



# **AUTONOMY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: DO STUDENTS TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR LEARNING?**

(DİL ÖĞRENMEDE ÖZERKLİK: ÖĞRENCİLER KENDİ ÖĞRENME  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study was conducted in order to investigate the perceptions of university students and teachers regarding responsibilities and abilities related to autonomous learning, and the autonomous activities both inside and outside the classroom. The study also investigated whether these responsibilities, abilities and activities changed significantly according to motivation level and gender. Qualitative data was gathered from 320 students and 24 teachers, together with quantitative data through interviews. The results suggest that students do not take responsibility for their learning although they have the ability, and teachers, themselves, take on most of the responsibilities, by perceiving their students incapable of fulfilling their responsibilities. This study suggests that both students and teachers need to understand the necessity of learner independence, and a training program on autonomous learning should be included in the language curriculum, particularly with regard to administration.

**Keywords:** Autonomy, Responsibility, Ability, Activity, Language learning

## **ÖZ**

Bu çalışma, üniversite öğrencilerinin ve öğretmenlerinin özerk öğrenmeye ilişkin yeterlilik ve sorumlulukları ile sınıf içi ve dışı özerk etkinliklere özgü algılarını araştırmak amacıyla yürütülmüştür. Çalışma, sorumluluk, yeterlilik ve etkinlik boyutlarının motivasyon ve cinsiyete göre önemli derecede değişip değişmediğini de araştırmıştır. Nicel veriler 320 üniversite öğrencisi ve 24 öğretmenden toplanmış ve nitel verilerle desteklenmiştir. Sonuçlar öğrencilerin kendilerini yeterli algılamalarına rağmen sorumluluk alamadıklarını, öğrenmelerin ise öğrencilerin sorumluluklarını yerine getiremeyeceğini düşünerek pek çok sorumluluğu kendilerinin üstlendiğini göstermiştir. Çalışmada öğretmen ve öğrencilerin "öğrenci özerkliği" kavramını yeterince anlamaları ve özerk öğrenme ile ilgili bir eğitim programının dil öğrenme programlarına alınması gerektiği önerilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sorumluluk, Yeterlilik, Etkinlik, Dil öğrenimi

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## INTRODUCTION

New approaches are always emerging in English teaching, but no matter which methodology and what techniques are used, there is a tendency to see learners as passive receivers of new information, as individuals who are unable to develop the necessary skills to learn to assess and control their own progress themselves (Rivers, 1992; Holden and Usuki, 1999). In the field of language learning, this can be felt strongly, because, in spite of the efforts of instructors and students, the English proficiency levels are not sufficient for university level. A growing number of research studies are focusing on investigating the causes of this failure, with many writers offering suggestions for improvement (Rivers, 1992; Brindley, 1990). One area of study is autonomy, defined as the degree of responsibility students take for their own learning, as proposed by Brindley (1990), Munby (1991), and the Council of Europe (2001). The Common European Framework (Council of Europe 2001, CEF) defines the concept of language learning autonomy as consisting of both those items which need to be learned in order for adequate communication, and the knowledge and skills which need to be developed by an effective autonomous learner.

In light of the above descriptions, this study investigates whether university students who have studied English as a foreign language over a period of time are able to direct and monitor their own learning process, and whether teachers are able to direct their students towards autonomy, involve students in goal setting and provide them with self-directed skills. This study also offers definitions of the concept of autonomy and reviews research conducted in Western and Eastern educational contexts, including the limited research undertaken in Turkey. The methodology covers the scope, the participants, and the instruments used to gather the data. The analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data is presented in the results.

### **Background of the Study**

According to Holec (1981) “learner autonomy is the ability to take charge of one’s own directed learning”. This process covers several variables; according to Little (2003), it requires insight, a positive attitude, a capacity for reflection, and a readiness to be proactive in self-management. Gardner’s (1999) description is slightly different. He claims that it is the process of taking personal responsibility for one’s own progress, and notes that this process requires self-assessment in order to determine one’s level of knowledge and skills. In this process, the learner is perceived as a decision-maker, developing the capacity to select the tools and resources appropriate to the task (Holec, 1985; Dickinson, 1995).

