as it aims to add to the limited body of work on L2 learning effort and inform the scope of further theoretical and empirical research as well as practice in EFL classrooms in English-major departments by providing a descriptive account of the subject. The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the L2 learning effort levels of students majoring in English language and literature?
2. Does the students' L2 learning effort differ across the groups of gender, age, year of study and perceived English proficiency?

## METHOD

### Research Design

The present study was conducted in a quantitative survey design. Researchers prefer using quantitative surveys when they aim to generalize results from sample groups to larger populations to draw inferences regarding some characteristics, attitudes or behaviors of these populations (Creswell, 2014). In this study, a questionnaire survey was administered as it was highly cost-effective and time-saving for the researcher to obtain data from the target group of students in the given time.

### Participants

The students majoring in English language and literature at a state university in Türkiye were selected as the population of the study. Total population sampling method, which refers to including all members of the target population in the data collection process, was considered to be appropriate for the scope of the research since the research population was not adequately extensive to select a sample group from it. Hence, the students from all years of study in the department were informed about the purpose and scope of the study besides anonymity and confidentiality matters, and were requested to participate in the survey. A total of 150 volunteer students provided responses to the survey. The descriptive results regarding the personal information of these students are provided in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Results of Participant Information

		f	%
Gender	Female	108	72.0
	Male	38	25.3
	Missing	4	2.7
Age	18-22	118	78.7
	23 and above	30	20.0
	Missing	2	1.3
Year of Study	Preparatory	52	34.7
	Freshmen	33	22.0
	Sophomores	34	22.7
	Juniors	27	18.0
	Seniors	4	2.7
Perceived proficiency	L2 Low	19	12.7
	Intermediate	117	78.0
	High	13	8.7
	Missing	1	0.7
Total		150	100

As illustrated in Table 1, the female students (72.0 %) constituted almost two-thirds of the respondents while the male students were much fewer (25.3 %) in number. As for the students' ages, two groups were determined for analysis in the study: those between the ages of 18 and 22 were in the first group and those students at or over the age of 23 were in the second. The descriptive results showed that the students between the ages of 18-22 were in majority (78.7 %) whereas the students who were 23 years old or older were only one-fifth (20.0 %) of participants overall. As regards their years of study, the students were in five groups and the group with the highest number of participants was preparatory year (34.7 %) in the department, followed by the sophomores (22.7 %), the freshmen (22.0%) and the juniors (18.0 %), who had close participant members. The seniors (2.7 %), however, were quite few in number. As a matter of fact, the number of students studying at the final year in the department is only four in total. The students were also requested to state their perceptions regarding their English language proficiency. They were asked to choose from levels 1 to 6, but their responses were cumulated and evaluated in three levels as low, intermediate and high. The students who perceived themselves at intermediate level (78.0 %) were more than two-thirds of the total number. Those students finding their L2 proficiency level low (12.7 %) and high (8.7 %) were similarly much less in number.

### Data Collection

The research data was collected through a questionnaire form consisting of two sections, the first interrogating personal information and the second presenting the Foreign Language Learning Effort Scale (FLLES) developed by Karabiyik and Mirici (2018). The personal information the students were asked to provide included their gender, age, year of study, perceived English proficiency and high school department (foreign language department or the others) as mentioned above. The FLLES was designed as a 5-point Likert-type scale comprising 34 items and four dimensions. The dimensions in the scale were determined as procedural effort (items 4, 10, and 16), substantive effort (items 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, and 15), focal effort (items 6, 12, and 17) and non-compliance (items 2, 8, 14). Procedural effort entails engagement in classroom-specific requirements such as joining in classroom tasks and completing assignments. Substantive effort connotes being actively involved in the language learning process. Focal effort, as the third dimension, comprises attentive learner behaviors in the L2 classroom. Lastly, non-compliance dimension encompasses behaviors impeding the effort to be displayed in L2 learning (Karabiyik & Mirici, 2018).

