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Turkish Tertiary Level Voluntary Intensive English Program Students' Perceptions of Autonomy and Autonomous Activities in EFL Classes

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Abstract

Language learner autonomy is an important concept that can change the English as a Foreign Language (EFL henceforth) world as giving learners control and responsibility for their language learning process. This study takes place in the EFL environment in a voluntary intensive English program at a state university in Turkey. In this program, there is an ongoing problem of drop-outs and failures each year, so the study was conducted to see if this phenomenon can be explained via autonomy. An explanatory sequential mixed-method study design was used. Autonomy Perception Scale was used to gather quantitative data, which was analyzed by means of IBM SPSS 22.0, and structured interview forms were utilized to collect qualitative data whose content was analyzed. Findings demonstrated that these students were not efficiently autonomous, there was no significant difference between genders, and many activities were conducted by adequately autonomous learners to promote learner autonomy levels in this program. Results were discussed and future implications were made.

Keywords: autonomy, language learner autonomy, autonomous activities, intensive English program (IEP).

Introduction

Autonomy has been an area of interest in English Language Teaching (ELT) world since it was introduced to educational fields as a desirable trait of a language learner in the second half of the 20th century, when student-centered approaches to language learning became popular. Autonomy is an individual difference which emerged as a result of these student-centered approaches, and it still affects the ELT world today.

Language learner autonomy is at the center of both language learning theory and practice (Little, 2007) due to the fact that language learning is individualistic; therefore, it is just possible to decide, monitor, and assess it by language learners themselves (Wang, 2011). Although learner autonomy has become one of the key goals in higher education (Baume, 1992), there are few studies in Turkey which identified autonomous language learners at different levels of education, and looked into whether they had some common activities as a sign of being autonomous. Also, the number of studies investigating the relationship and learner autonomy is insufficient (Üstünlüoğlu, 2009; Varol & Yılmaz, 2010; Abdel Razeq, 2014; Mardjuki, 2018) Furthermore, they have contradictory results. Moreover, although autonomy has been widely studied all over the world, there is still a need to understand the activities of autonomous language learners. Thus, this study aims to identify autonomous learners in a tertiary level voluntary intensive English program, to compare autonomy levels of female and male students, and investigate their autonomous activities in their context to guide other language learners.

Learner Autonomy

The concept of 'autonomy has many definitions stated by different scholars focusing on different ideas about it. One of the first definitions of autonomy is by Holec, who defines autonomy as 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning to have, and to hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning'(1981, p.3). In one of the earliest definitions, Dickinson (1987) defines it as 'the situation in which learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with the learning and the implementation of those decisions' (p.11). Smith (2003) states that Holec's definition is still the most widely-accepted and cited one, but there are many points to be discussed in it, such as what "the ability to take charge" means and how people's own learning can happen in a specific context. Thus, it is necessary to 'focus on when, where and how of language learning more' (Benson, 2016, p.15) because learners may affect when, where, and how the learning occurs, which makes them gain autonomy.

Researchers also identify autonomy as a social process which has three important features: It changes over time, it is context-bound and socially mediated (Little, 1991; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Palfreyman, 2003; Murray, 2011; Paiva, 2011). Some researchers also claim autonomy occurs as a result of social interactions with peers and teachers (Ryan, 1991; Little, 2000, 2003; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Palfreyman, 2003; Raya & Lamb 2008; Smith, Kuchah & Lamb, 2018). Thus, pair work and group work are valued in modern language education approaches as they are known to promote learner autonomy (Smith, Kuchah & Lamb, 2018).

Other researchers focus on the relationship between the process of language learning and autonomy. Nunan (1997) suggests that developing autonomy is a gradual process whilst learning a language. According to Little (2003), learner autonomy includes an ability to set specific learning goals, watch the progress and evaluate the learning outcomes via self-assessment procedures. In addition, during this process, learner autonomy necessitates

collaborative work with peers and teachers. These explanations complete the previous definitions by explaining where, when, and how, so they have practical implications.

