

Turkish EFL Learners' Perceptions of the European Language Portfolio as a Self-Assessment Tool

Demet Kulaç Püren¹

İsmail Hakkı Mirici²

To cite this article:

Kulaç Püren, D. & Mirici, İ. H. (2025). Turkish EFL learners' perceptions of the European language portfolio as a self-assessment tool. *e-Kafkas Journal of Educational Research*, 12, 541-556. doi:10.30900/kafkasegt.1487998

Research article

Received: 22.05.2024


Accepted: 25.08.2025

Abstract

This study investigated using the European Language Portfolio (ELP) in foreign language classes with a focus on learners' perceptions about using it as a self-assessment tool. It was also within the scope of this study to find out whether instruction in the use of the ELP had an impact on learners' views about using it. Participants were 160 tertiary level students from a state university on the Black Sea Coast of Turkey. This quasi-experimental study was based on a mixed-methods research design, making use of both quantitative and qualitative data. An *ELP Opinionnaire* developed by the researcher was administered after the ELP instruction whose aim was to inform the participants about the ELP use and raise awareness of its use, function and benefits. Semi-structured interviews were held with 12 participants who were chosen on a voluntary basis in order to validate the quantitative data. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 29, and the qualitative data was analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings revealed that the way self-assessment via the ELP is implemented is a factor affecting learners' perceptions.

Keywords: the European Language Portfolio, self-assessment, perceptions, effective self-assessment implementation

¹  Corresponding Author, demetkulacpuren@gmail.com, Bülent Ecevit University, School of Foreign Languages, Zonguldak, Turkey.

²  Author, Hacettepe University, Faculty of Education, Ankara, Turkey.

Introduction

Learner-centered approaches to language teaching have gained in considerable importance in foreign language instruction, assigning a major role to self-assessment in language classrooms. Self-assessment can be described as the evaluation or judgment of the value of one's performance and the identification of one's strengths and weaknesses with a view of improving one's learning outcomes (Klenowski, 1995). As Little (2005) suggests self-assessment should be integrated with other forms of assessment to ensure learner-centeredness. Self-assessment has been assumed to be effective for promoting self-directed learning and autonomy (Butler & Lee, 2010; Dann, 2002). It is also considered to be a main factor that maintains student attention and interest as well.

The progressively widespread adoption of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) across Europe has made a culture of self-assessment a more essential part of language teaching programs due to its close relation to learner autonomy, which is one of the key concepts highlighted by the CEFR. Learner autonomy, which has broadly been defined as the ability to manage one's own learning and to critically reflect on their learning process (Holec, as cited in Kristmanson et al., 2011), is viewed as a crucial condition of efficient life-long learning, another important notion put forward by the CEFR (Little, 2005).

Self-assessment is usually brought into language classrooms in two different ways: learners are either provided with a form to evaluate themselves, or are guided to keep portfolios, which is a more common and central way of self-assessment. With the help of portfolios, learners take responsibility of their own learning and recognize the gaps in their learning (Ekbatani, 2000).

The biggest contribution to the development of self-assessment in foreign language teaching and learning is made by the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and European Language Portfolio (ELP) (Little, 2005). ELP is an instructional language learning and reporting instrument in which students keep a record of their language learning experience (Kohonen, 2000). It consists of three sections: (1) the language passport (2) the language biography (3) the dossier. The language passport section is a summary of the learner's linguistic identity and intercultural experience. The language biography part provides learners with "I can" checklists to reflect on their learning and to support goal setting. The 'can-do' statements are in line with the CEFR descriptors for each level and each skill. Finally, the dossier is the section where learners keep their language-related work as evidences of their language learning achievement.

Motivation and attitudes are considered to be closely related as attitudes are viewed as strong predictors of motivated learning behaviors (Dörnyei, 2006; Masgoret et. al., 2001). Positive or negative orientations toward a particular issue offer clues about how individuals are likely to behave in that context and because of this predictive role, the study of attitudes is considered a vital field of inquiry (Akcan & Ablak, 2024). It is suggested that autonomous learners who can take decisions as to their learning and who take active part in the learning process develop positive attitudes, which, in return, is expected to result in a high level of motivation (Fazey & Fazey, 2001). Self-assessment has been assumed to be effective for promoting self-directed learning and autonomy (Butler & Lee, 2010; Dann, 2002), which implies that integrating self-assessment into language learning process may have an influence on developing positive attitudes towards language learning. Similarly, it is also stated that positive attitudes are needed for learner autonomy (Fazey & Fazey, 2001), revealing the fact that learner autonomy and positive attitudes are interrelated. Factors such as beliefs and opinions are known to be strong determiners of learners' behaviors as well as their performance (Kara, 2009). Similarly, these affective factors form the basis for attitudes which are also crucial elements in people's behaviors (Dörnyei, 2006). In that sense, it is crucial to generate positive opinions as an initial step of the acceptance of a new method or strategy.

The adoption of the ELP in the educational institutions in Turkey can be considered to be a challenge since the self-assessment culture is quite a new concept in Turkish educational setting. Although self-assessment is about involving students into the assessment process and sharing the responsibility, it should be noted that learner training, tutoring, guidance and feedback are essential for a fruitful reflection (Glover et al., 2005). Little (2005) argues that for learners who are used to traditional teacher-led instruction, it is not possible to talk about accurate self-assessment without any training.

Therefore, Turkish learners, whose experience of formal instruction have been largely based on traditional methods, may benefit from the ELP as a self-assessment tool extensively on the condition that they receive some kind of instruction about its use rather than being forced to make use of it somehow unconsciously.

