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AUTONOMOUS LEARNING CAPACITY OF EFL STUDENT TEACHERS ¹

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the impact of some personal factors on the autonomous learning capacity of student teachers in a foreign language department. The sample group of the study consisted of 146 prospective English teachers in the Educational Faculty of a state university. The participants were asked to anonymously fill out a questionnaire involving two parts which respectively investigated their background and autonomous learning capacity. The first part of the questionnaire is a combination of open-ended and multiple-choice items concerning the participant's age, gender, foreign language achievement, type of their high school and their degree. The second part of the questionnaire was originally developed to evaluate autonomous learning capacity of the students. The data were used to provide a descriptive and correlational analysis to address the research questions. The results indicate that there is a significant relationship between autonomous learning capacity of student teachers and some variables of the study. Finally, some practical recommendations were noted.

Key Words: English as foreign language, autonomous learning, student teachers.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Helping students become more conscious of their learning is a concern of many language educators recently. Researchers are trying hard to find ways to enhance students learning by facilitating and assessing the learning-teaching process in various perspectives. Autonomous learning is the concept focusing on the learner. With the emphasis of autonomous learning in English education today, EFL teachers are faced with the challenge of developing and implementing new teaching programs and approaches that can effectively improve students' autonomous learning capacity.

The fundamental importance of focusing on learner in language teaching is to help the learner acquire the skills to learn with a goal that ultimately leads to autonomous and continuous learning (Littlewood, 1996). Holec (1980) defines autonomy in language learning as the capacity of taking the responsibility of one's own learning. Benson (2001) also emphasizes autonomy as an attribute of the learner's approach to language learning and autonomous language learners are expected to take responsibility for their learning.

Holec (1980) emphasizes autonomy in language learning as an individual's ability to make the decisions concerning his learning in regard to five developmental components as following:

1. determining the objectives,
2. defining the contents and progressions,
3. selecting methods and techniques to be used
4. monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly
5. evaluating what has been acquired

In language learning, autonomous learning is a capacity, attribute, and attitude (Holec, 1980; Little, 1991), and can take different forms in different contexts, and to different degrees as a result of the characteristics of each learner. Thus autonomy is not inborn (Holec, 1980), but a natural tendency (Benson, 2001). However, students do not automatically have the ability to be autonomous in their learning. Instead, autonomy is a capacity that needs to be activated and developed. Holec (1980) believes that it is open to all and learners who lack autonomy are capable of developing it given appropriate conditions and preparation. Through exercise of shared decision making between learners and teachers, learner autonomy lies between total self-directed learning and traditional learning.

Therefore, it is necessary to build a framework in order to measure the extent to which learners are autonomous. Little (1991) suggests that observing students' behaviors will provide evidence of their learning autonomy. In defining autonomous behaviors, Benson (2001) points out that "the essence of genuinely autonomous behavior is that it is self-initiated rather than generated in response to a task in which the observed behaviors are either explicitly or implicitly required". Two central features of autonomy can be mentioned

(Littlewood, 1999). Firstly in order to be an autonomous learner, students are expected to take the responsibility of their learning and secondly taking responsibility involves learners in taking ownership of their learning. So it is clear that autonomous learners take an active role in their learning and are able to learn beyond the classroom. Autonomous learning is a co-occurring behavioral syndrome that consists of four factors. These are (a) desire, (b) resourcefulness, (c) initiative, and (d) persistence (Carr, 1999; Derrick, 2001; Meyer, 2001; Ponton 1999).

Desire

Meyer (2001) created a construct to better understand the autonomous learners' desire to learn. Meyer's construct consists of three elements: basic freedoms (understanding of circumstances and issues of expression), power management (group identity, growth and balance, and love issues), and change skills (basic communication skills and basic change behaviors).