In addition to the existing variables, Fazey and Fazey (2001) add three psychological characteristics; perception of competence, perceived internal locus of control, and intrinsic motivation. These writers also claim that the internal perceptions of students as to the locus of control regarding academic success or failure are important for the development of learner autonomy. In other words, students may take more responsibility for learning if they believe themselves to be in control of the outcome (Dickinson, 1995). Noting the close relation between autonomous learning and intrinsic motivation, Fazey and Fazey (2001) claim that students are less likely to self-regulate or take responsibility for learning when the motivation comes from an external source, such as a teacher. Deci and Ryan (1985), in developing the concept of self-determination, believe that once external directives are internalized, they become part of the value system of an individual. Thus, an encouragement of classroom autonomy increases student performance and stimulates motivation and self-esteem which, in turn, boosts achievement rates. However, teaching methods which are over-controlling may reduce autonomy and damage creativity (Utman, 1997). In addition to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, autonomous learning has also been researched with regard to the correlation between motivation and gender. Although the study of gender as a variable in language learning is relatively neglected in research (Ehrman and Oxford, 1995), gender-based studies of individual language learner differences show that females tend to have greater integrative motivation, more positive attitudes and a wider range of learning strategies (Oxford, Nyikos and Ehrman, 1988). In recent research, Salem (2006), although finding no significant gender difference in overall motivation, did suggest that females make more effort and have a higher regard for learning EFL.

As well as learner autonomy, the meaning and implications of teacher autonomy has received much attention in the literature. Little (2000), Aoki (2000), and Benson (2000) claim that this term has three dimensions. Firstly, self-directed professional action. This refers to affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, that is, the initiatives teachers take in the classrooms as applied to their teaching. Secondly, self-directed professional development, that is, the awareness of why, when, where and how pedagogical skills can be acquired through the self-conscious awareness of teaching practice itself. Thirdly, freedom of professional action or development from the control of others, that is, being autonomous in working situations. Little (2000) emphasizes that in the field of second language education, it needs to be clear which of the three dimensions is being referred to.

Mariani (1997), when considering teacher/learner autonomy, sees a dependence/independence continuum, with the need for independence or self-regulation at one end balanced by the need to feel safe and secure at the other. She goes on to suggest that teachers should link autonomy and dependence with two parallel concepts: challenge and support. The teacher should

challenge students in order to promote autonomy while supporting them in order to provide security. Setting open tasks, offering tasks with no pre-determined answers, letting students choose between alternative tasks, asking them to synthesize a text, or encouraging an atmosphere of peer correction in pairs or groups are some of challenges. Alternatively, modelling tasks by demonstration and fostering cooperation, as opposed to competition, are some of the activities which give support in the classroom.

Emphasizing this continuum, Bandura (1997) and Zimmerman (1998) claim that learners who are able to self-regulate the locus of control throughout the learning experience are strategic learners. Those learners learn through the positive experience of a good performance, through the experience of others, through verbal persuasion, and through a positive physiological state, and eventually develop their self-regulatory skills to the point where they become self-regulated learners and take control of their learning process. This can be envisaged as two circles. The inner circle refers to the familiar territory of what a learner already knows and can already do. The outer circle is the unfamiliar territory containing knowledge and skills not yet acquired. The boundary between these zones is known as the zone of proximal development and it is only here that learning can take place (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Mariani (1997), there are two possibilities for teachers: working towards the inner circle and promoting dependence, or working towards the outer circle and fostering autonomy. Using scaffolding strategies and gradually removing them is an example of a challenging and supportive action which embodies the principles of learning and teaching for autonomy.

This theoretical background to autonomy has led research in both the East and West. Research conducted in Sweden indicates that adult students improved their performance through self-assessment and reflection on their writing process (Sullivan and Lindgren, 2002). Research in Switzerland reveals high correlations between self-assessment and standardized test results (Wilson and Lindsey, 1999 cited in Council of Europe 2002). Bachman and Palmer (1989) and Blanche (1990) also found high correlations between self-assessment and test results or teacher assessment.

At this point, it is important to note alternative views of autonomy. Stating that self-directedness in learning is a socio-cultural reflection, Kasworm and Bing (1992) believe that it is important to consider the research results in non-Western countries, where different approaches to teaching and learning are used. Although Jones (1995) initially believed autonomy was “laden with cultural values, especially those of the West” and was, therefore, inappropriate to the traditions of learning and teaching in Cambodia, he later reported on the openness of his students to autonomous language learning. Research in Asian countries compared perceptions of autonomy among European and Asian students and concluded that the desire of Asian students