A number of studies have been conducted on the ELP, investigating different dimensions of self-assessment and the ELP itself as a self-assessment tool. There are studies examining the validity of self-assessment (Ross, 1998); the effect of different self-assessment tools on students' attitudes towards learning English (Şentürk, 2017); the evaluation of the use of the ELP (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002); the implementation of the ELP in a Turkish context (Yılmaz & Akcan, 2011); the ELP and learner autonomy (Little, 2009a). However, to the best knowledge of the researcher, there are few studies exploring students' opinions about using the ELP as a self-assessment tool (Perclová 2006; Yılmaz & Akcan 2011), but there are no existing studies that specifically examines the impact of ELP-focused training combined with teacher support on students' perceptions and acceptance of the portfolio. In line with this, the present study aims to explore what Turkish EFL learners' views about using the ELP as a self-assessment tool are. It is also another purpose of the study to find out whether training about self-assessment and teacher guidance has an effect on learners' views of it. What distinguishes the present study from the previous literature is its focus on learners' perceptions of the ELP specifically as a self-assessment tool, combined with an experimental investigation into the impact of explicit training and sustained teacher support. Unlike earlier studies that primarily evaluated the implementation or theoretical underpinnings of the ELP, this research adopts a mixed-methods design to provide both quantitative and qualitative evidence on how structured pedagogical interventions may shape learner attitudes. Therefore, it not only fills a gap in terms of empirical data on learner perceptions, but also contributes practical insights into how ELP-related training can enhance the effectiveness of self-assessment in EFL contexts.

The present study has two main purposes. First, it aims to explore the existing views of students towards the use of the ELP, and second, attempts to discover whether awareness raising through instruction in the use of the ELP has an impact on students' opinions about using the ELP. Thus, this study is initiated to offer an insight into the use of the ELP effectively with regard to learner views and the way it is implemented.

Based on the results of the study, the tertiary level EFL learners' views on using the ELP are explored. Having knowledge of learner opinions is believed to be important since they affect the extent to which learners benefit from a learning practice. What is more, the effects of CERF&ELP-related instruction on learners' opinions is put forward. On the condition that the instruction proves to have a positive effect, it may become a prerequisite for an effective ELP implementation.

Research Questions

1. What are Turkish tertiary level EFL learners' opinions about the use of the ELP?
2. Does instruction about the use of the ELP and teacher guidance influence students' opinions about keeping it as a self-assessment tool?

Method

The Research Design

The present study deals with the use of European Language Portfolio (ELP) in foreign language classes in two ways: learners' opinions to self-assessing themselves using it, and the effect of training and teacher guidance on their opinions. Hence, it is an experimental research as it seeks to put forward the possible effect of a specific treatment on an outcome. The treatment in this study consisted of a structured pedagogical approach combining both initial training and continuous teacher support. The training component involved an informative session with a video presentation that explained the purpose and structure of the European Language Portfolio (ELP), as well as its function as a self-assessment tool. During this session, students were guided on how to reflect on their learning and complete portfolio tasks effectively. In addition to this, regular in-class time was allocated for teacher-led portfolio checks, where learners could ask questions and receive feedback. This combination of explicit instruction and teacher scaffolding aimed to ensure that students engaged meaningfully with

the ELP throughout the term. Experimental research aims to obtain several beneficial insights into causal relations between dependent and independent variables (Creswell, 2012). In experimental designs, the independent variable is manipulated by the researchers by using a different method. One method is to present or absent a technique (Johnson & Christensen, 2010), in which the participants in the experimental group receive an intervention whereas the participants in the control group do not. The independent variable, instruction in the use of the ELP combined with teacher scaffolding, is only given to the experimental group, and both groups will be measured on the same dependent variables, namely their opinions.

The study adopts a mixed-methods research design since it incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. As Creswell (2012) states the mixing of both quantitative and qualitative data is useful to best understand a research problem. These two methods are believed to work better together to foster the development of theory (Dörnyei, 2011). In this case of mixing methods, the researcher draws conclusions from both the quantitative and qualitative databases. Thus, the present study began with a broad survey and then, in the second phase, focused on qualitative data through semi-structured interviews to collect detailed views from participants to help explain the initial quantitative survey.

The study is also based on a sequential-explanatory design. In a sequential-explanatory design, analysis of quantitative data is followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. Forms of qualitative instruments are employed to validate quantitative data. Likewise, in this research, the qualitative data were used to supplement and illuminate the data gathered through the questionnaires. The study is also quasi-experimental as it includes two different groups of participants as experimental and control groups and since it employs a pre and post-test design.

Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in an English preparatory school at a state university in the north-west of Turkey. The preparatory school provides English education for students at their first year of university education. The program is either obligatory or optional depending on learners' departments. The institution takes the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a reference to define the proficiency level of the students. Hence, the placement test, which is used to identify levels and place learners accordingly, consists of questions that aim at assessing learners' mastery on the descriptors in CEFR levels from A1 to B1. Based on the results of this test, three different groups of classes are formed with reference to CEFR: A1, A2 and B1. By the end of the academic year, A1 and A2 level classes are expected to become B1 level, and B1 level classes are expected to become B2+.

The data for the research was collected during the second term of 2021-2022 academic year. Upon the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, online education was the only way to sustain educational activities across the country. Thus, in 2020-2021 academic year distance education was implemented in all levels of education, from primary to higher education. The following year, in the institution where the study was carried out hybrid learning was employed. Hybrid learning is a learning model which combines face-to-face learning with online learning. The main purpose for applying this method was to avoid bringing large groups of students together and thus to lower the risk of infection. The students in the prep school were divided into two groups in the 2021-2022 academic year: the first group had their face-to-face lessons on the first half of the week and went on their language education through virtual learning for the rest of the week, whereas the second group of students started the week with online lessons and continued with face-to-face education in the second half of the week. Similarly, the teachers at the school followed the same schedule as their own classes. The content of the courses was the same for the same levels and the same textbook was used in both face-to-face courses and online lessons.