Resourcefulness

Resourcefulness for an autonomous learner means to gather and assess the internal and external resources needed for a learning experience (Carr, 1999). Rosenbaum (1989) posited that learned resourcefulness derives from the acquisition of disciplined thinking, which delays immediate gratification to achieve future rewards and prioritize values in problem solving (Carr & Confessore, 1998). The autonomous learner proactively searches for resources that benefit him or her in the learning experience; therefore, resources become important to this learner and consequently impact the facilitator of learning concerning internal and external resources (Knowles, 1980). Hiemstra (1992) noted that providing a center for learning resources requires physical space, technology, and staff. Yet, a savings may occur in diminished instructional costs as self-directed learners increase because of a greater reliance upon material and human resources outside the classroom (Garrison, 1989). The classroom learning experience and peer learning groups are among many learning resources rather than the stereotypical primary mode of learning for autonomous learners (Guglielmino, 1992).

Initiative

Ponton (1999) defined initiative as active goal-directedness in problem solving and initiating an action. Likewise, H. B. Long (1998) introduced the postulate that autonomous learners can take initiative in many ways to learn. Ponton (1999) posited that independence, based upon an individual's personal will to learn, reveals initiative's importance to the pedagogy of self-directed learners (Boyatzis, 2002). Mezirow (1984) suggested that this disposition toward action induces the will to "the learning process by which adults come to recognize their culturally induced dependency roles and relationships and the reasons for them and take action to overcome them" (p. 124).

Persistence

Derrick, (2002) conceptualized persistence as the sustained maintenance of three behaviors: volition, self-regulation, and goal-directedness. Volition represents the motivation to sustain an intended behavior. Self-regulation refers to maintaining activities that coincide with one have integrated self (Ponton et al., 2004) while goal-directedness is the behavior of establishing goals which help to enhance motivation of the learners for action (Confessore & Park, 2004).

Teachers as the facilitators of learning process are expected to foster autonomy. However, Little (1995), suggests that teachers won't foster the growth of autonomy in their learners if they themselves do not have the requisite behaviors necessary for success in autonomous learning. Developing a teacher's capacity to become a more effective learner is therefore dependent upon fostering those tendencies that are needed for the development of autonomous learning behaviors.

Autonomy is an important construct that must be applied to both teaching profession and language learning since both of them are expected to be improved after formal education process and throughout life. Due to changing role of language teachers, teachers' only goal is not to prepare students for the standardized tests but to make them capable of improving the language beyond school and use it for communicative purposes. It is teachers' role to help students learn how to become autonomous learners.

Teachers of autonomous language learners have various roles as helpers (Tough, 1971), facilitators (Knowles, 1975), resources (Breen & Candlin, 1980), consultants (Gremmo & Abe, 1985), counselors (Knowles, 1986), coordinators (Hammond & Collins, 1991), and advisers (Sturtridge, 1992) (cited in Voller, 1997). As teacher roles for autonomous learners get more attention, there is increasing research about the need for teacher autonomy. However, there is limited amount of research investigating to what extent prospective language learners as the language teachers of the future are autonomous. Assuming that teachers will not be able to facilitate learner autonomy if their own autonomy is constrained, this research aimed at measuring the autonomous learning capacity of prospective English teachers focusing on two research questions. The research questions addressed in the study are:

1. What is autonomous learning capacity of prospective English language teachers?
2. What is the relationship between autonomous learning capacity of prospective English language teachers and some demographic variables such as age, gender, year at school, high school type, and self-reported academic success?

Helping students become more conscious of their learning is a concern of many language educators recently. Researchers are trying hard to find ways to enhance students learning by facilitating and assessing the learning-teaching process in various perspectives. Autonomous learning is the concept focusing on the learner. With the emphasis of autonomous learning in English education today, EFL teachers are faced with the challenge of developing and implementing new teaching programs and approaches that can effectively improve students' autonomous learning capacity.

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3. What is autonomous learning capacity of prospective English language teachers?
4. What is the relationship between autonomous learning capacity of prospective English language teachers and some demographic variables such as age, gender, year at school, high school type, and self-reported academic success?

2. METHOD

Research Design

The autonomous learning capacity of student teachers' is at the heart of this study. The questionnaire sought information about the autonomous learning level of student teachers and its relationship with some individual variables. The researcher herself explained the purpose of the study to the student English teachers and participation in the study was entirely voluntary. The questionnaires were given in the participants' mother language.