There are some tertiary level studies that examine the perceptions about learner autonomy such as studies about teachers' perceptions about learner autonomy (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Al-Busaidi & Al-Maamari, 2014), the perceptions of both students and teachers (Lai, Yeung, & Hu, 2016), and perceptions of learner and teacher autonomy in Turkey (Üstünlüoğlu, 2009; Tanyeli & Kuter, 2013). These studies about perceptions have contradictory results, which makes it difficult to generalize the results. Ünal, Çeliköz and Sari (2017) search for the relationship between autonomy and proficiency similar to Dafei (2007). Han (2014) gathers studies about teachers' role in fostering autonomy in a literature review. These studies are some of the few studies conducted on autonomy in ELT area in Turkey.

Autonomous Language Learners

In the process focused approaches mentioned above, gaining autonomy is a process like language learning itself, and they both comprise several different pieces. It is essential to find out how they affect each other so that a learner can be called autonomous. The features of autonomous language learners are still discussed around the world, and many studies give definitions and explanations of it. In one of these studies, Harmer (2001) states that to be an autonomous language learner, a learner needs to spend time to learn out of class, to be an active participant and develop their strategies to learn appropriately. There are several internal and situational factors affecting autonomy, and the interaction between these factors determines how autonomous a learner is (Benson, 2001) such as their previous experiences of language learning (Nunan, 1997). Autonomous language learners need to utilize the target language by listening, speaking, reading, and writing with a reasonable mastery of target language grammar rules to develop their proficiency so that they can interact with other speakers in the future (Littlewood, 1996; Macaro, 1997; Little, 2003).

Littlewood (1996) defines that the aim of teaching is to help learners learn more independently, yet Little (1991) introduces the idea of interdependence over independence. The independence of autonomous learners is enriched by interdependence (Little, 2003). In addition, he emphasizes that autonomous learners do not need to do things by themselves, but rather for themselves (Little, 2007). This idea complies with the idea that autonomy is a result of social interactions (presented above). Autonomous language learners are in interaction with their peers and teachers to learn the language better. As learning a language necessitates active involvement and using the target language, learner autonomy is a substantial aspect of effective language learning (Dickinson, 1996; Wang & Peeverly, 1986; Little, 2007; Wang, 2011). In this way, it is possible to say that autonomous language learners are usually active during the learning process and willing to communicate in the target language, which is desired in language classes to transform them into successful learners. Autonomous language learners utilize their language learning environment, evaluate their own language learning process and apply necessary language learning strategies (Paiva, 2011).

As the concept of autonomy emerged in Europe, it is discussed to be a European concept related to its culture; however, it has been found to have relevance to learners to other cultures such as learners from developing countries (Smith, Kuchah & Lamb, 2018). With almost no exception, learners who can successfully learn a language in developing countries, where English is mostly the second language or the first foreign language, are found to be autonomous (Dafei, 2007; Smith, Kuchah & Lamb, 2018). As Turkey is an EFL (English as a foreign language) context, it is essential for the learners of English in Turkey to become autonomous so as to overcome the obstacles they come across on their path.

Autonomy in Formal Education

Autonomy in a formal education context is related to learners' desire and capacity to control their own learning process in a class environment in interacting with peers and teachers. Macaro (1997) states that autonomy is a skill to be acquired by learning how to decide one's own learning process and to be allowed to decide about oneself. In accordance with this, autonomy in a formal education environment encapsulates negotiations between learner and teacher about decisions to be made, needs of the learners and the organization of the groups (Macaro, 1997). While emphasizing learners' responsibility on the language learning process, autonomy does not exclude classroom teaching as learners can contribute to the decision-making and planning process in and out of classroom (Little, 1991).

Littlewood (1999) summarizes that being an autonomous language learner is crucial both because language learning is an individual process to be managed by learners themselves instead of teachers in formal education contexts, and they will continue learning languages even subsequent to their formal education period. In a formal education context, learners should have the capacity to manage their learning process inside and outside the classroom, help to build an ideal learning environment and collaborate with their peers and teachers to have effective learning (Benson, 2001).

This study was conducted in a tertiary level voluntary intensive English program, which means students choose to study in this program as an extra year with internal reasons such as having a better job in the future or external reasons such as elders' recommendations in their first year at university. The medium of language is Turkish at this university. Additionally, this program has no negative outcomes for unsuccessful students, so nearly half of the students show a tendency to drop out of the program before the end or fail to complete it successfully. Some of the students fail to meet the requirements of the program such as studying or doing homework. As autonomy is a concept related to the situation, the study was conducted to discover if these learners are autonomous, if there are significant differences between genders, and to investigate their autonomous ways of learning English. To achieve this aim, an explanatory sequential mixed-method study design was applied to neutralize the weaknesses of each form by gathering quantitative data to get statistical information and qualitative data to gain some insight (Creswell, 2014). For each research purpose, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the autonomy perception levels of the students studying in this tertiary level voluntary intensive English program?
2. Are there any significant differences in the autonomy perception levels between male and female students studying in this tertiary level voluntary intensive English program?
3. What are autonomous activities that are conducted by autonomous learners to learn English better?