The table below presents the demographic characteristics of the 160 students who participated in the study. The participants originated from various academic departments (Table 1). The largest representation came from Applied English and Translation (46.9%), followed by English Language and Literature (26.3%) and Engineering (15.0%). This distribution reflects the inclusion of students from diverse academic backgrounds. The participants displayed a relatively balanced distribution

across English proficiency levels. A2 level learners comprised 42.5% of the sample, followed by B1 (31.3%) and B2 (26.3%). This range ensures the study encompasses the experiences of learners at various stages of English language acquisition.

160 students and 14 teachers participated in the study. These students were in three different language proficiency levels: A2, B1 and B2. The concept of self-assessment and use of European Language Portfolio was a totally new issue for the students studying at the school where the study was carried out in the 2021-2022 academic year. However, as the ELP had been previously used at the institution, the participant teachers were quite familiar with it. Moreover, during the time the ELP had been a part of the curricular activities in the institution; all the teachers received a robust one-day training from an expert who is the pioneer in the field in the country.

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=160)

Category		Experimental(82)	Control(78)	Total(160)
Department / Faculty	Engineering	5 (6.1%)	19 (24.4%)	24 (15.0%)
	Applied English & Translation	45 (54.9%)	30 (38.5%)	75 (46.9%)
	Econ. & Admin. Sciences	3 (3.7%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (1.9%)
	English Lang. & Literature	22 (26.8%)	20 (25.6%)	42(26.3%)
	Interior Design	1 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)
	Civil Aviation	3 (3.7%)	4 (5.1%)	7 (4.4%)
	Tourism	2 (2.4%)	4 (5.1%)	6 (3.8%)
	Human Resources	1 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)
	Marine Management	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.3%)	1 (0.6%)
Proficiency Level	A2	37 (45.1%)	31 (39.7%)	68 (42.5%)
	B1	23 (28.0%)	27 (34.6%)	50 (31.3%)
	B2	22 (26.8%)	20 (25.6%)	42 (26.3%)
Participation Type	Compulsory	75 (91.5%)	67 (85.9%)	142 (88.8%)
	Voluntary	7 (8.5%)	11 (14.1%)	18 (11.3%)
Gender	Female	61 (74.4%)	49 (62.3%)	110 (68.8%)
	Male	21 (25.6%)	29 (37.7%)	50 (31.3%)

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from the participants during the spring term of 2021-2022 academic year. Quantitative data collection was completed at the end of the term, after the participants in both experimental and control groups experienced a self-assessment practice using the ELP. During the process, the participant groups went on their usual studies through the semester. Qualitative data for the research was collected once at the end of the second term.

Students from three different levels (A2, B1 and B2) participated in the study. Each group of proficiency level was divided into two groups as experimental and control groups. Data were collected in two phases. In the first phase, as a first step, a meeting was held with the participant teachers in which they were informed about the study and the data collection process. They were also notified about their role and responsibilities and their possible approach during the process was discussed as well. Following this, both the experimental and control groups started to use the ELP as a self-assessment tool. The ELP to be used was provided for each participant student by the researcher in the form of small booklets and they were given out by the participant teachers. However, the experimental

and control groups differed largely in the way they benefitted from the ELP. For the former group, the ELP became a part of the lessons on a regular basis and there was teacher support during its completion by the students. Furthermore, the participants in this group received a training session in their native language in which they were informed as to what the CEFR is and its purpose, what self-assessment is and its importance, what the ELP is and its relation to the CEFR, as well as the sections of the ELP and how to use them. A standard form of training by the researcher was desired, so in order to overcome the time limitation issue all these were explained clearly by the researcher with the help of a PowerPoint presentation and it was recorded through Zoom application. The link for the video was shared with the teachers and the same presentation video was watched by all the experimental group participants in their classrooms. Following this informatory session, the students started to fill in the Language Biography sections in the ELP based on their current levels with their teachers' support. They did the same as the courses went on through the term and the teachers spared specific time for the ELP checks in their courses on a pre-determined basis. The teachers of experimental groups displayed a positive attitude towards the use of self-assessment via the ELP and they acted in a supportive manner. Conversely, the participants in the control groups were not informed about any issues related to self-assessment via the ELP and no specific time was given for its completion during the class hours except for the first ELP check. The students were just instructed to complete the language biography part on their own without any teacher support. As for the other ELP checks during the term, the students were advised to complete the appropriate level as an assignment without any guidance. At the end of the process of the term, the 'ELP Use Opinionnaire' was implemented to the students to find out about what they feel and think about assessing themselves using this assessment tool.

As for the qualitative data, semi-structured interviews, lasting approximately ten minutes each, were conducted with twelve students in the experimental group to gather their perspectives on the self-assessment process through the ELP. Random sampling method was adopted to determine the interviewees as it is a strong way to minimize any subjective aspects and random samples tend to be more indicative of the overall population compared to non-random ones in most cases (Dörnyei, 2011). Interviewees scheduled their interview times based on their own availability, typically after regular class hours. Each student was asked around six questions about their experience on the use of the ELP. The interviews with students were conducted in Turkish to facilitate their expression of ideas about the ELP in a comfortable and informal setting, rather than following a strict question-and-answer format. Consequently, each interview with a student lasted around ten minutes, with the duration varying based on the students' experiences with the ELP. All interviews were recorded to be transcribed by the researcher later.

Instruments

The present study used both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data came from an opinionnaire, and the qualitative part was collected through semi-structured interviews.

The ELP Use Opinionnaire: The popular type of Likert scale is sometimes used not to elicit facts, but to explore opinions about a specific subject and these are called 'opinionnaires' (McDonough & McDonough, 2006). It is believed that there is a significant relation between one's opinions and their attitudes and behaviors as well. Therefore, with the help of opinionnaires, it is possible to deduce attitudes, behavior tendencies or other character aspects out of the opinions of participants (Lentz, 1934). In the present study, The ELP Use Opinionnaire was used to explore participants' views on assessing themselves via the ELP.