Subjects:

As was mentioned above participants (may also be referred to as 'students', 'student teachers', 'pre-service', or 'prospective English teachers') in this research comprised of 107 females and 26 males, totally 133 students of Teaching English as a Foreign Language Programme at a State University in Turkey. The English Language Teacher Education

program is a 4 year full-time degree program for teacher training students to become English language teachers for the primary and secondary education. Most of the participants 63 (47.4%) graduated from Regular High Schools, 61(45.9%) of them graduated from Anatolian High Schools where they get intensive foreign language education, and 2 (1.5%) of them graduated from Vocational High Schools and 4 (3.0%) of them were graduate of Private High Schools. They varied from freshman, to senior levels including the students in one year preparation program and their age ranged from 18 to 28 with the median score of $21,5\pm 1.96$. Data showed that, 20 students were getting foundation education in the School of Foreign Languages, 33 were freshmen, 28 were sophomores, 27 were juniors, and 25 were seniors. In the study, participants were categorized into “high and average achievers” groups on the basis of students’ self-ratings based on their own perceptions as suggested by Hsieh and Schallert (2008), since the perception of success vary according to the expectations of the learners. According to their statements, 49 (36.8%) of them rated themselves as “high achievers” whereas 82 (61.7%) reported that they were “average achievers” and only 2(0.16%) of them reported themselves as “low achievers” and these two were excluded from the analyses. Before conducting the questionnaires, the subjects were informed verbally by the researchers that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and would not influence their grade in the courses.

Instruments:

The participants were asked to anonymously fill out a questionnaire involving two parts which respectively investigated their background information and autonomous learning capacity. The first part of the questionnaire was a combination of open-ended and multiple-choice items concerning the participant’s age, gender, year at the faculty and type of high school that they graduated from. The questionnaire which aimed to investigate the participants’ autonomous learning capacity was originally developed by Xu, Peng and Wu (2004) to evaluate the autonomous learning capacity of EFL students in terms of five factors. It was reported to have a Cronbach alpha of .94 (Cited in Pu, 2009). The Questionnaire itself contained 32 items in total involving five aspects of autonomous learning capacity as follows:

1. Five items to evaluate learners’ level of understanding the instructor’s teaching objectives and requirements,
2. Five items to evaluate learners’ level of setting up personal learning objectives and study plans,
3. Five items to evaluate learners’ level of using learning strategies in an effective way,
4. Seven items to evaluate learners’ level of monitoring the use of learning strategies,
5. Ten items to evaluate learners’ level of monitoring and evaluating the English learning process (Xu, Peng and Wu, 2004, cited in Pu, 2009).

Validity and Reliability:

The Cronbach-alpha coefficient value for the overall reliability analysis of the questionnaire was found as 0.93 which shows a satisfying level of reliability beyond the minimum desirable level of reliability as stated by Pallant (2005): “Ideally, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of a scale should be above .7” .

Data Analysis:

According to the nature of the research, the study used descriptive statistics (frequencies, range, means, and standard deviations), t-test and ANOVA as the statistical analysis methods. All collected data were coded and computerized using the SPSS software and the alpha level for the tests was set at .05. After calculating each participant's autonomous learning score, their scores were compared to the variables selected for the study.

3.FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to determine the autonomous learning capacity of EFL pre-service English teachers in detail. The study also examined if autonomous learning capacity of the participants differ in terms of age, gender and high school type and year at the faculty. The findings were presented under two subtitles in accordance with the research questions:

Autonomous Learning Capacity of prospective English Language Teachers:

Descriptive statistics were used to determine Turkish EFL students' autonomous learning capacity. According to the statistical results, the mean of the 133 participants' autonomous learning capacity was 3.91. As the questionnaire was a 5-likert scale survey with 5.00 as the highest score and 1.00 as the lowest score, the result indicated, in general, Turkish pre-service EFL teachers in this study reported having moderately high autonomous learning capacity. The questionnaire aimed to investigate the participants' autonomous learning capacity in terms of five factors. Results of the items are presented in groups according to the areas of the Autonomous Learning Capacity Scale outlined in the method section. The detailed descriptive statistics for each factor are listed in Tables 1 through 5.