Methodology

Participants

The study has a convenience sampling procedure as it was conducted with a specific purpose of studying in this program in the 2018-2019 fall semester. 129 students, who were still registered for the program at the time of the collection, participated in the study. Students' ages ranged from 17 to 23 (with a mean of 18 years 8 months). 81 students were male, and 48 students were female. 29 students studied in B1 level classes and 100 students studied in A2 level classes (who were placed in their groups with a proficiency exam at the beginning of the semester). Participation in the study was voluntary, and students signed consent forms before participation in which they were informed about the study and the researcher. As autonomous learners needed to be called later for further information, students were assigned numbers before the study on their consent forms and scales and they were requested to write their phone numbers on consent forms.

Instruments

Data triangulation was used in the study in order to validate quantitative findings with the qualitative data gathered (Dörnyei, 2007). To gather quantitative data, Autonomy Perception Scale developed by Demirtaş (2010) was used. He adopted the scale from Figura and Jarvis (2007) and translated it in Turkish for his thesis. He generated the factor analysis and he found all the items were loaded in one factor, so confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. As Demirtaş discovered one factor, the one-factor option was selected. With the accepted limit .25, all the items were loaded in one factor.

First, a small-scale pilot study was conducted with a class of students (N=15) in the same program, who were not included in the total data later to measure the reliability of the scale in this context. As there is only one factor, the overall reliability of the scale was calculated. Cronbach's alfa value of the internal consistency reliability test was .87. As it was above .80, it can be called reliable, according to Dörnyei (2007). Therefore, it was decided to be employed for the study.

The scale embraces two parts: The first part asks for demographic information such as gender, age, and the length of learning English. The second part encapsulates 30 questions with a 5-point Likert scale to show the frequency of the given statement (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=always). The scale was applied in Turkish to hinder any misunderstandings due to the lack of English proficiency of the students.

For the qualitative part of the study, autonomous language learners were requested to respond to an online structured interview form with eleven open-ended questions related to their autonomous activities related to planning, improving skills, vocabulary knowledge and

grammar competency, peer cooperation, use of technology and self-assessment, which are the key concepts related to learner autonomy both in the scale and literature reviewed. They were given 3 days' time to complete the part. It was expected to take nearly half-an-hour to finish it.

Data Collection and Analysis

Firstly, to collect quantitative data, necessary permission was obtained from the School of Foreign Languages administration. All possible participants were given numbers both on their consent forms and scales to refer them back if they were found to be autonomous learners. In this way, they did not have to write their names, but the researcher guaranteed that she could contact them afterwards in case she needed it. Autonomy Perception Scale by Demirtaş (2010) was distributed to all classes at the same time on December 20th, 2018 after necessary information was given to the teachers to apply them and to the students on their consent forms. It took nearly 15 minutes to complete the scale. It included items such as 'İngilizce öğrenme sürecimi planlarım (I plan my English learning process)'. IBM SPSS 22.0 statistical package was used to analyze quantitative data. It was analyzed by descriptive statistics such as mean scores and frequencies of individual questions, and the overall mean score of each student was calculated to extract autonomous language learners. To evaluate the mean scores, evaluation criteria were adopted from Demirtaş (2010). Means between 0-1.49 were evaluated as the activity was not conducted. The mean range between 1,50-2,49 was evaluated as the activity was not preferred. The mean range between 2,50-3,49 was thought to be conducted inadequately, while the mean range between 3,50-4,49 was evaluated to be conducted adequately. Means 4,50 and above were evaluated to be done effectively.

To answer the second research question, the test of normality was conducted to see if the data were normally distributed. If the skewness and kurtosis are between +1.0 and -1.0, the data is accepted as normally distributed (Barrett, Morgan, Leech and Gloeckner, 2011). Thus, parametric tests could be used to analyse it. Independent samples t-test was used to investigate if there was any significant difference between female and male students.