to be active and independent was as strong as that of European students (Littlewood, 2000). Other studies attributed the passive classroom behaviour of Asian students to the educational contexts in which they worked (Holden and Usiki, 1999). Hong Kong is one example of a culture where it is generally accepted that, in most schools, qualities such as independence, individuality and creativity are less highly valued than obedience, conformity, discipline and diligence (Evans, 1996). This opinion is also supported in research conducted by Chan et al. (2002), who found that students perceived the teacher as a dominant figure, and their preference was for the teacher to take responsibility for their learning. Ho and Crookall (1995) discussed in detail the cultural traits that hindered or encouraged autonomy in such a setting and noted that it was through the concrete action of taking responsibility that genuine autonomy was learnt. In conclusion, some studies conducted in Asian countries such as Japan and Hong Kong show that Asian students had a reasonably positive attitude towards learner autonomy while other study results (Gardner and Miller, 1994; Littlewood, 2000) reach no definite conclusion about the applicability of learner autonomy within the Hong Kong context. A further significant opinion that should be mentioned here is that of Pennycook's (1997) who believes that autonomy and the autonomous individual are purely a construct of Western cultures and that the notion has limited applicability to other cultural contexts. Pennycook (1997) adds that language needs to be understood within the particular context in which it is used, and stresses the need to investigate the cultural factors that affect each classroom.

Since autonomy and motivation in foreign language learning is context-specific and is perceived differently in different cultures, an examination of Turkish students' attitudes to autonomy is important since Turkey is a country located between the East and the West. When broadly reviewed, Turkey's educational system is not greatly different from those of other eastern countries. Because of the policies of the Higher Education Institution and Ministry of Education, English teaching is exam-oriented, aiming at training students for proficiency exams and focusing on grammar use, reading comprehension and writing skills. Although there has been limited research on autonomy in Turkey, studies conducted do give some indications of the perception of autonomy and how learner autonomy is influenced by previous learning experiences (İskenderoğlu, 1992; Keskekci, 1995). Erdoğan's study (2003) at a Turkish secondary school showed that the factors of teacher behaviour hindered the development of learner autonomy because the teachers themselves had been trained within the same education system and thus were unable to change their habits. Previous research has produced similar results, demonstrating that the Turkish educational system is mainly directed and evaluated by authorities. This has an adverse influence on learner autonomy, and the majority of students lack the necessary critical thinking and reflection skills (Karasar, 1984;

Karagül, 1996; Büyüköztürk, 1999). This vicious circle is demonstrated in a study on pre-service language teachers' autonomy researched by Sert (2006), which indicated that classroom training activities were neither aimed at preparing these trainees to be aware of their own needs and goals, nor helped them assess their own strengths and weaknesses as learners. The result also revealed the trainees' failure in directing and monitoring their own learning.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This paper investigates university students' perceived responsibilities and abilities related to autonomous learning, and the related activities conducted inside and outside the classroom. In addition, the study examines whether responsibility, ability and activities undertaken vary significantly according to motivation level and gender, leading to results which are expected to reveal the current attitudes to autonomy and to promote autonomy, using appropriate materials.

This study was conducted at a time when self-learning facilities at the university were newly opened. These included the Self-Access Center, Smart Class, Activity Center and a project supported financially by the EU Socrates-Lingua program in order to encourage greater student autonomy, The Language Café.

The following issues are addressed in this study:

1-Does responsibility, ability and activities significantly differ according to gender?

2-Does responsibility, ability and activities significantly differ according to motivation levels?

3-What are students' perceptions of their responsibilities?

4-What are students' perceptions of their abilities?

5-What different activities are students engaged in inside and outside the classroom?

The questions above were also directed to the teachers in order to get their perspective.

### **Limitation of the Study**

The sample is limited in the number of participants surveyed and is restricted to only one English Medium University, located in İzmir, Turkey. The study involves 320 freshman students, and 24 English teachers.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

The study involved 320 students chosen randomly from a total of 960 Freshman students attending a Turkish university, where English, although not the official language of the country, is the primary medium of instruction. All the students involved were Turkish, with 162 females and 158 males, ranging in age from 19 to 22. As these students had studied in the English Language preparatory program for one year and passed the proficiency examination, this sample group was expected to represent distinguishing features of a language learner. Twenty-four English teachers teaching this group of students participated in this study. Of the 24, 11 were native English speaker teachers while 13 were non-native; all were within the 30 to 48 age range and had at least five years of teaching experience. The group consisted of 8 females and 16 males.