The opinionnaire used was developed by the researcher specifically for the present study and the procedures to ensure validity and reliability were carried out. As a first step, the literature was reviewed for existing attitude scales or opinionnaires to see the types of statements and the wording used. Subsequently, a pool of statements was formed regarding the use and benefits of self-assessment via the ELP following a review of the related literature. As a further step, the researcher consulted two experts holding their PhD degrees and working in the field of language teaching and finalized the opinionnaire upon making the suggested arrangements proposed by the experts. The final version of the scale consisted of 18 statements that were believed to address the purpose of the study well. The

opinionnaire was piloted with a similar group of 132 students studying at preparatory school at the same state university the previous year to test its reliability and it proved to have internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha of .932. In the opinionnaire, the participants are asked to state their level of agreement by marking the options ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The statements are all written in Turkish so that the participants do not experience any problems in understanding what is meant by the items.

The European Language Portfolio (Northern Cyprus Version): Self-assessment comprises of two main factors: a) making judgments regarding the standards of expected performance; b) then evaluating the quality of the performance in comparison to these standards (Boud, 1995). The ELP provides a pre-structured format that helps language learners to present and document their proficiency levels (Lenz, 2004) and the Language Biography section of the ELP enables learners to assess their language learning process and progress (Gonzales, 2009). It is designed in the form of checklists for each language skill for each proficiency level. Learners are provided with descriptors regarding each language proficiency level. These descriptors are formulated based on the 'can do' statements defined by the CEFR; however, they are simplified, combined or cut apart to make learner self-assessment possible (Lenz, 2004). These descriptors are given as a grid and learners evaluate their language learning performance by ticking the box that they think best expresses their present ability. In this sense, the ELP is a very well-designed tool for self-assessment. Furthermore, the preparatory school where the study is carried out designs their curriculum around the objectives proposed by the CEFR and uses course materials that are based on the CEFR levels, which makes the ELP an effective instrument to produce results in the present study.

The Northern Cyprus version of the portfolio was designed for the use of secondary schools in Northern Cyprus by a group of teachers and an educational supervisor. It was a validated tool and introduced in all secondary public schools for the use of the language learners. Although the self-assessment grid in the CEFR consists of six levels of proficiency from A1 to C2, this version of the ELP covers the first four levels as A1, A2, B1 and B2, including all the levels at the institution. The fact that this ELP model was freely available on the internet and that it is suitable for the study in terms of the levels included, it was considered as an appropriate tool to make use of. The portfolio was downloaded, copied by the researcher in the form of small booklets, and handed out to the learners in the study by the participant teachers.

The Training Presentation: One of the aims of the study was to find out whether the way self-assessment is implemented is a factor affecting learners' views about the ELP or not. Glover et al. (2005) underscored the importance of four elements for implementing the ELP efficiently:

- Integration into the curriculum
- Support from teachers and administrators
- Training for both students and teachers
- Clear delineation of the role and purpose of the ELP

Relying on these factors, creating awareness in learners about self-assessment and clarifying how ELP functions in relation with the CEFR was assumed to be a crucial step for an effective implementation. In order to fulfill this, a simple but comprehensive presentation encompassing the basics of the subject was prepared by the researcher following a review of the related literature. The outline of the presentation was as follows:

- I. What is CEFR?
- II. Why is CEFR important for language learners?
- III. How does it function?
- IV. What are the reference levels?
- V. How are CEFR and ELP related?
- VI. What is self-assessment?
- VII. What are the parts and aims of the ELP?

Due to time limitation, it was not possible to make the presentation face-to-face with each participant group. Instead, the researcher made the presentation using the Zoom application and recorded it at the same time. The link for the recording was shared with the participant teachers and they showed the video in their classrooms during their regular class hours. The presentation was in Turkish and took 40 minutes. The researcher shared contact information at the end of the presentation and the students were encouraged to contact the researcher for any further information or questions.

Semi-Structured Student Interviews: The study adopted a sequential-explanatory approach in which quantitative data was followed up with qualitative. In other words, qualitative data was used to interpret or clarify the results from quantitative data analysis (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Qualitative research focuses on understanding the subjective viewpoints, experiences, and emotions of individuals. Its primary aim is to dive into the perspectives of participants regarding the topic under investigation (Dörnyei, 2011). Semi-structured interviews usually have an overall previously-planned framework, but they also allow the researcher to be flexible within that. The interviewer still controls the course of the interview by providing guidance and direction and this feature constitutes the ‘structured’ side of the type. On the other hand, the interviewer is also eager to follow up interesting developments and invite the participant to expand on them, which is the ‘semi’ nature of this type of interviews (McDonough & McDonough, 2007, Dörnyei, 2011). Taking all of these into account, the present study used semi-structured interviews to support and further explain the quantitative data about the learners’ views on the use of the ELP.

A total of twelve students in experimental groups were called for an interview. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, which was reached when no new themes or information emerged during the analysis of the interviews. This was continuously assessed throughout the coding process. Data saturation was reached when additional interviews no longer yielded new themes or insights, indicating that the sample size was sufficient to capture the range of learner views. Although the volunteer nature of participation may bias the sample toward more engaged learners, the rich qualitative data obtained provided valuable complementary perspectives that aligned with and helped explain the quantitative findings. There were an equal number of four students representing each proficiency level: A2, B1 and B2. Interviewees were chosen on a voluntary basis. It was also believed that those who were willing to attend an interview would elaborate more on the topic. The interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis and in learners’ native language (Turkish) so that the students could express themselves better.

There were six questions in the interview guide. The questions that align with research objectives were constructed and in collaboration with the colleagues, they were continuously revised and refined. With the aim of improving the quality of interview data, use of jargon, ambiguous words or leading questions like “It was motivating, wasn’t it?” were avoided. Finally, an expert who has in-depth knowledge of the area was consulted and the questions took their final form after all the feedback taken. What effect did using the ELP have on you about your language learning process?