(1) Understanding instructors' teaching objectives and requirements:

As shown in Table 1, the mean of the participants' responses for section one of the Student Autonomous Learning Capacity Questionnaire was 4.00, which was the highest among the five sections in this questionnaire. Considering the mean values shown in the table, it can be understood that the participants adopt the principles of autonomous learning in various ways. As can be seen in the table, the items, related to the students' awareness about the course requirements and the importance of their own efforts in studying were the highest. However, they reported that they were not quite successful at adopting the teaching objectives of the teachers into their own learning. As a result of these findings based on the learners' choices of items 1,2,3,4, and 5, it is possible to claim that the learners in this research are at an awkward stage of autonomy and they are quite aware of the importance of understanding the course requirements and objectives and slowly internalizing the objectives of the teachers and class activities.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Autonomous Learning Capacity Questionnaire –Section One

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I understand the course requirements and the class requirements.	133	4.248	0.075
2. I am able to turn the teacher's teaching objectives into my own learning objectives.	131	3.809	0.064
3. I know it's very important to study hard according to the course objectives.	132	4.106	0.084
4. I know why the teacher would use a certain class activity to improve my	128	3.953	0.082
5. I feel I can keep up with the progress of the course.	131	3.855	0.081
Valid N (listwise)	123		
Average Mean		4,00	

(2) Setting up personal learning objectives and study plans:

Table 2 showed that the mean for section two of the Student Autonomous Learning Capacity Questionnaire was 3.74 which was the lowest among the five sections of the questionnaire. The score showed that participants mostly agreed that they were able to arrange their own study plans and rearrange them if needed which reveal their ability of autonomous studies to some extent. Nevertheless, their lower scores of the items 9 and 10 show that they were neither good enough about time management for their studies nor competent about the English Syllabus of the School.

In the literature, it has been strongly emphasized that learners' own choice, setting objectives, identifying content as well as selecting methods and techniques are essential in gaining autonomy in learning (Holec (1981; Cotteral 1995). Nevertheless, participants got their lowest scores in this section and this result seems quite discouraging on behalf of learner autonomy. As Broady (1996) recommended the learners in this study have little experience in making any content choice and they may never have been able to be encouraged.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Autonomous Learning Capacity Questionnaire -Section Two

	N	Mean	SD
6. Besides the class tasks and assignments, I will make my own English study plan.	132	3.803	0.082
7. I make my own study objectives according to my own situation.	133	4.255	0.071
8. I adjust my study plan if necessary.	133	4.060	0.085
9. I make a time plan to study English.	130	3.500	0.090
10. I set up my English study objectives according to the English Syllabus of the School.	132	3.106	0.093
Valid N (listwise)	129		
Average Mean		3.745	

(3) Using learning strategies in an effective way:

Table 3 indicated that the mean for section three of the Student Autonomous Learning Capacity Questionnaire was 3.86 which was the second lowest score after the second section. The high scores that students got from items 14 and 15 showed that students were able to understand and use writing and reading strategies more, but comparatively speaking, their ability to use listening and speaking strategies was low, though they were aware of the importance of understanding and using language learning strategies in general (item3). It is widely accepted that being involved in deciding the methodology of the lesson enhances learner autonomy because it is the learner who has the word to say about how to learn best. In order to help learners to assume greater control over their own learning, it is essential to help them become aware of and identify the strategies that they already use or could potentially use (James and Garrett, 1991). Nevertheless, the students in the study do not seem to be quite sure of the strategies they are using especially in listening and speaking courses. Since learning strategies are one category of learner training content to be included in plans to help learners become more autonomous (Wenden, 1991), students are expected to be aware of the learning strategies in general and in foreign language learning to study more efficiently. At this point, it may be possible to say that students in this research may not be seen as complete autonomous learners based on their choices of the items 11,12,13 considering the suggestion of Balçıkanlı (2010) that the more the learners are aware of the strategies they employ, the more autonomous they will become.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics Autonomous Learning Capacity Questionnaire –Section Three