### The Questionnaire and Data Collection

In order to compare the results with research conducted in culturally similar circumstances, it was decided to base the questionnaire on that used by Chan, Spratt and Humphreys (2002). This questionnaire, in turn, was based on inputs from Deci (1995), and Deci and Ryan (1985). The original 52-item questionnaire contained 4 sections, all of which are related to autonomous learning: students' perception of their responsibilities, students' perception of their abilities, students' perception of their motivation level, and the activities they engage in both inside and outside classroom. Before piloting the questionnaire, in order to discover whether responsibility, ability, and the activities change significantly according to motivation, a separate section on "motivation" was added to the "personal information section". The questionnaire was also translated into Turkish and then reverse-translated to ensure content validity and to avoid any misunderstanding which might result from language. After revision, the pilot study, which was conducted for item clarity purposes, covered 110 students in various faculties. The questionnaire was administered to the pilot group by the researcher herself. On completion of the questionnaire, students were asked to comment on any ambiguous items in order to ensure content validity.

A principal components analysis with a varimax rotation was first used in order to ensure the construct validity of the questionnaire. According to the results of the factor analysis, 15 factors with an eigenvalue greater than one were identified. When examined by a scree plot, it was seen that there was a sharp drop from the third factor to the fourth. This implied that the questionnaire has three dimensions, which can be labelled responsibility, ability and activities. The eigenvalue and the explained variance rates were found to be 7.13 and 12.65% for the first component (factor); 4.54 and

10.82% for the second; 2.39 and 5.7% for the third. The total variance rate was calculated as 29.2% and the alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was found to be .81, while the factors were found to be .58, .80 and .77. As expected, these results yield evidence for three factors. .58 for the first dimension appears low, but 10 items in this section were kept because these items reflected the cultural effects on autonomous learning as indicated by Chan et al. (2002) and Ho and Crookall (1995). The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the questionnaire of .81 suggested consistency of response.

In conclusion, the revised questionnaire included three main sections and 42 items, in addition to personal information about students' gender and motivation level. Students were asked to identify their motivation level based on a 3-point Likert scale (unmotivated, motivated, and highly motivated). The responsibility section (1-10 items) was arranged using the following descriptors: 'student's responsibility', 'teacher's responsibility' and 'both' while the ability section (11-20 items) was arranged in a 5-point Likert scale (very poor, poor, okay, good, very good) and the activities (21-42 items; never, rarely, sometimes, often and always) (see Appendix I). The student questionnaire was administered at the end of the spring term. Nine incorrectly completed responses were excluded. After statistical evaluations, 25 students of the sample group participated in a 45-minute interview (in their native language to ensure no misunderstanding occurred) based on the findings emerging from the questionnaire survey, with the purpose of ensuring the gathering of both qualitative and quantitative data.

A version of the same questionnaire was administered to the instructors of the sample group (see Appendix II). Twenty-four completed this questionnaire and eight took part in interviews, based on the results extracted.

### **Analysis of the Data**

The total scores for responsibility, ability, and activity were computed. The t-test was used for the analysis of the findings related to gender, and ANOVA was used to analyze whether responsibility, ability and the activities differ significantly in terms of motivation level. In order to analyze whether there is a significant difference between the perception of students and teachers regarding responsibility, Chi Square was used and regarding ability an activity t-test was used. SPSS 11.0 was used in the analysis of the data.

## **RESULTS**

### **Gender and Responsibility/Ability/Activity**

The t-test suggests that the scores of responsibility do not differ significantly according to gender,  $t(309) = 1.48$ ,  $p > .05$ . However, in scores



related to (perception of) ability between genders,  $t(309) = 3.82$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $d = .46$ , the mean of females ( $M = 34.84$ ) is considerably higher than males ( $M = 31.9$ ). Thus, females perceive themselves as more competent language learners than males. A similarly significant gender-based difference was found in activity scores,  $t(309) = 4.93$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $d = .56$ , showing that the females scored ( $M = 68.62$ ) higher than the males ( $M = 60.46$ ).

### **Motivation and Responsibility/Ability/Activity**

The results of ANOVA indicate a significant difference in the scores of responsibility,  $F(2,308) = 12.31$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta^2 = .08$ ; ability,  $F(2,308) = 25.42$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta^2 = .15$ , and activities,  $F(2,308) = 15.11$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta^2 = .11$  in terms of motivation levels as perceived by the students. The significant effects were investigated with pairwise comparisons by using Scheffe correction. The comparisons indicate that the responsibility scores between all groups are significant except highly motivated and motivated groups (M.D.Hmot-Unmot = 1.91,  $p < .01$ , M.D.Mot-Unmot = 2.26,  $p = .00$ ).

A Scheffe post hoc analysis also indicates that motivation levels differ significantly between groups in terms of ability scores (M.D.Hmot-Unmot = 7.52,  $p = .00$ , M.D.Hmot-Mot = 2.67,  $p < .01$ ). Thus, the mean of the ability scores of the highly motivated group is significantly higher than those of the motivated and unmotivated groups.