The necessity of recording semi-structured or unstructured interviews when utilizing them as research data was underscored in the literature. Relying solely on note-taking proves inadequate due to the inherent challenge of capturing all nuances and personal meanings. Additionally, the act of note-taking itself can disrupt the flow of the interviewing process (Dörnyei, 2011; Creswell, 2012). Thus, the interviews were all recorded to be transcribed later.

Data Analysis

The current study examines the utilization of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) in foreign language classrooms from two perspectives: learners' views about self-assessment with the ELP, and the influence of the way it is introduced and used. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied in the study. While the quantitative data were gathered through an ELP opinionnaire, the qualitative data came from semi-structured student interviews.

Analysis of Quantitative Data: The quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 29). When evaluating the study data, frequency distribution (number, percentage) was provided for categorical variables, and descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were provided for numerical variables. A level of $p < 0.05$ was considered as significant in the results.

To explore scale reliability, one of the most commonly used criteria is Cronbach's alpha, which is a measure of internal consistency. As a first step of data analysis, calculations were made for the scales, and Cronbach's alpha values were computed for the The ELP use opinionaire (post-test: 0.973). This value is generally higher than the acceptable value of 0.700 (Nunnally, 1978), indicating good reliability.

As the next step, normality of the data for each scale was checked to determine the appropriate data analysis method. Kolmogorov Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were used to check normality and the histograms and normal probability plots (q-q plots) provided by SPSS were checked, as well. Finally, the decision on using parametric or non-parametric tests was made accordingly.

Analysis of Qualitative Data: For the analysis of the qualitative data, thematic analysis method, which is a widely adopted qualitative analytic design, was used. Thematic analysis is a technique used to identify, analyze and report themes within data. As thematic analysis does not require the researcher to have broad knowledge of theory and technology, it stands out as a more accessible way of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to lead the data analysis process rigorously, the steps put forward by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed: Familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, producing the report.

As can be understood from the table, the initial step was to transform the interview records into textual form and to translate them into English as the interviews were held in participants' mother tongue. Then data was read and re-read with an unmotivated look in order to get a general understanding of the whole text. After reading the whole a number of times, bearing the research aim in mind and thus getting familiar with it, initial codes were formulated. As Dörnyei (2011) suggests analysis of qualitative data is an iterative process, in other words, it involves going back and forth between the data and the analysis continuously. There were no predetermined codes, thus the codes were totally data-driven. During this process, any utterance that is related to the topic or any interesting passage was highlighted using different colors and short notes were written in the margin next to them. Once the codes were collated, they were revisited to generate themes at a broader level. In this phase, all the codes were examined together carefully and sorted into themes. Having an idea of what themes had come out of the data and what the overall story they tell, the next thing that was done was naming those themes.

Prior to moving on the last phase of the analysis which is the reporting of the results, some steps for obtaining the validity and reliability of the analysis were taken. Qualitative validity entails the researcher's verification of the accuracy of findings through applying specific methodologies, whereas qualitative reliability pertains to the consistency of the researcher's approach across various researchers (Gibbs, 2007). In an attempt to ensure the accuracy of the analysis, *peer debriefing* method which involves collaborating with others was applied (Cresswell, 2014). While doing this, the way proposed by Lynch (2003) was followed. Two colleagues who hold their PhD degrees and have experience in qualitative studies were invited to do external code check in which they were supplied with a list of the codes formed by the researcher and were asked to recode the data using them. At the end of the process, similarities or discrepancies were discussed with the other coders. Subsequently, the coding reliability was calculated using Miles and Huberman's (2016) formula ($\text{Reliability Percentage} = \frac{\text{Agreement}}{\text{Total Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}}$). To be accepted as reliable, the percentage needs to be at least 80% and the percentage in the present study was 92%, which is over the expected number. Once inter-coder agreement was ensured, the themes were finalized.

As the final step, the writing procedure began by reporting the findings in line with the research aim. Important quotes were also included in the flow of the findings. It was expected that participants' answers in the interview support their results of the scales in the study.

The following are the themes emerged from the interviews:

- The Positive Impact of Training
- Autonomy
- The Motivating Effect of Tracking Progress
- A Sense of Achievement
- Versatility, Ownership and Goal-setting
- The Motivating Effect of the ELP Use

Findings

1. What are Turkish tertiary level EFL learners' opinions about the use of the ELP?
2. Does instruction about the use of the ELP and teacher guidance influence students' opinions about keeping it as a self-assessment tool?

Results of the Quantitative Data

The analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics to summarize the distribution of opinionnaire scores for each group (experimental and control). This included calculating measures like mean, standard deviation (SD), minimum, and maximum scores. The analysis revealed a generally positive perception of the ELP across all groups. The experimental group exhibited the highest average score ($M = 79.24$, $SD = 8.765$), indicating the most favorable opinions towards the ELP use. The control group displayed a lower average score ($M = 56.00$, $SD = 17.142$), suggesting a less positive initial perception compared to the experimental group. When combining both groups, the overall average score ($M = 67.47$, $SD = 17.296$) leaned towards a positive view of the ELP. The experimental group also demonstrated a lower standard deviation compared to the other groups. This suggests a more homogenous distribution of positive opinions within the experimental group.

Table 2

Descriptive Analysis of the European Language Portfolio Opinionnaire

	N	Mean (SD)	Min.	Max.
Experimental Group	82	79.24 (8.765)	44	90
Control Group	78	56.00 (17.142)	26	90
Both Groups	160	67.47(17.296)	26	90

For the findings related to the impact of teacher support and instruction on students' opinions about keeping the English Language Portfolio (ELP) as a self-assessment tool, data obtained from the ELP opinionnaire was used. The analysis focused on comparing the ELP opinionnaire scores between the experimental and control groups using an independent samples t-test. Before conducting the independent-samples t-test, the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances were tested. Normality of the distribution was assessed using skewness and kurtosis values as well as visual inspection of histograms and Q-Q plots, which indicated that the data were approximately normally distributed for both groups. Homogeneity of variances was tested using Levene's Test, which showed non-significant results ($p > .05$), indicating that the assumption of equal variances was met.