	N	Mean	SD
11. I understand foreign language learning strategy in general.	132	3.871	0.082
12. I use listening strategies when I practice my listening skills. (A set of methods used to understand the content of the listening material; for example, to apply knowledge of English pronunciation, grammar, cultural background knowledge to correctly understand the listening material.	133	3.834	0.079
13. I use communicative strategies when I practice my oral English. (To achieve communicative goals, applying intercourse tactics such as reduction, compensation etc. to overcome language obstacles in real communication.)	133	3.744	0.075
14. I use reading strategies when I do English reading. (During the reading process, applying different reading methods according to the different genres, contents, and objectives of the reading material)	133	3.894	0.080
15. I use writing strategies when I write in English. Composition strategies including conception, material selection, plotting, and modification)	132	3.969	0.087
Valid N (listwise)	131		
Average Mean		3.864	

(4) Monitoring the use of learning strategies:

The mean for section four of the Student Autonomous Learning Capacity Questionnaire was 3.745 which was the second highest score after the first section. In this group students had the highest scores in the items related to awareness of their own learning styles, strategies and approaches towards learning and evaluate them if they were suitable for them or not. However their scores are weaker on the items related to adjusting unsuitable learning strategies and finding ways to cope with the problems. As emphasized in the literature (Lee, 1998) autonomous learners are expected to work greatly on their own pace, deciding on the questions of what, when, how, and how often which eventually lead them to take the responsibility of monitoring all the components of their own studies. The results of the study in this section, may be found encouraging indicating that students are ready to take the responsibility of pursuing relevant approaches and strategies. However, they seem to be in need of being guided in detecting and overcoming the barriers in their learning process to become autonomous learners.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics Autonomous Learning Capacity Questionnaire –Section Four

	N	Mean	SD
16. I adjust my listening learning strategies if I find they are not suitable for me.	133	4.067	0.072
17. I adjust my communicative learning strategies if I find they are not suitable for me.	131	3.992	0.068
18. I adjust my reading learning strategies if I find they are not suitable for me.	132	4.030	0.072
19. I adjust my writing learning strategies if I find they are not suitable for me.	130	3.792	0.088
20. I evaluate my learning approaches in order to find the problems of my study.	131	3.801	0.068
21. I change my learning approach when I find it inappropriate.	131	4.053	0.082
22. I am aware of whether my learning approaches are suitable to myself or not.	132	4.181	0.080
Valid N (listwise)	123		
Average Mean		3.981	

(5) Monitoring and evaluating the English learning process:

Table 5 provides the results for section five. The mean for section five of the Student Autonomous Learning Capacity Questionnaire was 3.88 which was the third highest score after the first and fourth sections. The scores showed some encouraging results indicating that most of the time the participants were aware of their language mistakes, put a considerable effort in correcting their mistakes on their own, practicing the new knowledge and using appropriate learning approach. Yet, the participants scored relatively lower in

some aspects such as monitoring their own progress, performance, finding opportunities outside class and cooperation with friends.

Self-assessment and evaluating their own learning process are essential components of autonomous learning, enabling learners to undertake more responsibility and identifying their weak and strong areas as well as effective language learning strategies and materials (McNamara and Deane, 1995, Little, 2004). However, as can be inferred from the results, participants do not seem to be competent enough about self-assessment which can provide them opportunity to observe and manipulate their own progress.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics Autonomous Learning Capacity Questionnaire –Section Five

	N	Mean	SD
23. I find opportunities to learn English outside class.	132	3.734	0.094
24. I find ways to conquer those affective factors that might have negative influence on my English study.	133	3.797	0.078
25. I try to take advantage of the learning resources available.	130	3.976	0.081
26. I try to use the new knowledge when I practice my English.	131	4.030	0.075
27. I try to cooperate and learn together with my classmates.	132	3.636	0.098
28. I realize the learning mistakes I've made during my study process.	133	3.849	0.085
29. I know the reasons why I make mistakes and will take actions to correct them.	131	3.923	0.080
30. I try to use appropriate learning approaches to make myself a better language learner.	132	4.015	0.067
31. I check whether I've finished my study plan when I try to finish a language	133	3.827	0.072
32. I check whether I've learned the previous knowledge when I try to finish a language learning task.	132	3.810	0.081
Valid N (listwise)	123		
Average Mean		3,88	