The results for activities give similar results, revealing that motivated and highly motivated students often participate in activities related to autonomous learning (M.D.Hmot-Unmot = 12.99,  $p = .00$ ; M.D.Hmot-Mot = 5.71,  $p < .01$ ).

### **Students' and Teachers' Perception of Responsibility in Language Learning**

A 2x3 contingency table regarding responsibility was conducted to evaluate any significant differences between the perceptions of teachers and students. The results show that there is, in fact, a significant difference between students' and teachers' responses. The majority of students believe that both students and teachers are seen as responsible for making progress during lessons, while most teachers see students as responsible  $\chi^2(2, N = 335) = 112.82$ ,  $p = .00$ , Cramer's  $V = .58$ . The majority of students believe that making progress outside class is their responsibility, while only 25% of teachers perceive this as the students' responsibility  $\chi^2(2, N = 335) = 92.3$ ,  $p = .00$ , Cramer's  $V = .52$ . 64.6% of students perceive the teacher as responsible for stimulating interest in learning English and 62.5% of teachers agree with this, while others (37.5%) disagree, believing that this should be the student's responsibility  $\chi^2(2, N = 335) = 21.85$ ,  $p = .00$ , Cramer's  $V = .25$ . While 48.9% of students perceive teachers as responsible for identifying a student's weak

areas in English, 62.5% teachers think that this should be the student's responsibility  $\chi^2(2, N = 335) = 26.37, p = .00, \text{Cramer's } V = .28$ .

**Table 1. Frequencies and Percentages Concerning Teachers' and Students' Choices in Responsibility**

			Choice of the Participants		
			Teacher	Student	Both
Item 1	Students	Frequency	25	249	27
		Percentage	11.3%	8.7%	80.1%
	Teachers	Frequency	0	3	21
		Percentage	0%	87.5%	12.5%
Item 2	Students	Frequency	24	243	44
		Percentage	7.7%	78.1%	14.1%
	Teachers	Frequency	18	6	0
		Percentage	75%	25%	0%
Item 3	Students	Frequency	201	29	81
		Percentage	64.6%	9.3%	26%
	Teachers	Frequency	15	9	0
		Percentage	62.5%	37.5%	0%
Item 4	Students	Frequency	89	70	152
		Percentage	28.6%	22.5%	48.9%
	Teachers	Frequency	9	15	0
		Percentage	37.5%	62.5%	0%
Item 5	Students	Frequency	186	24	101
		Percentage	59.8%	7.7%	32.5%
	Teachers	Frequency	15	8	1
		Percentage	62.5%	33.3%	4.2%
Item 6	Students	Frequency	219	24	67
		Percentage	70.4%	7.7%	21.5%
	Teachers	Frequency	17	7	0
		Percentage	70.8%	29.2%	0%
Item 7	Students	Frequency	182	32	97
		Percentage	58.5%	10.4%	31.1%
	Teachers	Frequency	16	8	0
		Percentage	66.7%	33.3%	0%
Item 8	Students	Frequency	159	60	92
		Percentage	51.1%	19.3%	29.6%
	Teachers	Frequency	22	2	0
		Percentage	91.7%	8.3%	0%
Item 9	Students	Frequency	224	17	70
		Percentage	72%	5.5%	22.5%
	Teachers	Frequency	17	7	0
		Percentage	70.8%	29.2%	0%
Item 10	Students	Frequency	63	102	146
		Percentage	20.3%	32.8%	46.9%
	Teachers	Frequency	10	13	1
		Percentage	41.7%	54.2%	4.2%

Students again perceive teachers as responsible for deciding the objectives of an English course,  $\chi^2(2, N = 335) = 21.19, p = .00$ , Cramer's  $V = .25$ , deciding what should be learned next in lessons  $\chi^2(2, N = 335) = 16.32, p = .00$ , Cramer's  $V = .22$ , choosing what activities to use  $\chi^2(2, N = 335) = 18.26, p = .00$ , Cramer's  $V = .23$ , deciding how long to spend on each activity  $\chi^2(2, N = 335) = 15.32, p = .00$ , Cramer's  $V = .21$ , and choosing what materials to use  $\chi^2(2, N = 335) = 22.8, p = .00$ , Cramer's  $V = .26$ . 33.3% of teachers perceive that students should decide the objectives of a course, and 29.2% think that deciding what should be learned next should be the students' responsibility. It is interesting to note that almost all teachers (91.7%) consider that deciding how long to spend on each activity should be their own responsibility while only 19.3% of students perceive that it should be the students' own responsibility. 46.9% of students perceive that evaluating learning is both the teacher's and student's responsibility while 54.2% of teachers perceive students as responsible,  $\chi^2(2, N = 335) = 16.94, p = .00$ , Cramer's  $V = .22$ .

***Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Abilities in Language Learning:*** The results of the Independent Samples t-test indicate that there is a significant difference between the teachers' and students' responses in terms of perception of abilities in language learning,  $t(333) = 6.06, p = .00$ . In the areas of choosing learning activities, objectives and materials, both in and outside the classroom, deciding what they should learn, how long to spend on each activity, identifying weaknesses in English, and evaluating learning, students ( $M = 25.04$ ) perceive themselves more competent when compared to the perceptions of their teachers ( $M = 33.43$ ) on the same issues. It is interesting to note that even though students consider themselves able to evaluate, choose materials, decide on the course objectives and identify weaknesses, they prefer to pass the responsibility to teachers.

***Students' and Teachers' Perception of Activities Inside and Outside the Classroom:*** A t-test was conducted in order to detect any significant differences between students' and teachers' perceptions regarding activities, however, the analysis results indicate no significant variation  $t(333) = 1.06, p > .05$ . Both groups, therefore, hold similar perceptions of how often students conduct activities in/outside classroom related to autonomy.

***Interview Results with Students and Teachers:*** Twenty-five students volunteered to participate in a 45-minute interview, conducted in a classroom. It was a semi-structured interview aimed at getting the students' own ideas about autonomy in language learning. The interview, conducted in the

students' native language, Turkish, was recorded, and later transcribed and analyzed on the basis of the frequencies.

The students, in general, reported that teachers neither trust nor give responsibilities to students although they feel competent to choose materials, activities and contribute to course objectives. Here are five reports highlighting this:

“When we express our true feelings about the materials and activities, teachers say that we are not experts and teachers know the best.” (expressed by 6 students)

“We are aware of our needs and want to share these needs with teachers. However, they say that they already have objectives set by the school and they cannot change this. Thus, the lessons become very boring.” (expressed by 4 students)

“We would like to get involved in the decision-making process in regard to classroom activities, materials and objectives, but teachers do not motivate us.” (expressed by 9 students)

“Honestly, we are very happy with the current system because teachers take on most of the work.” (expressed by 12 students)

“We don't do activities related to autonomy if our teachers do not check.” (expressed by 7 students)

In addition to the interview with students, the researcher interviewed eight teachers. They, in general, expressed that students are not competent at choosing activities, materials and evaluating their learning although they admitted having failed in leading them to autonomous learning. Here are some reports highlighting this:

“We have to shoulder the responsibilities ourselves since the students are reluctant to do so” (expressed by 2 teachers)

“We may have failed in clarifying course objectives, preparing materials according to students' needs, involving them in the teaching and learning process, and training them to share responsibilities.” (expressed by 5 teachers)

“Students are inadequate in choosing activities, objectives, and learning materials inside and outside the classroom, deciding how long to spend on each activity and evaluating their learning, taking into account the students' profile at university.” (expressed by 3 teachers)

“We lack information and awareness regarding learning, and fail to encourage students to be autonomous by, for example, stimulating them to do more projects, search on the internet, or evaluate themselves. Honestly, we are constrained by the department as to which activities to use.” (expressed by 6 teachers)

## DISCUSSION

The results suggest that ability and activity scores differ significantly according to gender, with females considering themselves more competent and more participatory than males in activities related to autonomous learning. The results for responsibility do not reflect a noticeable gender difference; however, a significant difference is indicated in motivation and responsibility, ability and activity.

Students surrender almost all responsibility to teachers, whereas they perceive themselves capable in several areas such as choosing learning activities and objectives inside/outside class, deciding how long to spend on each activity and evaluating learning. This study also suggests that the majority of students do, at times, engage in autonomous learning activities both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers agree that in general terms, the majority of students sometimes participate in autonomous learning activities. The teachers see themselves as taking almost all responsibility because they perceive that students lack this ability.

These results are consistent with similar research conducted in the field. As mentioned above, this study suggests that females perceive themselves more competent in language learning and they engage more in autonomy-related activities. This is consistent with the studies conducted by Ehrman and Oxford (1995), and Oxford, Nyikos and Ehrman (1988), who contend that females tend to show more positive attitudes to language learning.

