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The Issue of Learning Culture as a Hindrance in Promoting Learner Autonomy

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Abstract: The patriarchal structure in Turkish society along with teacher-centered instructional style cause Turkish learners to become passive and dependent learners. Teacher is accepted as an authority figure in the classroom, who should take most of the responsibilities and make most of the decisions about their learning in the classroom context. Also, teaching English is regarded as a subject to be taught, but not a language of communication. These characteristics of Turkish learning culture are considered as factors that hinder students in the continuum of independent or autonomous learning. This study aimed to figure out the learning realities of learners and the specific conditions affecting the development of learner autonomy into consideration to identify students' readiness for autonomous study. The analysis of the learner autonomy questionnaire results indicated that participants had weak control over their own learning process indicating low level of autonomy. Moreover, they do not feel very competent in making decisions about their own learning in formal classroom environment.

Keywords: *Learner autonomy, learning culture, independent study.*

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Introduction

In this era of sustainability, the most important part of foreign language education is to help students become independent learners who can cope with academic and social difficulties throughout their language learning experience; thus, they would learn how to manage their life-long learning process to reach the goals they have identified. Although studies on autonomy have demonstrated its impact on academic achievement in the learning process and its vital role in the development of lifelong learning skills policies (Afshan et al., 2015; Borg & Al-Busaidi, n.d.; Huang, 2006; Nakata, 2011; Nasri et al., 2015; Nguyen, 2014; Reinders & Lazaro, 2011), the implementation of pedagogy that fosters autonomy often encounters significant barriers based on sociocultural, institutional, and individual dimensions.

The literature consistently identifies a number of learner-related constraints that hinder the development of autonomy such as learners' lack of previous experience of autonomous learning, learners' little contact with English outside the classroom, learners' focus on passing tests, lack of incentives among learners, learner dependence on the teacher, learners' proficiency level, lack of learner ability to exploit resources, teacher–learner interaction, teachers' little trust on learner abilities, lack of teacher autonomy, traditional teaching practices, lack of relevant resources for teachers and learners, fixed curriculum, examination system, university entrance exams, lack of time, and educational policies (Afshan et al., 2015; Borg & Al-Busaidi, n.d.; Huang, 2006; Nakata, 2011; Nasri et al., 2015; Nguyen, 2014; Reinders & Lazaro, 2011). Moreover, many learners lack the necessary skills to benefit from available resources and manage their own learning. At the institutional level, traditional teacher-centered instruction, rigid curricula, and high-stakes assessment systems restrict opportunities for fostering autonomy (Nguyen, 2014; Reinders & Lazaro, 2011). Teacher beliefs about their profession and learners, and teachers' autonomy are also effective in creating autonomous learning environments (Borg & Al-Busaidi, n.d.).

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These interrelated challenges highlight the need to address these constraints to obtain flexible, learner-centered environments that empower learners to promote learner autonomy. The focus of this study is to put forward the importance of learner readiness to foster learner autonomy and assists learners go through the continuum of autonomy, with a particular interest in learning culture.

Literature Review

Before taking the necessary steps to promote learner autonomy in specific contexts, cultural, social and political aspects of those contexts that shapes students' readiness for learner autonomy should be investigated first to match the demands in the curriculum to the learning realities of learners and to take the specific conditions affecting the development of learner autonomy into consideration in that particular context (Chan et al., 2002; Cotterall, 1995). Hofstede's (1986) cultural dimensions framework—individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity/femininity—has frequently been cited to explain learners' resistance to autonomy. Students from individualist societies who are generally driven by personal ambition and want to be recognized for their own personal achievements may be more likely to work well autonomously. On the other hand, students from cultures marked by a high degree of social collectivism might prefer working in groups and, according to Tudor (1997), they may regard learner autonomy as "egotistic or even anti-social". Large power distance societies give individuals a great degree of authority, whereas in small power distance societies, authority is spread among the group members. Students from weak uncertainty avoidance cultures may not wish to participate in activities where they may risk being negatively evaluated by teachers or peers. Low tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity may also cause students to experience discomfort when using a mode of learning, such as autonomy, to which they may be unaccustomed. Hofstede (1986) describes masculine societies as those in which men are more competitive, assertive, and interested in material gains whereas women are more nurturing and concerned with social harmony and the quality of life. Assertive students who have initiative may handle a more autonomous mode of learner better than students from more feminine societies who would prefer to maintain a low profile, seeing it as a more modest form of behavior.