Autonomous Learning Capacity of Prospective English Language Teachers Depending on Gender, Year at School, High School Type, and Academic Achievement:

Firstly, in order to look into male and female student teachers' difference in their autonomous learning capacity, an independent-measures t test was applied to data and the results indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference between male and female with respect to their autonomous learning capacity in any of the sub dimensions as can be seen in Table 7. This finding is consistent with some previous research (Carr, 1999; Ponton, 1999; Yilmazer, 2007) indicating no significant difference between male and female participants while it is not in line with some others (Derrick, et.al.2007; Boyno, 2011; Bynum & Kotchick, 2006) indicating a slight but meaningful difference between male and female in their autonomous learning capacity.

Secondly, before analyzing the data related to high school type, two types of the schools - Vocational and Private high schools- had to be excluded from the analysis process due to insufficient number of the participants from those two schools. Consequently two of the high schools which involve almost all of the participants were considered for the analysis and an independent sample T test had to be conducted. As can be seen from the Table 7, a statistically significant difference was only determined between these two types of the schools with respect to their level of “understanding the instructor’s teaching objectives and requirements”, in favor of Anatolian High Schools graduates. Their mean scores were obviously higher than those of the Regular High Schools. However, there was not any statistically significant difference between the schools in terms of other four subdimensions namely “setting up personal learning objectives and study plans”, “using learning strategies in an effective way”, “monitoring the use of learning strategies”, and “monitoring and evaluating the English learning process” as it is indicated in the Table 7. In Turkey, a major change was carried out concerning the high school education in Turkey and since 2005 regular high schools have been converted to Anatolian High Schools gradually due to the new regulations. The criterion for being an Anatolian High school is closely related to students’ achievements in secondary education placement score. This score is determined by the centralized nationwide exams and competence grades at the end of the 6th, 7th, and 8th class. Students attending to those school usually plan to perform further studies in university, thus have higher motivation for learning school subjects and English. Therefore, it is not surprising at all; to find out that Anatolian high school graduates are better at embracing and internalizing the instructors’ and courses’ objectives. Likewise, some previous research also indicated that type of education affects autonomous learning capacity of the learners in various ways (Dixon, 1992; Fontaine, 1996; Derrick, et.al., 2006).

Table 7: Autonomous Learning Capacity of Prospective EFL teachers in terms of Gender, High School Type and Year at School

Autonom. Learning		GENDER		HIGH SCHOOL TYPE		YEAR AT THE FACULTY				
		FEM	MALE	AHS	RHS	PREP	FR	SOP	JR	SR
SECTION 1	F	2.492		6.227		1.281				
	P	0.240		0.031*		0.281				
	M	4.040	3.872	4.158	3.924	4.136	4.173	3.87	3.875	3.97
	SE	0.057	0.169	0.052	0.093	0.931	0.102	0.14	0.129	0.15
SECTION 2	F	0.112		7.232		2.017				
	P	0.808		0.109		0.096				
	M	3.739	3.773	3.851	3.675	3.821	3.85	3.71	3.474	3.875
	SE	0.060	0.122	0.059	0.093	0.154	0.96	0.12	0.126	0.101
SECTION 3	F	1.672		2.132		1.105				
	P	0.423		0.120		0.357				
	M	3.841	3.960	3.981	0.066	4.00	3.781	3.85	3.707	4.032

	SE	0.065	0.117	3.806	0.090	0.09	0.109	0.14	0.138	0.133
SECTION 4	F	0.036		1.446		0.748				
	P	0.447		0.067		0.561				
	M	4.002	3.892	4.095	3.877	4.09	3.900	3.906	4.142	3.93
	SE	0.062	0.139	0.707	0.095	0.14	0.108	0.107	0.127	0.15
SECTION 5	F	0.001		1.513		2.159				
	P	0.556		0.431		0.078				
	M	3.867	3.946	3.943	0.073	4.11	3.763	3.874	3.708	4.08
	SE	0.059	0.130	3.852	0.088	0.09	0.116	0.124	0.106	0.13

Thirdly, one way ANOVA was conducted to determine the effects of the year at the faculty on autonomous learning capacity of the pre-service EFL teachers and it was found out that the student teachers at different grades of the faculty did not differ in terms of five areas of autonomous learning capacity (Table 7). Notably, this finding reveals that student teachers do not develop autonomy through their education years. The capacity of autonomous learning does not seem to change as they get older and study at different levels of the teacher training program.