To answer the third research question, thirty-two students who were identified as adequately autonomous learners were contacted. Since their semester ended and they left for their hometown, the contact with students was supplied via mobile phones and requested to complete a structured interview form online with eleven open-ended questions. Fourteen students participated in this part of the study. Three days' time was given to complete the forms and promised to be awarded with lunch when they returned. Their answers were recorded, and the content was analyzed to find any patterns in their autonomous activities.

Results

Autonomy Perception Levels of Students

The first research question intended to explore what the students' levels of autonomy perception were. To answer the first research question, descriptive statistics was conducted, and mean scores of all questions were calculated. Table 1 shows the overall descriptive statistics (in the appendix).

According to the statistical information in Table 1, none of the mean scores of the questions indicated the activities were performed efficiently by the students. Out of thirty questions in the scale, seven of the questions -3, 4, 8, 14, 15, 16, 20- showed the activities were adequately done by the students. Thus, it can be specified that these students usually identify their English learning aims ($M=3,65$), look for better ways to learn English ($M=3,61$) and they get help from peers and teachers when they need it ($M=3,84$). To improve their listening skill, they focus on new words during listening ($M=3,55$). They listen to things again to understand better ($M=3,53$) and listen to songs in English ($M=3,73$). They use contextual clues to understand better while reading ($M=3,55$). In all other questions, the mean scores demonstrated that the students do not do the activity required, or they do it inadequately.

When it comes to individual students' autonomy levels, the frequency was calculated according to the mean scores of students. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Autonomy Perception Mean Scores of Individual Students

Ranges	Frequency	Percent
Students between 0-1,49	3	2,3
Students between 1,50-2,49	27	20,9
Students between 2,50-3,49	67	52
Students between 3,50-4,49	32	24,8
Students between 4,50-5,00	0	0
Total	129	100,0

According to the results in Table 2, no students were highly autonomous or could do the activities questioned effectively. There are 32 students who performed these activities adequately and can be called autonomous, while 67 students implemented them inadequately. 30 students did not do these activities.

The Gender Difference

The second research question was asked to investigate if there was any significant difference in autonomy levels of female and male students. To answer this question, independent samples T-test was applied. Mean score of male students was 2,99, while female students' mean score was 3,05. Independent samples T-test showed there was no significant difference in autonomy levels of male and female students in this program ($,617 > ,005$).

Activities of Autonomous Students

To answer the last research question, structured interview forms were analyzed for their content and some frequencies were identified. In the descriptive questions part, 57,1 % of the students were male, and 42,9% of the students were female. Moreover, they were asked how they decided to join this voluntary program, and 92,9 % of the students answered that it was their own choice, which was coherent with the responses to previous autonomy perception questionnaire. Only 7,1 % told a teacher recommended them.

The first question intended to explore if the students had planned their English learning process, which is an important sign of autonomy. Out of fourteen students, five

students answered they had not planned their learning process, whereas nine students said they had planned their learning process, as identified in Table 5. Three students denoted they had planned it, but they had not explained it. Four students planned their learning in the long term, and two students planned their vocabulary learning process.

Table 5

Autonomy in Planning English Language Learning

Sub-Category	Frequency (n)	Example Meaning Unit
General Process	4	“Seviyem A2 idi 1. dönem B1 2.dönem B2 ve asıl mesleki bölümümde ise C1 ve mesleki İngilizce öğrenmeyi amaçladım (S8).” (I was A2 level. I aimed being B1 in the first semester, B2 in the second semester, in my department C1 and vocational English.)
Vocabulary Learning	2	“Gerek derste duyduğum bilmediğim kelimeleri not alarak gerekse izlediğim ve izlemekte olduğum yabancı diziler ve filmlerde kendime göre önemli gördüğüm kalıpları ve kelimeleri zihnime yerleştirerek (S2).” (Not only by taking notes of the words I hear and don't know, but also memorizing phrases and words I thought as important in foreign TV series and films.)

The second question intended to search whether the students searched for extra resources to help their English learning process. Twelve out of fourteen students answered they searched for extra resources, but three of them did not reflect their answers. The other nine students explained their preferences, as designated in Table 6. Five students remarked six different uses of the Internet and Internet-based resources. Four students referred to using websites. Two students emphasized using videos to improve their English. One student expounded downloading useful applications and use social media pages. In addition, four students were found to use resource books.