In line with Jones (1995), who describes autonomy as “laden with cultural values”, the results regarding responsibility, ability and activities could be attributed to students’ social-cultural backgrounds. The results of this study seem to be consistent with the studies conducted by Holden and Usiki (1995), Littlewood (2000), and Chan et al. (2002), which found that Asian students want to be active and independent in class like European students although they perceive teachers as an authority figure. This study is also consistent with other studies conducted in Turkey, which suggest that teacher factors hinder the development of learner autonomy (Erdoğan, 2003; Büyüköztürk, 1999; Karagül, 1996). A potential cause for this may be that Turkish teachers, seen as authority figures in the education system, fear losing power and control, and, therefore, tend to take on most of the responsibility in class. According to Sert (2006), even pre-service teachers are unable to apply autonomous learning strategies as these are not taught in faculties, thus reinforcing the vicious circle that works against autonomy. There is a danger of this vicious circle turning into a habit over time.

It is also interesting to note here that students are not given responsibility in their learning process, although their own view is that they do have this capacity. The teachers’ traditional role as decision makers may

be the reason for students engaging in autonomous activities “sometimes” rather than “often” or “always”. The studies conducted support this finding, that over-authoritarian teachers may cause a reduction in autonomy and damage creativity (Utman, 1997). As the self-determination theory notes, intrinsically motivated learners search for challenges and enhance competence, and autonomous learners who are “self-directed” outside the classroom can decide for themselves what to learn out of regular classroom hours (Koestner and McClelland, 1990). Although the findings of this study suggest that most of the students perceive themselves as motivated, they neither seek challenges nor are often willing to engage in activities out of the classroom. This can be attributed to the type of motivation they have: intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. Fazy and Fazy (2001) and Dickinson (1995) highlight the importance of motivation, claiming that students will take more responsibility if they believe themselves to be in control of the outcome. Teachers, then, should share responsibilities with their students so that students do not lose their motivation.

Finally, the interviews conducted with teachers reveal similar results to those carried out in other countries, highlighting the fact that teachers feel a lack of freedom to determine the initiatives they take in the classroom and thus, cannot properly encourage students to be autonomous (Little, 2000; Aoki, 2000). As stated by Mariani (1997), teachers themselves should be aware of what it is to be an autonomous learner and that autonomy is a continuum between independence and dependence, challenge and support. Interviews conducted with students reveal similar results with the ones conducted in Turkey and abroad as well. Research conducted in Turkey indicates that teachers are unable to direct students to autonomous learning because they themselves had not been trained accordingly (Erdoğan, 2003; Sert, 2006). During the interview, students expressed that teachers are reluctant to share responsibilities with students.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

This study shows that students do not perceive themselves as sufficiently autonomous, that they are unwilling to take responsibility and that they continue to see the teacher as a dominant figure who is the decision maker in the classroom. Thus, this study highlights the need to integrate learner independence into the language curriculum, with a well-structured focus, delivery, and content.

The focus (topic, task, functional, grammar-based, mixed syllabus), the delivery (the amount of independent learning time a teacher spends) and the content (activities and tasks) should be prepared bearing in mind the best way to introduce students to autonomous learning, the skills and knowledge

needed, and the extent that students are permitted to make decisions based on their own needs.

Considering that the implementation of autonomous learning is closely related to management, staff development, learner training, and learning resources, a policy framework which addresses this implementation should also be developed. Without this, it would be difficult to implement independent learning in a coherent way and to attract institutional commitment. Within this framework, teachers need to experience autonomous learning themselves and need to be committed to self-development. The questions of how teachers can be psychologically prepared and which skills and knowledge are needed for autonomy should be addressed as well. Students/learners need induction sessions and support so that they can become familiar with independent language learning materials, equipment and resources. Thus, designated advisors working at the Self-Access Center will be able to provide students with appropriate approaches.

To sum up, the results indicate that students do not perceive themselves as autonomous enough in language learning and teachers lack the ability to move their students towards autonomous learning. Respecting student ideas, sharing decisions in teaching, learning goal setting and leading students towards taking responsibility for their learning rather than prescribing the learning process will all increase student motivation, and thus, foster success.

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**APPENDIX 1****Questionnaire for Students****Please Read**

This questionnaire was devised to determine whether you have a tendency towards autonomous learning. Please do not write your name and put -X- where appropriate.

**Personal Information**

1- Sex : Male  Female

2- How would you describe your motivation (level)? Highly motivated to learn English  
Motivated to learn English  
Not at all motivated to learn English

**Section 1. RESPONSIBILITIES**

When you are taking English classes at university, whose responsibility should it be?