The t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in ELP opinionnaire scores between the experimental and control groups ($t = 9.335$, $p = 0.000$). This indicates that the experimental group, which received teacher support and instruction on ELP use, had a significantly more positive view of the ELP as a self-assessment tool compared to the control group, which did not receive such support or instruction. The average ELP opinionnaire score for the experimental group was 77.24 ($SD = 8.76$), indicating a generally favorable perception of the ELP. In contrast, the average score for the control group was 56.00 ($SD = 17.14$), suggesting a less positive view. This difference in means further supports the finding that teacher support and instruction played a role in shaping students' opinions on the ELP.

Table 3.

Comparison of Experimental and Control Groups

	Experimental	Control	t^1	p
	M \pm SD	M \pm SD		
The ELP Opinionaire	77.24 \pm 8.76	56.00 \pm 17.14	9.335	p <0.001

t^1 :Independent samples t test, *:p<0.05

Results of Qualitative Data

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perceptions of the ELP and to further support the quantitative research findings, interviews were conducted with 12 participants. The findings from these interviews were presented alongside quotations under thematic headings that emerged during the analysis. The following are the three themes emerged in the interviews:

- Autonomy
- The Positive Impact of Training
- A Sense of Achievement

Autonomy: In students' replies as to how they felt about tracking and evaluating their own language learning development, the emerging theme was about 'autonomy'. Most of the interviewees (n=8) highlighted that assessing themselves using the ELP gave them the feeling that they were in control of their own learning as can be seen in some of the quotes from the interviews below:

ST: "Assessing myself was a bit daunting at first, but it also made me realize how much control I have over my learning. It's empowering to know that I can take charge of my education and make decisions about what areas I need to focus on to improve."

ST: "At first, I was skeptical about assessing myself, but as I went through the process, I felt more and more in control of my learning. It's empowering to know that I have the autonomy to evaluate my own performance and take steps to improve without relying solely on external feedback."

In all responses, students expressed a sense of taking control of their learning journey. They mention feeling empowered by the ability to evaluate their own progress and set their own goals. The students emphasize the responsibility they feel for their academic success. They acknowledge that self-assessment requires them to take ownership of their learning and make decisions about where to focus their efforts for improvement. A common thread among the responses is the realization that their education is ultimately in their hands. They understand that self-assessment allows them to understand where they stand academically and what steps they need to take to achieve their goals, thus reinforcing their autonomy in the learning process. Through self-assessment, students experience a sense of empowerment. They recognize that they have the autonomy to evaluate their own performance and take steps to enhance their learning without relying solely on external feedback or guidance. Overall, the analysis underscores how self-assessment fosters autonomy among students by enabling them to take control of their learning, assume responsibility for their academic success, feel empowered in their learning journey, and recognize their role as active participants in their education.

The Positive Impact of Training: Another theme emerged was about the impact of informing participants about the European Language Portfolio before asking them to use it as a self-assessment tool. An emphasis was made on 'the positive impact of training', showing that training learners about why and how they should use the ELP enabled them to accept it as a valuable tool. Some sample answers are presented below:

ST: "Before learning about the European Language Portfolio, I had no idea what it was or how it could benefit me. However, being thoroughly informed about it completely changed my perspective. I now see the ELP as a valuable tool for tracking my language progress and setting goals for improvement."

ST: "I had heard about the European Language Portfolio before, but I didn't fully understand its purpose until I was thoroughly informed about it. Learning about its features and benefits

made me realize its potential as a self-assessment tool, and I now have a much more positive view of using it."

ST: "Initially, I was hesitant about using the European Language Portfolio for self-assessment because I didn't know much about it. However, after being thoroughly informed about its purpose and functionality, I became much more confident in its ability to help me track my language skills and plan my learning."

ST: "I had some reservations about using the European Language Portfolio at first, but being thoroughly informed about its features and benefits changed my perspective completely. Now, I see it as an essential tool for self-assessment and goal setting in language learning, and I'm excited to start using it."

The responses indicate that being thoroughly informed about the ELP led to an increased understanding of its purpose, features, and benefits. This understanding transformed the participants' initial perceptions and reservations about the tool. Furthermore, the students mention that their perspective changed significantly after receiving thorough information about the ELP. They shifted from being hesitant or unaware to recognizing the value and potential of the tool for their language learning journey. It can also be understood from their answers that learning about the ELP in detail boosted the students' confidence in using it as a self-assessment tool. They felt more assured in their ability to utilize the tool effectively for tracking their language skills and setting learning goals. What is more, after being thoroughly informed about the ELP, the students developed a greater appreciation for its value in language learning. They recognized it as an essential tool for self-assessment and goal setting, indicating a positive shift in their attitude towards its use. Another important interpretation of the answers is that understanding the features and benefits of the ELP motivated students to start using it actively in their language learning endeavors. They expressed excitement and eagerness to incorporate it into their study routine, highlighting the positive impact of training on their motivation.

Overall, the analysis underscores how being thoroughly informed or trained about the ELP before using it as a self-assessment tool has a positive effect on students' understanding, perspective, confidence, appreciation of value, and motivation. This highlights the importance of providing comprehensive training or information about educational tools to maximize their effectiveness and promote student engagement.

A Sense of Achievement: The European Language Portfolio (ELP) serves as a versatile tool for language learners, offering a structured framework for self-assessment and goal setting. One of the questions in the interviews was to explore students' perspectives on the most beneficial aspects of the ELP and its contributions to their language learning process. While answering the question, the learners emphasized that using the ELP created a sense of achievement. What is more, they related this to individual assessment of skills and monitoring progress. Through their insights, it is possible to gain valuable perspectives on the impact of the ELP in fostering a sense of accomplishment and guiding learners towards linguistic proficiency. The quotes below exemplify this:

ST: "Its ability to assess each language skill individually provided me with a sense of achievement. By evaluating my proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking separately, I could see my progress in each area and feel satisfied with my accomplishments. Showing me where I was, where I am now, and where I could be was a great contribution."