### Data Analysis

The reliability of the scale was established with the internal consistency analysis ( $\alpha = .85$ ) and test-retest reliability analysis ( $r = .86$ ,  $n = 64$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), and the validity was assured with exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses with satisfactory fit for the four-factor (60.77 % of total variance explained) model besides predictive validity analysis and convergent and discriminant validity analyses (Karabiyik & Mirici, 2018). For the present study, the Cronbach's alpha value for the scale was determined to be .83, indicating that it was a reliable data collection tool.

The research data was collected in the autumn semester of the 2022-2023 academic year upon research ethics committee approval. The data set was transferred to statistical analysis software. Firstly, negatively worded items were reverse-coded and the missing values were replaced with mean scores. This could be possible owing to the fact that the percentage of these values in total data set was lower than 2 % (Seçer, 2015). Initial analyses were carried out to determine the normality of distribution among the data. The normality test results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Results of the Tests of Normality

Scale /Subscale	N	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Results	Skewness	Kurtosis
L2 learning effort	150	.200	-.35	.25
Procedural effort	150	.000*	-1.00	1.66
Substantive effort	150	.000*	-.10	.09
Focal effort	150	.072	-.54	.00
Non-compliance	150	.000*	-.91	.05

\* $p < .05$

In the evaluation of population distribution, normality was tested via Skewness and Kurtosis values and the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov analysis. The acceptable Skewness and Kurtosis values were determined to be between +1.5 and -1.5 as suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013). As Table 2 demonstrates, all values for the overall FLLES signified a normally distributed population. However, Kurtosis value for the procedural effort subscale was not within this range. As the Kolmogorov-Smirnov results also showed a departure from normality ( $p < .05$ ), it was determined that population distribution for this subscale may not be normal. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov results for other two subscales, namely substantive effort and non-compliance, similarly displayed divergence from normality ( $p < .05$ ). As a result, non-parametric inferential analyses were used in the study when the effects of the independent variables (gender, age, year of study, and perceived L2 proficiency) on responses to these subscales were tested.

### Research Ethics

This study was undertaken cautiously with respect to research ethics. Research data were collected after the research ethics committee approval was granted and the participants were informed about the purpose and scope of the study and the voluntary and anonymous nature of the data collection process.

## FINDINGS

The determination of English language and literature department students' foreign language learning effort levels was the primary purpose of the current research. With the purpose of answering the first research question, descriptive analyses were conducted to establish the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values for the overall FLLES scale and the subscales. The results are disclosed in Table 3 below. The mean values at the interval of 1.00-1.80 represented the frequency of "never" whereas those between 1.81-2.60 were interpreted as "rarely"; 2.61-3.40 as "sometimes"; 3.41-4.20 as "often"; and 4.21-5.00 as "always".

**Table 3.** Results of Descriptive Analyses for FLLES and its Subscales

Scale /Subscale	N	Min	Max	$\bar{X}$	SD
L2 learning effort	150	2.12	5.00	3.86	.52
Procedural effort	150	1.00	5.00	4.16	.70
Substantive effort	150	1.50	5.00	3.56	.64
Focal effort	150	1.67	5.00	3.95	.70
Non-compliance	150	1.67	5.00	4.26	.77

According to the results depicted in Table 3, the overall L2 learning effort level of the students was in "often" interval ( $\bar{X}$ =3.86). As regards the effort sub-dimensions, the highest mean value was identified for the non-compliance ( $\bar{X}$ =4.26). As the item scores for this subscale were reverse coded during the calculation of the total scale, it has to be noted that the results should be reverse-interpreted in that the high mean score indicated very low levels of non-compliance, to be precise, standing for the "never" frequency. In other words, the students indeed reported that they hardly ever exhibited non-compliance behaviours. Another subscale with a high scoring was the procedural effort ( $\bar{X}$ =4.16). The students, according to self-reports, very frequently, almost always, exerted procedural effort in L2 learning. The other two dimensions of effort, focal and substantive, were also within the "often" interval, although with lower mean values ( $\bar{X}$ =3.95 and  $\bar{X}$ =3.56, respectively). Consequently, it was concluded that the students participating in the study reported that they frequently exerted effort to learn English as a foreign language.