Table 6

Autonomy in Choosing Extra Resources

Sub-Category	Frequency (n)	Example Meaning Unit
Websites	4	“...internet sitelerinden yardım alıyorum (S5).” (I get help from internet websites.)
Videos	2	“...internet üzerinde vloglar travel country tarzında videoları kaynak seçtim (S9).” (I chose vlogs and videos related to travel and country.)
Resource Books	4	“...bir çok farklı sözlük ve kitap gibi kaynaklardan yardım alıyorum (S1).” (I get help from many different resources like dictionary and book.)
Reading passages	1	“Kendi seviyemde anlayacağım şekilde yazıları bulmaya çalışırım (S4).” (I try to find reading passages which are in my level and I can understand.)

Use of Applications 1	“Telefonuma İngilizceyi daha kolay ve hızlı öğrenebileceğimi düşündüğüm uygulamalar indirdim (S11).” (I downloaded applications on my mobile via which I thought I could learn English easier and faster.
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The third question was reflected to know if the students did anything to improve their speaking skills out of class. All students answered they did something to develop their speaking skills, as explained in Table 7. Thirteen students stated they spoke English with their peers, teachers, and family. Three students mentioned to use the Internet, and one student specified that they read aloud to improve his/her pronunciation.

Table 7

Autonomy in Improving Speaking in English

Sub-Category	Frequency (n)	Example Meaning Unit
Talking to peers	11	“...yabancı bir kaç arkadaşım ile konuşmaya çalışıyorum (S1).” (I’m trying to talk to some foreign friends.)
Talking to family	2	“...babam ve yabancı dil bilen arkadaşlarımla günlük konuşmalar hatta yazışmalarda İngilizce kullanmaya çalışıyorum (S5).” (I’m trying to use English in daily speech and even writing with my dad and friends who knows it.)
Talking to teachers	1	“Yabancı hocalarımla konuşmaya çalışıyorum her fırsatta (S3).” (I’m trying to speak to my foreign teachers in every opportunity.)
Using online resources	3	“Sosyal medyada İngilizce konuşan insanlarla sohbet ederim (S7).” (I chat with people who speak English in social media.)
Pronunciation practice	1	“Evde ders çalışırken veya İngilizce bir yazı gördüğümde bunları sesli okurum (S11).” (I read aloud while studying or when I see a text in English.)

The fourth question investigated whether the students did anything to improve their listening skills out of class. Thirteen out of fourteen students answered it positively, and explained they used some means of technology to improve this skill (Table 8). Eight students denoted listening to music, whereas ten students mentioned watching something such as videos, films, TV series. One student remarked s/he used an application with listening exercises.

Table 8

Autonomy in Improving Listening in English

Sub-Category	Frequency (n)	Example Meaning Unit
Listening to music	8	“Müzik listeme her gün yeni bir İngilizce şarkı eklerim (S8).” (I add a new English song to my music list every day.)
Watching something	10	“Youtube gibi platformlarda video izlerim (S6).” (I watch videos on platforms such as Youtube.)

Using an application 1 “Telefonuma uygulama indirdim. Bize film kesitleri sunuyorlar istersek İngilizce alt yazılı da yapabiliyoruz (S11).” (I downloaded an application on my phone. They present us film parts, if we want we can make it with English subtitles.)

The fifth question was reflected to see if the students did anything to improve their writing skills. Eleven of them expounded they did something to improve it even though there were not common trends (Table 9). Three students remarked that they chatted online by writing, whereas five students signified they made some means of writing practice. Two students emphasized translating from Turkish to English or vice versa.

Table 9

Autonomy in Improving Writing in English

Sub-Category	Frequency (n)	Example Meaning Unit
Written chat	4	“Sanal ortamda arkadaşlarımla İngilizce sohbet etmeye çalışıyoruz (S11).” (We are trying to chat in English with my friends online.)
Writing practice	5	“Orada geçen bazı sözleri cümleleri alıp kendime uyarlayıp örnek cümle yazmaya çalışıyorum (S9).” (I’m trying to write example sentences by adapting some sentences from there.)
Translation	2	“Türkçe metinleri ingilizceye çeviririm (S10).” I translate Turkish texts to English.)