The focus of this study is the culture of language learning in Turkey; therefore, it would be beneficial to have a brief look at studies conducted in Turkey on learner autonomy in different educational contexts. In the Turkish context, the persistence of teacher-centered pedagogies is often attributed to cultural values emphasizing authority, hierarchy, and structure (Yılmaz, 2007; Yumuk, 2002). Turkey is one of the "strong uncertainty avoidance countries" according to the classification of Hofstede (1986). The patriarchal structure in Turkish society indicates a preference for structure, order and predictability. Also, Turkish society may be regarded as a collectivist one where there are very close ties between family members and relatives, even with neighbors living in the same district. People behave in accordance with behavioral norms, and they become respected members of that group, and they are supported. The impact of this structure on language learning classroom could be explained as follows. Firstly, since cultural values within the society depend on parental and teacher authority, the dominant classroom instructional style in secondary schools in Turkey is defined in the literature as teacher-centered (Yılmaz, 2007; Yumuk, 2002). Teachers regard themselves as presenters and correctors, as Hatipoğlu Kavanoz (2006) also indicated. As can be expected, because of teacher authority, students see the teacher as an authority figure in the classroom, who should take most of the responsibilities and make most of the decisions about their learning in the classroom context (Okumuş Ceylan, 2015; Yılmaz, 2007; Yumuk, 2002).

Secondly, the teaching of English was observed as a subject and not a language of communication in all schools visited as part of a collaborative analysis of the current state of English language teaching and learning in state schools in Turkey (The British Council and TEPAV). As English course is regarded as a subject like maths or biology, the fact that this subject as a language to be taught requires the acquisition of the four skills (i.e., reading, writing, speaking, and listening), involves cultural background, and necessitates new adaptations is avoided. Haznedar (2010) put forward those teachers mainly used course books (85%), workbooks (71%) and teacher's book (57%). Haznedar (2010) also examined the techniques teachers used in their instruction, she found that repetition (85%), conversation (87%), asking questions (93%), pair work (72%) and translation (66) were the mostly used techniques. Highly used techniques of asking questions and repetition indicate that teachers regard making students active by engaging them in whole class activities directed by the teachers. These grammar-based activities were identified as the first factor that led to the failure of Turkish students to speak/ understand English on graduation from High School, despite having received an estimated 1000+ hours of classroom instruction (The British Council and TEPAV). Haznedar (2010) also noted that 70% of the teachers still use Audio-lingual method of 1960s which is based on memorization of the newly learned information and repetition of it. She suggested that learners are used to learning via memorization, and this passive learning habit prevents them from being responsible for their own learning. Therefore, creativity, independence and responsibility are not encouraged in the curriculum. The result is a cycle in which both teachers and students internalize passivity as a norm, further forming resistance to autonomous learning practices. The present teacher-centric, classroom practice focuses on students learning how to answer teachers' questions (where there is only one, textbook-type 'right' answer), how to complete written exercises in a textbook, and how to pass a grammar-based test. Thus, grammar- based exams/grammar tests (with right/wrong answers) drive the teaching and learning

process from Grade 4 onwards. Yumuk (2002) further states that learners who enter universities do not possess necessary critical thinking and reflection skills due to their teacher-dependent learning habits.

Thirdly, as "intellectual disagreement in academic matters is felt as personal disloyalty" (Hofstede, 1986) in Turkish society, a conflict with the teacher in academic issues is regarded a disrespectful behavior. Also, students are not encouraged to speak freely in the class or in conversations at home, and this makes Turkish learners passive and dependent, non-initiative, not expressive of opinions, and dependent (Yılmaz, 2007). Learners' reluctance to express opinions or challenge ideas stems not only from an inherent cultural disposition but also from a schooling system that rarely encourages inquiry, critical thinking, or reflection (Yılmaz, 2007). Autonomy is both culturally foreign and structurally unsupported.

Turkish learning culture resembles Asian learning culture which strongly favors collectivism, power, and authority (Littlewood, 1996). It is asserted that classroom participation patterns such as lack of curiosity, excessive dependence on the teacher, and lack of autonomy in learning processes might be possible consequences of such learning culture (Li, 1998; Shebani & Pulvermüller, 2018; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018).

For instance, Li (1998) conducted a study that aimed to investigate South Korean secondary school English teachers' perceived difficulties in adopting Communicative Language Teaching. The results showed that most of the respondents considered learners' resistance to class participation one of the factors that had an influence on their adoption of communicative language teaching practices. Korean teachers reported that learners were used to the traditional classroom structure in which they took on a passive role and expected the teacher to give them information directly. Another example is a study from Pakistani culture. Yasmin and Sohail (2018) learners are supposed to be obedient, and do not speak in front of elders unless they are spoken to; learners have a great reliance on teacher which encourages rote learning among students.