With the aim of answering the second research question, the differences in the EFL students' L2 learning effort according to some learner variables were elaborated. The students' gender was the first variable tested with respect to its effects on responses. Independent samples t-test was used in the analyses of responses to overall FLLES and focal effort subscale, and Mann-Whitney U test was applied to the responses to procedural effort, substantive effort and non-compliance subscales.

**Table 4.** Independent samples t-test and Mann-Whitney U Results for Gender as a Variable

Scale /Subscale	Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
L2 learning effort	Female	108	3.94	.46	3.04	.032*
	Male	38	3.64	.63		
Focal effort	Female	108	4.02	.64	2.63	.005**
	Male	38	3.73	.80		
			Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	p
Substantive effort	Female	108	78.78	8508.00	1482.00	.011*
	Male	38	58.50	2223.00		
Procedural effort	Female	108	80.73	8719.00	1271.00	.000***
	Male	38	52.95	2012.00		
Non-compliance	Female	108	74.25	8019.50	1970.50	.708
	Male	38	71.36	2711.50		

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

The findings showed that gender was a significant factor in the determination of the students' L2 learning effort both in general and in focal, substantive and procedural effort dimensions (p<.05). For all constructs, female students scored higher than their male peers, demonstrating higher L2 learning effort (Table 4). The only subscale for which the difference across genders was insignificant was the non-compliance, yet this subscale also received higher ranking from female students.

The students' age was another factor tested for its relation to their responses to FLLES. As the respondent ages were evaluated in two groups, Independent samples t-test and Mann-Whitney U were used as statistical analyses. The results are displayed in Table 5 below.

**Table 5.** Independent samples t-test and Mann-Whitney U Results for Age as a Variable

Scale /Subscale	Age	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
L2 learning effort	18-22	118	3.86	.50	-.21	.828
	23 & older	30	3.88	.60		
Focal effort	18-22	118	3.94	.69	-.46	.643
	23 & older	30	4.01	.76		
			Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	p
Substantive effort	18-22	118	76.83	9066.50	1552.50	.188
	23 & older	30	65.32	1959.50		
Procedural effort	18-22	118	71.11	8391.50	1370.50	.053
	23 & older	30	87.82	2634.50		
Non-compliance	18-22	118	72.66	8573.50	1552.50	.287
	23 & older	30	81.75	2452.50		

From Table 5 above, it can be concluded that the difference in the students' responses to FLLES and the subscales across age groups was insignificant ( $p > .05$ ), indicating that age was not a noteworthy factor influencing the students' L2 learning effort.

Measuring the effect of the students' year of study in the department on their self-reported L2 learning effort was another purpose of the study. The students participating in the survey were from five different levels, the preparatory year included; and therefore, One-Way ANOVA and its nonparametric counterpart, Kruskal Wallis H were utilized in the determination of the significance of differences in student responses resulting from their years of study. Homogeneity of variance was confirmed for the One-Way ANOVA test ( $p > .05$ ).

**Table 6.** One-Way ANOVA and Kruskal Wallis H Results for Year of Study as a Variable

Scale /Subscale	Year of Study	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	F	p
L2 learning effort	Prep	52	3.97	.53	3.41	.011*
	1	33	3.80	.53		
	2	34	3.81	.41		
	3	27	3.67	.54		
	4	4	4.52	.31		
Focal effort	Prep	52	3.96	.74	.54	.667
	1	33	3.99	.66		
	2	34	3.87	.57		
	3	27	3.91	.81		
	4	4	4.41	.78		
			Mean Rank		$\chi^2$	p
Substantive effort	Prep	52	92.21		28.80	.000**
	1	33	77.09			
	2	34	62.82			
	3	27	48.46			
	4	4	135.38			
Procedural effort	Prep	52	74.39		6.86	.143
	1	33	61.94			
	2	34	78.10			
	3	27	87.17			
	4	4	100.88			
Non-compliance	Prep	52	75.51		8.16	.086
	1	33	63.41			
	2	34	89.18			
	3	27	69.41			
	4	4	100.00			

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .001$

The comparison of mean scores across groups indicated varying levels of significance in the relationship between L2 learning effort and its dimensions and year of study (Table 6). As regards the overall L2 learning effort, a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) was observed in the mean scores in favour of the senior students. The mean values of the other four groups displayed a partly negative year-effort relationship where L2 learning effort partially decreased (a very slight difference was observed between the rankings of sophomores and juniors) as the year of study advanced. On the subscale level, no significant difference was observed for procedural and focal effort and non-compliance behaviours whereas substantive effort levels were significantly different according to the year of study. In a similar vein with the results for general L2 learning effort, this dimension also received the highest ranking from the seniors whereas the scores of the other four groups of students were in a negative relation with year of study. In other words, substantive effort levels regressed as the years advanced when the scores of these four groups (preparatory year students, freshmen, sophomores and juniors) were considered.