The sixth question asked the students if they did anything to improve their reading skills. Twelve students explained what they did for it, which is demonstrated in Table 10. Nine students identified they read some means of written texts such as books, stories, short passages. Three students specified they read whatever they found. One student said s/he read s/he reread what had been covered throughout the courses.

Table 10

Autonomy in Improving Reading in English

Sub-Category	Frequency (n)	Example Meaning Unit
Reading texts	9	“İngilizce kitap okuyorum (S1,S3).” (I’m reading books in English.)
Read everything they3 find	3	“...karsima cikan her ingilizce sey i okuyup anlamaya calisiyorum (S2, S3, S11)
Reread previous items	1	“Okulda geçtiğimiz yerleri yurt ortamında ders çalışırken tek basıma okumaya özen gösteririm (S9).” (I reread the parts we covered at school while studying in dormitory on my own.)

The seventh question was verbalized to learn if these students did anything to learn grammar better. Four of them said they did nothing to improve it. Four students stated they did exercises, whereas two students denoted they made revisions. Three of them remarked

they watched videos, and one of them told s/he read books to learn grammar. Examples are demonstrated in Table 11.

Table 11

Autonomy in Studying English Grammar

Sub-Category	Frequency (n)	Example Meaning Unit
Doing Exercises	5	“(tekrarın) ardından konu ile ilgili test çözüyorum (S1, S10).” (After the revision I solve tests related to the topic.)
Make Revisions	2	“Genelde sınıfta öğrendiğim konuyu eve geldiğimde tekrar ediyorum (S1).” (I usually revise the topic I learned at school when I come home.)
Watching videos	3	“İnternette konu anlatımlı videolar izlerim (S7).” (I watch videos on the Internet which tell the subjects.)
Reading books	1	“Kitap okurum (S6).” (I read books).

The eighth question was reflected to ask students whether they did anything to develop their vocabulary knowledge (Table 12). Six students just mentioned they looked up the new words in a dictionary, whereas four of them expounded they noted down new words as well. Two students explained they had vocabulary notebooks, two of them memorized new words, and three of them used these newly memorized vocabulary items so as to recall them. Two students specified they downloaded applications to learn vocabulary.

Table 12

Autonomy in Studying English Vocabulary

Sub-Category	Frequency (n)	Example Meaning Unit
Looking up new words	6	“Bilmediğim veya merak ettiğim kelimeleri (sözlükten) bulur(um) (S2).” (I look up the words I don’t know, or I wonder.)
Taking notes	4	“Bilmediğim kelimeleri not alıp açıklamalar yazıyorum (S3).” (I take notes of the words I don’t know and write explanations.)
Vocabulary Notebook	2	“Kelime defteri oluşturuyorum (S3).” (I make a vocabulary notebook.)
Memorising	2	“Yeni gördüğüm kelimeleri ezberlemeye gayret ederim (S7).” (I memorise the words I see for the first time.)
Using the words	3	“Öğrendiğim yeni kelimeleri sık sık kullanırım (S10).” (I frequently use the new words I have learned.)
Applications	2	“Uygulamaları yükler ona göre çalışırım (S6).” (I download applications and study accordingly.)

The ninth question was figured to explore if the students helped each other to learn English. Although all the students but one answered positively, only seven of them explained the process. All seven students said they studied together with their friends, and two of them added they chatted online with their friends in English, as indicated in Table 13.

Table 13

Autonomy in Cooperation

Sub-Category	Frequency (n)	Example Meaning Unit
Studying together	7	"Birbirimize anlatıyoruz (S3, S9, S11)." (We tell each other.)
Chatting online English	in2	"Sanal ortamda İngilizce konuşmaya çalışırız (S11)." (We try to speak English in the virtual environment.)

The tenth question was about the use of technology to learn English. All the students answered that they used technology, and eight students explained their answers in detail. Three students denoted they used social networking sites, whereas the other three students stated they watched videos to learn something. Two students remarked they learned everything through technology. Two students identified they used applications. The other two students emphasized they used technology to reach new information. Sample sentences were demonstrated in Table 14.