	<b>Yours</b>	<b>Your Teacher's</b>	<b>Both</b>
1. to ensure you make progress during English lessons			
2. to ensure you make progress outside class			
3. to stimulate your interest in learning English			
4. to identify your weaknesses in English			
5. to decide the objectives of your English course			
6. to decide what you should learn next in your English lessons			
7. to choose what activities to use to learn English in your English lessons			
8. to decide how long to spend on each activity			
9. to choose what materials to use to learn English in your English lessons			
10. to evaluate your learning			

Please indicate if you want to add other

items.....  
.....

**Section 2. ABILITIES**

If you have the opportunity, how good do you think you would be at:

	<b>Very poor</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>OK</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Very good</b>
11. choosing learning activities in class					
12. choosing learning activities outside class					
13. choosing learning objectives in class					
14. choosing learning objectives outside class					
15. choosing learning materials in class					
16. choosing learning materials outside class					
17. deciding what you should learn next in your English lessons					
18. deciding how long to spend on each activity					
19. identifying your weaknesses in English					
20. evaluating your learning					

Please indicate if you want to add more items

.....

**Section 3. ACTIVITIES**

**Last year and in this academic year, how often have you**

	<b>Always</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>
21. done assignments which are not compulsory?					
22. noted down new words and their meanings?					
23. read newspapers in English?					
24. visited your teacher about your work?					
25. read books or magazines in English?					
26. watched English TV programs?					
27. listened to English songs?					
28. talked to foreigners in English?					
29. practiced using English with friends					
30. done grammar exercises?					
31. done group studies in English lessons?					
32. attended the self-study center?					
33. asked the teacher questions when you didn't understand?					
34. made suggestions to the teacher?					
35. planned your lesson/study?					
36. activated your prior knowledge while studying?					
37. made inferences about your lesson?					
38. done classifications while studying?					
39. summarised your studies while studying?					
40. taken notes while studying?					
41. used resources while studying?					
42. worked cooperatively with your friends?					

**Please indicate if you want to add more items**

.....  
.....

**Many Thanks for giving your time to complete this questionnaire. Your co-operation is much appreciated.**

**APPENDIX II****Questionnaire for Teachers****Please Read**

This questionnaire was devised to determine whether your students have a tendency to autonomous learning. Please do not write your name and put -X- where appropriate.

**A- Personal Information**

- 1- Gender Male  Female
- 2- Your experience (in years)? 0-5  5-10  10-15  15 and above
- 3- How would you describe your students' motivation (level)?  
Highly motivated to learn English  
Motivated to learn English  
Not at all motivated to learn English

**Section 1. RESPONSIBILITIES**

**When you are teaching English classes at university, whose responsibility should it be?**

	<b>Yours</b>	<b>Student's</b>	<b>Both</b>
1. to make sure students make progress during English lessons			
2. to make sure students make progress outside class			
3. to stimulate student interest in learning English			
4. to identify student weaknesses in English			
5. to decide the objectives of the English course			
6. to decide what should be learned next in English lessons			
7. to choose what activities to use to learn English in English lessons			
8. to decide how long to spend on each activity			
9. to choose what materials to use to learn English in English lessons			
10. to evaluate student learning			

**Section 2. ABILITIES**

**If your students had the opportunity, how good do you think they would be at:**

	<b>Very poor</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>OK</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Very good</b>
11. choosing learning activities in class					
12. choosing learning activities outside class					
13. choosing learning objectives in class					
14. choosing learning objectives outside class					
15. choosing learning materials in class					
16. choosing learning materials outside class					
17. deciding what students should learn next in English lessons					
18. deciding how long to spend on each activity					
19. identifying their weaknesses in English					
20. evaluating their learning					

**Section 3. ACTIVITIES**

**Last year and in this academic year, how often do you think your students have:**

	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
21. done assignments which are not compulsory?					
22. noted down new words and their meanings?					
23. read newspapers in English?					
24. come to see you about their studies?					
25. read books or magazines in English?					
26. watched English TV programs?					
27. listened to English songs?					
28. talked to foreigners in English?					
29. practiced using English with friends					
30. done grammar exercises?					
31. done group studies in English lessons?					
32. attended the self-study center?					
33. asked you questions when they don't understand					
34. made suggestions to you?					
35. planned their lesson/studies?					
36. activated their prior knowledge while studying?					
37. made inferences about English lessons?					
38. done classifications/mind maps while studying?					
39. summarized their studies while studying?					
40. taken notes while studying?					
41. used resources while studying?					
42. worked cooperatively with their friends?					