ST: "What I found most beneficial about the ELP was its detailed assessment of each language skill. Being able to evaluate my abilities in reading, writing, listening, and speaking separately gave me a clear understanding of my strengths and areas for improvement."

ST: "I was considering myself as unsuccessful because I can't speak English well, or I'm not good at writing but when I assessed skills separately I saw that I was not that bad in other skills and started to feel more successful. That's why I didn't give up."

ST: "Its greatest contribution to me was providing a sense of achievement as I could see my progress in each skill area. I could clearly see where I needed to focus my efforts."

All responses emphasize the sense of achievement that students derive from using the European Language Portfolio (ELP). By assessing each language skill individually and tracking their progress over time, students feel a sense of accomplishment as they witness their growth and improvement. Furthermore, the analysis reveals the importance of assessing each language skill individually. Students appreciate the detailed evaluation of their reading, writing, listening, and speaking abilities, which provides them with a comprehensive understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement. Overall, the analysis underscores how the ELP empowers students to take ownership of their language learning journey and stay motivated in their pursuit of proficiency.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Suggestions

The research question was about the opinions of the learners about self-assessment. The answer to this question was important to find out because affective factors like opinions and beliefs are highly significant as they are predictors of students' behaviors and their performance in return (Kara, 2009). It is argued that learners with positive views tend to possess more acceptance and positive attitudes towards a learning situation. Furthermore, as Gardner (1985) put forward, attitudes are individuals' judgmental response to a referent based on their beliefs or viewpoints concerning that referent, which means that opinions or beliefs form the basis of attitudes. Thus, it was assumed that exploring learners' opinions about self-assessing themselves using the ELP would be an important initial step taken towards understanding its effectiveness and its potential impact on learner motivation. In other words, in order for learners to fully benefit from self-assessing themselves and to cultivate an increase in their motivation, it is crucial that they possess positive opinions and appreciation about self-assessment using the ELP first.

The findings related to the opinions of the participants about the ELP revealed that when the participants were considered as a whole sample, their opinions about using the ELP leaned towards positive. This finding is consistent with the previous study (Perclova, 2006) which found out that Czech learners found the ELP both interesting and useful, and their attitudes towards the ELP were very positive. However, when the treatment groups were held separately, it became clearer that the learners in the experimental group exhibited the most favorable opinions about using the ELP, whereas the control group reported less positive views.

Self-assessment is a process in which students are involved in ongoing evaluation of the quality of their work and learning progress, where they assess how well they meet predetermined objectives or criteria, recognize both strengths and areas needing improvement and adjust their approach accordingly (Andrade & Du, 2007). Although it has certain contributions to language learning, it should be noted that it is a rather new experience for learners who usually act as passive agents in the assessment system (Dochy & Segers & Sluijsmans, 1999). Boud (1995) asserts that the way self-assessment is implemented plays a crucial role in how students perceive and accept it. Moreover, it is emphasized that the implementation process should include a clear rationale clarifying the objectives of the activity and explicit procedures in which students know how to evaluate themselves. Koyuncu (2006) investigated the ELP as an alternative assessment tool for improving primary school students' autonomy in learning. She concluded that the ELP had a significant role on increasing students' autonomy. Moreover, many participants in the study expressed their positive attitudes towards the ELP by emphasizing their interests to study with the ELP.

It is clear that the findings from quantitative and qualitative analysis support each other and also seem to be in line with the literature as it revealed that when learners were introduced with the idea of self-assessment with its rationale and when they were provided support about how to manage it; their positive opinions and acceptance about it turned out to be at a higher level. Likewise, it is quite possible that less positive views by the participants in the control group was due to the lack of the elements of the ideal way of self-assessment implementation. Furthermore, the reason of more positive perceptions of the participants in the experimental group could be owing to becoming more autonomous learners with the help of the ELP, as confirmed by the qualitative findings.

Having revealed the positive effect of awareness-raising on generating more positive opinions about self-assessment through the ELP, this study could be useful for educators in terms of offering an idea about how to implement self-evaluation practices. Although the literature about the self-assessment

and the ELP has made emphasis on the ideal way to introduce and implement them (Boud, 1995; Gardner, 1995; Glover et al., 2005; Kostons et al., 2012; Ortega et al. 2022; Yan & Carless, 2022), putting theory into practice can sometimes be disregarded due to reasons such as the lack of time to spare or insufficient knowledge of educators. However, if efficiency of a new method or instrument is desired, it should be noted that gaining acceptance is a crucial step to achieve this and can only be succeeded by following the right steps.

One important consideration in interpreting the results is that the treatment involved two overlapping components: initial ELP training and ongoing teacher support. Since these elements were delivered together, it is not possible to determine the individual contribution of each. This limits the ability to draw causal conclusions about which aspect—training or teacher guidance—was more influential in shaping students' perceptions. Future studies may consider isolating these variables by implementing separate conditions (e.g., training-only vs. support-only) in order to examine their effects independently. Another limitation of the study is the lack of longitudinal follow-up. Since the data were collected shortly after the intervention, it remains unclear whether the observed changes in students' perceptions and attitudes toward the ELP would persist over time. Future research could address this gap by implementing a longitudinal design to examine the long-term impact of ELP-related training and teacher support. An additional point that requires careful consideration is the potential volunteer bias in the qualitative component. Since participation in the interviews was voluntary, it is possible that those who agreed to be interviewed were more motivated, reflective, or positively inclined towards the ELP than those who did not participate. This may limit the generalizability of the qualitative findings to the broader population of learners. Furthermore, the sample size in the study was limited for generalizable results. In order to reach more comprehensive and generalizable results, a larger sample group consisting of participants from various universities would be more preferable.

Acknowledgment

Copyrights: The works published in the e-Kafkas Journal of Educational Research are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial 4.0 International License.