Finally, the statistical analyses revealed that self-reported academic achievement is an important factor on the students' autonomous learning capacity. As can be seen in Table 8, students perceiving themselves as high achiever language learners and average achiever language learners significantly differed in the five subdimensions of autonomous learning capacity. This finding is coherent with findings of researches (Little, Ridley, & Ushioda, 2003; Sao & Wu, 2007; Little, 2009; Nakata, 2010; Ushioda, 2010; Karataş, et. al.2015) demonstrating that students with higher autonomous learning capacity are certainly better language learners and that involving students' ideas and decisions in teaching process and setting goals together will lead students to taking responsibility of their own learning rather than prescribing the learning process will all foster language learners' success.

TABLE 8: Autonomous Learning Capacity of Prospective EFL teachers in terms of Self-Reported Academic Achievement

		SELF-REPORTED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT	
AL		HIGH ACHIEVERS	AVERAGE ACHIEVERS
SECTION 1	F	5.437	
	P	0.001*	
	M	4.263	3.856
	SE	0.053	0.084
SECTION 2	F	1.093	
	P	0.000*	

	M	3.995	3.592
	SE	0.072	0.070
SECTION 3	F	1.682	
	P	0.000*	
	M	4.159	3.677
	SE	0.076	0.075
SECTION 4	F	0.754	
	P	0.001*	
	M	4.220	3.821
	SE	0.080	0.073
SECTION 5	F	1.281	
	P	0.000*	
	M	4.200	3.685
	SE	0.068	0.068

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Consequently, one can easily see from the findings of this study that EFL student teachers themselves are autonomous learners to some extent and they are well expected to be able to encourage their future students to be autonomous learners as well. Considering the essential components of autonomous learning, it can be easily observed that EFL student teachers are relatively better at “understanding instructors’ teaching objectives and requirements” and “monitoring the use of learning strategies” which indicate higher awareness about sharing the objectives of the courses with the instructors and importance of how to learn English in terms of necessary strategies. Additionally, they are relatively weaker in “setting up personal learning objectives and study plans”, “using learning strategies in an effective way”, and “monitoring and evaluating the English learning process”. These conclusions should not be seen surprising and should not be evaluated without considering the practices in the educational institutions of Turkey. Since English language courses at all levels of educational institutions in Turkey are structured which are bordered by a ready-made curriculum and textbooks, unfortunately, students and sometimes even teachers do not have the opportunity to participate in the decision making process of selecting materials, techniques and methods. As a result of these practices at educational institutions, students are not given the opportunity to be autonomous enough to decide about setting their own goals and monitor their own progress and study on their own pace and in accordance with their interest. In these premises, the best thing they can do is to understand and internalize the objectives of the instructors or courses and make study plans to reach the ultimate goals of the courses. At this point, it should be noted that unless these structured courses are not abandoned, language learners cannot be fully autonomous in their learning process.

Subsequently, it has been concluded that gender and year at the faculty are not affecting factors in the capacity of autonomous learning. It can be claimed that there must be some other factors in affecting autonomy in learning a foreign language other than gender.

However, from a practical perspective, the present study suggests that ELT classes do not seem to be designed to promote the facilitation of students' perceptions of autonomy since the years spent in teacher training program did not seem to foster autonomous learning skills. Above all, it is suggested that ELT programs should increase student teachers' understanding of autonomy in language learning process help them develop autonomy in their studies.

Moreover, one of the most striking conclusions of the research is the relation between academic achievement and autonomous learning capacity of student teachers. It recommends that the role of autonomous learning to promote student teachers' perceptions of achievement should not be underestimated.

Ultimately, considering the consequences of the present research, specifically different interventions may be required to address different study groups' perceptions their autonomus learning capacity. It is also recommended that in the future, follow up researches will examine various factors that affect autonomy, in EFL settings, with increased numbers of participants elaboratively.

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