The self-perceived proficiency in English language was another factor tested with respect to its influence on the participant students' responses to the scale. As L2 proficiency was evaluated at three levels (low, intermediate and high) in the study, One-Way ANOVA was applied to the overall FLLES and the focal effort subscale since they had normally distributed populations, whereas Kruskal Wallis H was adopted as the analysis of testing the relationship for the subscales with irregularly distributed populations. Homogeneity of variance was confirmed for the One-Way ANOVA test ( $p > .05$ ). Table 7 below illustrates the analysis results

**Table 7.** One-Way ANOVA and Kruskal Wallis H Results for Perceived Proficiency as a Variable

Scale /Subscale	Perceived proficiency	L2	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	F	p
L2 learning effort	Low		19	3.74	.52	.60	.547
	Intermediate		117	3.88	.50		
	High		13	3.82	.74		
Focal effort	Low		19	4.03	.55	.56	.568
	Intermediate		117	3.95	.70		
	High		13	3.76	.90		
				Mean Rank		$\chi^2$	p
Substantive effort	Low		19	69.92		.54	.762
	Intermediate		117	75.12			
	High		13	81.31			
Procedural effort	Low		19	59.74		2.81	.245
	Intermediate		117	77.38			
	High		13	75.85			
Non-compliance	Low		19	60.66		2.78	.248
	Intermediate		117	77.71			
	High		13	71.62			

The results revealed that the values for general effort and its dimensions showed slight and negligible differences across the groups of proficiency levels (Table 7). It was, therefore, concluded that the students' perceptions about their L2 levels did generate hardly any difference in the effort they exerted in learning English ( $p > .05$ ).

To summarize, findings from this study enabled descriptive and inferential conclusions regarding the EFL learning effort of students of English language and literature at a state university in Türkiye. The descriptive findings revealed a moderate-to-high frequency of EFL learning effort. The inferential findings demonstrated significant differences for the variables of gender and year of study while age and perceived English proficiency did not produce any difference in student responses. Female students displayed higher levels of effort than their male counterparts did and as for the year of study, the seniors showed highest frequency of effort. The findings will be interpreted in the light of available research.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Effort has been recognized as a crucial indicator of favorable learner characteristics including higher motivation, self-efficacy beliefs and positive attitudes in the field of SLA, yet research on L2 learning effort has been mostly restricted to this subsidiary role, and little attention has been paid to characterize and describe it in its own right. It was not until recent years that learning effort was empirically investigated as an independent construct



(Ersoy, 2021; Genç & Köksal, 2021; Karabıyık & Mirici, 2018; Özer & Başarır, 2020). This study set out to explore the L2 learning effort of a group of tertiary-level EFL learners and the significance of some learner variables in determining the students' effort levels. The students participating in the study were enrolled in English language and literature program at a state university in the eastern region of Türkiye. Research data were gathered via the FLLES developed by Karabıyık and Mirici (2018). The students reported that they "often" ( $M=3.89$ ) expended effort in their L2 studies. This may be evaluated as a satisfactory result. However, when the specific setting and the characteristics of the subject group in the study are taken into consideration, the result is below the expectations.