The teacher is also seen as an authority figure in Omani culture (Shebani & Pulvermüller, 2018). Autonomous activities which usually require a change in the teacher-learner relationship is seen as a challenge to the status quo of Omani culture, thus affecting students' interest in participating in such activities. Additionally, the Omani students prefer group related activities that require working together as a team as opposed to a more independent, autonomous mode of learning where students may be competing or where they may feel that the teacher is not fulfilling his/her role in the learning process. They preferred a more teacher-centered approach to learning, and they expected support and guidance from the teacher.

Although the focus of this study is not the relationship between religion and culture, the related research also indicates the influence of Muslim religion on the values of regional culture which impacts educational practices in eastern countries such as Malaysia, Oman, and Pakistan (Amroun, 2008; Shebani & Pulvermüller, 2018; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018). Pakistan is the second country with the largest Muslim population (11.1%), Turkey and Iran are the largest Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East. In these countries, interaction between male and females is not appreciated, and there are separate schools for male and female students in primary and secondary schools. When coeducation is in practice in higher education institutions, female learners are encouraged to be reserved in front of their male teachers, and distance is considered modesty (Amroun, 2008; Shebani & Pulvermüller, 2018; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018). This might, to some extent, explain why students become passive, non-initiative, not expressive of opinions, and dependent as Yılmaz (2007) in higher education.

Despite these cultural stereotypes, there is the claim that the characteristics Asian learners display might be attributed to the structural elements of the educational system itself rather than cultural factors (Pierson, 1996). Gieve and Clark's study (2005) examined whether approaches to learning are culturally determined or attributed to contextual factors. The participants were Chinese undergraduates studying English in the UK. The results suggested that Chinese learners appreciated the benefits of autonomous study as much as European students did, and they made equally good use of this opportunity. Considering these results, the writers argue that if the learners are provided with appropriate conditions to practice learner autonomy, culturally determined approaches to learning become flexible to contextual variation.

In Turkish context, students are considered as dependent on the teacher from kindergarten to high school depending on the reasons mentioned above. With such culture of learning, we cannot assume that they are ready to set off from total dependency to independence at once at university. Today, we can and should assist students to learn how to provide sustainable development throughout their life. The purpose of this study is to find out about the culture of learners studying at English prep school.

Methodology

Taking into consideration the features of Turkish learning culture, this study aims to figure out to what extent students learning English obligatorily in prep school are ready to study autonomously. These 67 Turkish learners are enrolled in an undergraduate English study program. These language learners in three separate classes, randomly chosen for the study. These students have been raised in Turkish society and have attended state schools. To gather data, a Learner Autonomy questionnaire prepared by Karabiyik (2008) was used. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the

questionnaire used in Karabiyik's study was .888 for the whole questionnaire. To find out about the participants' culture of learning, the questionnaire developed by Karabıyık on learning contexts was used. The questionnaire consisted of questions asking the general role of their teachers from their high school, their own role as a student at high school, the frequency the participants were encouraged to take responsibilities, their perceptions of learners about themselves and their teachers' regarding their responsibilities, their decision-making abilities, their motivation level and their engagement in autonomous activities both inside and outside the class, their perceptions of responsibilities, their abilities, their motivation, various autonomous learning activities inside and outside the class, and their metacognitive strategy use. The data gathered was analyzed using SPSS 28, via frequency, correlation and regression tests.

Findings/ Results

The overall culture of learning score of the participants was a combination of their self-ranking of their teachers' and their own roles and their reported amount of experience with autonomous activities in the high schools that they graduated from.

1. Confusing Perceptions of Teacher Authority and Learner Autonomy

Table 1. How do you describe your teacher?

	Sole authority				Facilitator		
Answer	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**X̄**	**SD**
N	12	22	22	24	20	3.16	1.310

The participants considered their teachers to be neither strictly authoritative nor facilitative figures, somewhere in between. They considered themselves neither autonomous nor teacher-dependent, falling in somewhere between, reflecting a transitional stage toward autonomy but not fully independent.

Table 2. How do you describe yourself?

	Dependent on the teacher			Autonomous			
Answer	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**X̄**	**SD**
N	5	13	25	31	25	3.60	1.142

The findings in Table 1-2 suggest that while teachers maintain some control, students are gradually encouraged to take ownership. This indicates a balance of a learning environment with traditional structures along with learner-centered approaches.

2. Selective Engagement in Autonomous Activities

The items from 3 to 13 aimed to investigate whether the participants were given responsibilities in their own learning in their high schools by having them engaged in some activities that require autonomy. The items that attained the highest percentages were choosing partners to work with (item 6), setting learning goals (item 10) and evaluating the courses (item 11). The items that had the lowest mean scores were preparing portfolios (item 13), deciding what to learn next (item 12) and evaluating your own work (item 5). We might conclude that the participants reported higher engagement in collaborative and goal-setting activities (e.g., choosing partners, setting learning goals), which are relatively structured forms of autonomy. Conversely, more complex autonomous tasks such as portfolio preparation, self-evaluation, and deciding learning content were less frequent. To summarize, the findings indicate that students are given controlled choices but not full ownership over their learning processes. The instructors tend to choose certain autonomy-supportive activities, less risky or easier to manage ones, but not decision-making or self-assessment tasks that could empower students. Thus, we might regard this as a partial implementation of learner autonomy.