Ethics statement: In this study, we declare that the rules stated in the "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" are complied with and that we do not take any of the actions based on "Actions Against Scientific Research and Publication Ethics". At the same time, we declare that there is no conflict of interest between the authors, which all authors contribute to the study, and that all the responsibility belongs to the article authors in case of all ethical violations.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, first and second author; methodology, first and second author; validation, first and second author; analysis, first author; writing, review and editing, first and second author; supervision, second author.

Funding: This research received no funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical approval was obtained from Hacettepe University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee to conduct the research with the decision dated 27.08.2018 and no. 35853172-300

Data Availability Statement: Data generated or analyzed during this study are available on request.

Conflict of Interest: There is no conflict of interest among authors.

Generative Artificial Intelligence Statement: ChatGPT was used for language editing.

References

- Andrade, H., & Du, Y. (2007). Student responses to criteria-referenced self-assessment. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 32(2), 159-181.
- Boud, D. (1995). *Enhancing learning through self-assessment*. London: Kogan Page.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Butler, Y. G., & Lee, J. (2010). The effects of self-assessment among young learners of English. *Language Testing*, 27(1), 5-31.
- Ceylan, A., & Ablak, S. (2024). Development of the social studies course attitude scale. *International Journal of Education, Technology and Science*, 4(1), 1596-1618.
- Council of Europe (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Creswell, W. J. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research (4th ed.)*. Boston, USA: Pearson Education.
- Dann, R. (2002). *Promoting assessment as learning: Improving the learning process*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dochy, F., Segers, M., & Sluijsmans, D. (1999). The use of self-, peer- and co-assessment in higher education: A review. *Studies in Higher Education*, 24(3), 331-350.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2006). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Edmonds, W. A., & Kennedy, T. D. (2017). *An Applied Guide to Research Designs*. Sage Publications.
- Ekbatani, G., & Pierson, H. (2000). Moving toward learner-directed assessment. *Learner-directed Assessment in ESL*, 1-11.
- Fazey, D. M. A., & Fazey, J. A. (2001). The potential for autonomy in learning: perceptions of competence, motivation and locus of control in first year undergraduate students. *Studies in Higher Education*, 26(3), 345-361.
- Gibbs, G. R. (2007). *Analyzing qualitative data*. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The Sage qualitative research kit*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Glover, P., Mirici, İ. H., & Aksu, M. G. (2005). Preparing for the European Language Portfolio: Internet connections, ERIC.
- González, J. A. (2008). Promoting student autonomy through the use of the European Language Portfolio. *Elt Journal*, 63(4), 373-382.
- Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2010). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*. Sage Publications
- Kara, A. (2009). The effect of a “learning theories” unit on students’ attitudes toward learning. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online)*, 34(3), 100-113. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/jelapa.787886372821933>
- Klenowski, V. (1995). Student self-evaluation processes in student-centred teaching and learning contexts of Australia and England. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 2(2), 145-163.
- Kohonen, V. (2000). Student reflection in portfolio assessment: making language learning more visible. *Babylonia*, 4, 11-14.
- Kostons, D., van Gog, T., & Paas, F. (2012). Training self-assessment and task-selection skills: A cognitive approach to improving self-regulated learning. *Learning and Instruction*, 22(2), 121-132.
- Koyuncu, S. (2006). *The effect of the European language portfolio on learner autonomy for young learners*. Çukurova University Institute of Social Sciences, English Language Teaching Department
- Kristmanson, P. L., Lafargue, C., & Culligan, K. (2011). From action to insight: a professional learning community's experiences with the European Language Portfolio. *The Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 14(2), 53.
- Lentz, T. F. (1934). Reliability of Opinionaire Technique Studied Intensively by the Retest Method. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 5(3), 338-364. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.1934.9921603>.

- Little, D. (2005). The Common European Framework and the European Language Portfolio: Involving learners and their judgments in the assessment process. *Language Testing*, 22(3), 321-336.
- Little, D. (2009a). *The European Language Portfolio: Where pedagogy and assessment meet*. 8th International Seminar on the European Language Portfolio, Graz, Document 4, 1-18.
- Lynch, B. K. (2003). *Language Assessment and Programme Evaluation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Masgoret, A. M., & Gardner, R. C. (2003). Attitudes, motivation, and second language learning: a meta-analysis of studies conducted by Gardner and associates. *Language learning*, 53(1), 123-163.
- McDonough, J., & McDonough, S. (1997). *Research Methods for English Language Teachers* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315832548>
- Miles, M., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Nunnally, J. C. (1978). *Psychometric Theory* (2nd Ed.). McGrawHill.
- Ortega, M., Mora, J. C., & Mora-Plaza, I. (2022). L2 learners' self-assessment of comprehensibility and accentedness: Over/under-estimation, effects of rating peers, and attention to speech features. In J. Levis & A. Guskaroska (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 12th Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching Conference (PSLLT)* (pp. 1–13). Brock University. <https://doi.org/10.31274/psllt.13354>
- Perclová, R. (2006). *The implementation of European Language Portfolio pedagogy in Czech primary and lower-secondary schools: beliefs and attitudes of pilot teachers and learners*. University of Joensuu.
- Ross, S. (1998). Self-assessment in second language testing: A meta-analysis and analysis of experimental factors. *Language Testing*, 15(1), 1-19.
- Şentürk, B. (2017). *The effect of different self-assessment tools on students' attitudes towards learning English*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Hacettepe University.
- Ushioda, E., & Ridley, J. (2002). Working with the European Language Portfolio in Irish post-primary schools: An evaluation project. *ERIC*, 4-9.
- Yan, Z., & Carless, D. (2022). Self-assessment is about more than self: the enabling role of feedback literacy. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 47(7), 1116–1128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2021.2001431>
- Yılmaz, S., & Akcan, S. (2011). Implementing the European Language Portfolio in a Turkish context. *ELT Journal*, 66(2), 166-174.