As an academic actively lecturing in the department, the researcher acknowledges that the majority of the students in the department had low language proficiency scores when they were placed in the department and the communicative competence of the students is not generally improved to the levels necessary for meeting the requirements of the department even after one-year preparatory program. The students commonly experience difficulties in comprehending the content of literature courses delivered with English medium instruction. It is therefore of utmost importance for these students to exert high, even extra effort to overcome their insufficiencies and augment their L2 skills as the significance of individual effort in developing academic and literacy skills has been established in previous research (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2013; Arratibel & Bueno-Alastuey, 2015; Carbonaro, 2005; Ersoy, 2021; Kelly, 2008). Furthermore, substantive effort, which connotes the integrative, self-directed and therefore more sophisticated aspect of effort, received the lowest ranking whereas procedural effort, which is characterized with task-oriented behaviors, was reported to be exerted with the highest frequency. This result implies that the students more frequently approached to language learning as a task to be fulfilled than as a process to be internalized and accomplished with the attainment of learning outcomes. A follow-up research on the individual, social and/or contextual factors impeding the students' engagement and exertion of higher effort could provide an insight for attempts to escalate the L2 learning effort levels.

The study results also provided information regarding the effects of the students' gender, age, year of study and perceived L2 proficiency on their EFL learning effort. The results did not imply significant differences across age and perceived L2 proficiency groups. On the other hand, gender was found to be a significant factor in determining the amount of expended effort. Female students reported apparently higher L2 learning effort than the male students in the department. This result corroborates previous research. Kelly (2008) similarly found that girls outperformed boys with respect to the effort they exerted in their studies. Yeung (2011) also investigated student effort in schoolwork in Australian primary and secondary schools and found student effort to be higher for female students. Examining Canadian native and immigrant students' study efforts, Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2013) also found that female students displayed higher study efforts when compared to male students, attributing more of their success to effort, and producing higher grades and higher literacy scores. In a Turkish EFL context, Yetkin and Ekin (2018) found significant differences in intended effort levels of secondary school students across gender groups in favor of female students. Similarly, Genç and Köksal (2021) reported that gender was one of the individual factors resulting in significant differences in the extent of EFL learning effort exerted by digital natives, and females were the group demonstrating greater effort. As previously mentioned in this paper, effort has been associated substantially with motivation in and positive attitudes towards L2 learning, and gender-related research in SLA has mostly pinpointed higher motivation (Ryan, 2009) and more positive attitudes (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Ellis, 1994) for female foreign language learners. It is, therefore, possible to explain the higher effort levels for female students with the effects of such other closely-associated personal factors. Further gender-focused correlational studies taking effort as a separate construct might shed more light on this relationship.

The students' year of proficiency was another factor producing significant differences in the students' L2 learning effort levels. The senior students reported the highest L2 learning effort. It has to be noted here that the number of students at this grade was only four and that three of these students were international students coming from Ghana, an officially English-speaking country. The inequality in the number of group members and the potential difference in language learning motivation and many other characteristics of these students when compared to their Turkish peers makes it difficult to infer assertive conclusions. On the other hand, when the results from the other four groups of students were evaluated, a decrease was observed in advancing years of study. The preparatory year students displayed the highest level of effort whereas juniors showed effort in the lowest frequency. Several studies disclosed similar results. Yeung (2011) reported lower levels of effort from students from higher grades. Similarly, Yetkin and Ekin (2018) recorded a steady decrease in student effort in higher grades of school. This result may also be related to some extent to the students' motivation. As motivation is highly related with effort, so might be demotivation. Research has shown that demotivation in foreign language learning decreases as students advance to higher grades of education (Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Falout et al., 2009). The

determination and elimination of demotivating factors might contribute to the prevention of the grade-led decline in L2 learning effort. Specifically focusing the on demotivation and effort relationship with further research might provide more accurate and explicit implications regarding this argument.

### **Limitations**

The present study bears some methodological limitations to be acknowledged. The most noteworthy of all is that the results of the study are based on student self-reports which hold the potential for response bias. Secondly, the conclusions drawn are limited to data from one single data collection tool, a quantitative survey. Further research might utilize from triangulated approaches. Lastly, the study results are delimited to a convenience sample in a particular context and they should not be considered generalizable.

### **Statements of Publication Ethics**

The author declares obedience to the principles of publication ethics. An approval was granted for the present study by Iğdır University Research and Publication Ethics Committee with the document number E-37077861-900-87068 on December 14, 2022.

### **Researchers' Contribution Rate**

The author as the single contributor of the research designed, conducted and reported the overall study.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author discloses no conflict of interest.

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