Table 14

Autonomy in Use of Technology

Sub-Category	Frequency (n)	Example Meaning Unit
Social Networking Sites	3	"...instagramda learn english tarzı sayfalarıda ayrıca takip ediyorum (S9)." (I also follow pages learn English kinds of pages on Instagram.)
Watching videos	3	"Dil bilgisi için de videolar izliyorum (S11)." (I also watch videos for grammar.)
Technology everything	is2	"Bilmediğim her şeyi teknoloji sayesinde öğrenebiliyorum (S1)." (I can learn everything I don't know through technology)
Applications	2	"Akıllı telefonumda ingilizce öğrenme programı olan duolingo ve sözlük bulunmakta (S3)." (There are duolingo, which is an application to learn English, and a dictionary on my smart phone).
Reaching information	new2	"...tüm teknolojik materyallerie ulaşıyorum (S3)." (I reach all technological materials.)

The last question sought if they evaluated their learning process or their language improvements. All the students but one told to specified they did evaluations. Nine students told they evaluated themselves, whereas one student told he used peer-evaluation. Out of nine students who told they evaluated themselves, four students expressed) they used evaluation to see their weaknesses, the other two students clarified they explored their weaknesses and studied) on them, and two students remarked they wanted to see their own progress. All the sub-categories were indicated in Table 15.

Table 15

Autonomy in Evaluation

Sub-Category	Frequency	Example Meaning Unit
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Self-evaluation-to see weaknesses	N=4	Nerelerde yanlış nerelerde doğru veya nerelerde takıldığıma dikkat ederim (S6).” (I pay attention to my mistakes, where I am right or I have problems.)
Self-evaluation-to overcome their weakness	N=2	“Tabi bunu eksiklerimi ve üstüne yoğunlaşmam gereken bölümü bulmak için yaparım (S8).” (Of course, I do it to find my weaknesses and the things to focus on.)
Self-evaluation-to monitor progress	N=2	“Kendini değerlendirme formlarını doldururum ve sürekli seviye belirleme testlerini çözüp ne kadar ilerlediğimi görürüm (S4).”
Peer evaluation	N=1	“Arkadaş çevremin katkılarıyla genellikle (S10).” (Usually thanks to my friends around.)

Discussion

This study was conducted to see whether tertiary students studying in a voluntary intensive English program in a state university were autonomous language learners. The second aim was to explore if there was any significant difference in language learning autonomy levels between genders. The last part of the study was dedicated to identifying some activities of these students corresponding to learning autonomy. To achieve these multiple aims, a mixed-method study was conducted. Autonomy Perception Scale was used to collect quantitative data, whereas an eleven questioned structured interview form was used to collect qualitative data. The results of each research question will be discussed below. This study will have important practical implications.

Primarily, the mean score of each question indicated which autonomous language learning activities were performed by the students in general. Out of thirty questions related to autonomous language learning activities, just seven of them received the scores that can be evaluated to be done by the students adequately. According to the mean scores, none of the activities were conducted efficiently. These results show that the students in this program do not conduct many autonomous language learning activities although they have chosen to study in this program. These students need to promote their autonomous activities to be more proficient language learners, so they should be informed about their situation, and some awareness-raising activities should be conducted.

In addition, mean scores of each student were calculated, and 32 students were identified as adequately autonomous language learners, which is 24, 8 % of all the students in the study. No students were identified to have efficient language learning autonomy. These students' current situation calls for immediate action since they have already finished their first semester and they have less time to achieve their goals. They should be motivated to try to learn English outside the class which is compulsory to be an autonomous language learner (Harmer, 2001) as well as being explained what to do to promote their language learner autonomy.

Secondly, there was no significant difference between females and males concerning language learner autonomy. This result contradicts with the results of Üstünlüoğlu (2009), which indicated female students engaged more with the activities which require autonomy, and Mardjuki (2018), which reflected different genders engaged in different autonomous

activities. However, Varol and Yilmaz (2010) could not obtain any significant difference between female and male language learners' autonomous activities. Abdel Razeq (2014) also did not attain any significant difference between female and male students' language learning autonomy perception. These studies demonstrate contradicting results, which proves the need for further studies in the area. For this study, the results may be since these students entered the university four months ago with similar university entrance exam results, so these students have not had enough time at university to differentiate between each other.

Thirdly, students were asked about the specific activities related to language learner autonomy. The questions consisted of language learning planning process, aims of language learning, searching for extra resources, use of communicative skills, grammar and vocabulary learning, use of technology, and assessment process, which was aimed to investigate the when where and how of autonomous language learning (Smith, 2003; Benson, 2016). Their answers were analyzed to get some ideas about how to promote language learner autonomy levels of all students. These findings are substantial since they come from language learners themselves rather than suppressed by researchers. If these findings are used to promote all students' autonomy levels, autonomous students will have paved the way for this process.

Initially, out of fourteen students who participate in the second part of the study, nine students have planned their learning process, which is the first responsibility one takes charge of during language learning. Secondly, twelve students look for extra materials, and nearly all of them use at least one kind of technological resource. These young adults were born into the technology era, and it is a crucial part of their lives, which affects their learning preferences, as well. Thus, these students can be promoted to use more technological resources to promote their autonomy and learning.

The next four questions are related to improving skills. All the students do something to improve their speaking skills, which they consider as the most significant part of learning a language in this communication era, so all students' competency can be encouraged by extra speaking activities, and a speaking club can be arranged for them, which will create another opportunity to talk. The second important part of a good communication is listening skill. Therefore, thirteen students try to improve their listening, and they use technology to this end such as listening to music, watching TV series, films, videos online. Corresponding to writing, eleven students try to improve it by writing or translating. It is a good improvement since these students learn English for academic or business purposes, so they will need to write in English. As the last skill, twelve students try to improve their reading skills through reading distinct materials. These findings comply with the autonomy literature as these are the parts of oral and written communication, and autonomous learners are defined as people who use the target language to be able to use it in the future (Littlewood, 1996; Macaro, 1997; Little, 2003).

The next questions are associated with developing grammar and vocabulary proficiency, respectively. Ten students do exercises, revise, or watch videos. Trying to learn grammar is particularly important as taking the responsibility to develop one's grammar requires autonomy (Pawlak, 2017). In addition, to develop their vocabulary knowledge, all of them apply different strategies such as using a dictionary, taking notes, keeping a vocabulary notebook. As all the students do at least one thing to improve their vocabulary knowledge, it

shows that they are aware of the importance of vocabulary while learning a language, and they take action related to it. Furthermore, Littlewood (1996) thinks autonomous learners are the ones who can choose their own ways to improve their grammar and vocabulary, which is the first prerequisite concern in autonomous communication.

The next question is with respect to interdependent learning, which means students learn during interaction with peers, and teachers (Little, 1991). The question focuses on peer interaction of interdependent learning. All students except for one study with their friends, or chat with them to learn English better. It is essential for them in an EFL environment since peer interaction gives them opportunities to use the target language and overcome the problems. The next question is associated with the use of technology to learn English. In addition to their previous answers where they identified a lot of technology use, here they all specify that they utilize technology frequently. As technology helps students to learn whatever they need out of class, it is their advantage to have explored this limitless resource. The last question is concerned the evaluation process which is one of the crucial steps of learner autonomy (Little, 2003; Paiva, 2011). Although thirteen students accept using evaluation in the language learning process, only nine of them denote their assessment. Whereas eight students use self-evaluation, one student prefers peer-evaluation. Evaluation is crucial in this process and calls for further action related to weaknesses; however, just two students emphasize working on weak points.

The findings of the study demonstrate that although the students in this program have made their own choices to study English, there are not efficiently autonomous learners; rather, there are only adequately autonomous language learners. There is no significant difference between male and female students. However, the data collected from adequately autonomous learners helps to gain some insight about young adult language learners. If their actions are developed, and they are projected to the whole population with the improvements, all the students can be helped to gain autonomy, which will help them not only in the second semester but also after the program.

In the long term, the data gathered should be included in the curriculum of the program. In the coming years if the students can be helped to develop autonomy at the beginning of the year (Ceylan, 2015), and they can use this substantial feature throughout their English learning process. In addition, having more efficiently and effectively autonomous learners may decrease the drop-out rates in this program which can be as high as 40 % in some years. The results of the study can also encourage the other intensive English programs in Turkey to investigate language learner autonomy levels of their students.

As for the limitations of the study, this population is exceedingly small population in terms of intensive English programs in Turkey. Further studies can be completed cross-programs to compare the results and generalize the findings better. Moreover, as this study is conducted at the end of the first semester, there is not a chance to see if these autonomous learners will be more successful at the end of the year, so further research should be done to compare their autonomy levels and success in learning English.

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