Table 3. Activities during your high school education

		$\bar{X}$	SD
3	How often were you asked to participate in group/pair work activities?	**3.10**	1.046
4	How often were you asked to evaluate your own work?	2.90	1.156
5	How often were you asked to evaluate your peers' work?	2.52	1.078
6	How often were you asked to choose your partner to work with?	**3.31**	1.033
7	How often were you asked to participate in a project work?	2.96	1.186
8	How often did your teachers ask you to choose what activities to use in your lessons?	2.69	1.076
9	How often did your teachers ask you to choose what materials to use in your lessons?	2.61	1.100
10	How often were you asked to set your own learning goals?	**3.10**	1.116
11	How often were you asked to evaluate your course?	2.78	1.204
12	How often were you asked to decide what you should learn next?	2.46	1.185
13	How often were you asked to prepare portfolios?	2.28	1.253

4. Responsibility Sharing Reflects a Gradual Shift Toward Learner Agency

Table 4 demonstrates the results of the responsibilities section of the questionnaire. The participants tend to take more control of the responsibilities taken outside the class such as making sure they make progress outside class (item 15), deciding what they learn outside the class (item 26), and making you work harder (item 18). However, in five out of thirteen items, learners rely more on teachers within lessons. The participants agree to share responsibility with the teacher in some areas. These items include the responsibilities for making sure that learners make progress during lessons (item 14), stimulating student interest in learning English (item 16), identifying their weaknesses in learning English (item 17), and evaluating the course (item 25). Sharing responsibility with the teacher indicates a blended model; learners taking more charge in informal learning contexts but still depend on teachers for structured guidance and motivation in class. To sum up, classroom time remains teacher-centered, but students are encouraged or required to manage their learning beyond formal instruction. dependent. It may also be regarded as a reflection of Turkish learning culture, valuing teacher authority in formal settings while encouraging learner independence in private study.

Table 4. Responsibilities

		$\bar{X}$	SD
14	Make sure you make progress during lesson	3.10	.781
15	Make sure you make progress outside class	**4.37**	1.057
16	Stimulate your interest in learning English	2.88	1.032
17	Identify your weaknesses in English	2.85	1.062
18	Make you work harder	**3.64**	1.151
19	Decide the objectives of the English course	3.45	1.340
20	Decide what you should learn next	1.76	.818
21	Choose what activities to use in your English lessons	1.81	.783
22	Decide how long to spend on each activity	1.90	1.107
23	Choose what materials to use in your English lessons	1.70	.853
24	Evaluate your learning	2.33	1.160
25	Evaluate your course	2.69	1.196
26	Decide what you learn outside the class	**4.21**	1.122

5. Self-Efficacy in Learning Abilities

The findings in Table 5 show that the participants tend to regard themselves as good at identifying their weaknesses (item 35) and evaluating the course (item 34). They also reported being good at choosing activities (item 28) and objectives outside class (item 30). These findings reflect participants' confidence in their metacognitive skills and ability to manage aspects of their learning independently. confidence is a positive indicator for fostering greater learner autonomy in higher education or adult learning contexts. Thus, we might suggest that these participants are ready to take on more responsibility if provided with the appropriate tools and support. It also underscores the importance of developing these skills in earlier education stages to prepare learners for lifelong learning.

Table 5. Abilities

How do you think you would be at:		$\bar{X}$	SD
27	Choosing leaning activities in class	3.27	1.109
28	Choosing learning activities outside class	**3.61**	1.072
29	Choosing learning objectives in class	3.34	.993
30	Choosing learning objectives outside class	**3.61**	.999
31	Choosing learning materials in class	2.87	.936
32	Choosing learning materials outside class	3.04	1.065
33	Evaluating your learning	3.31	.857
34	Evaluating your course	**3.52**	1.020
35	Identifying your weaknesses in learning English	**3.66**	.946
36	Deciding what you should learn next in your English lessons	3.22	1.126

6. Out-of-Class Self-Initiated Activities for Entertainment

Table 6. Activities

In your last academic term, outside class, without having been assigned to do so, how often did you:		Mean	SD
38	read grammar books on your own?	2.94	1.085
39	note down new words and their meanings?	3.45	1.077
40	send letters to your pen friends?	1.99	1.261
41	read newspapers in English?	2.13	1.266
42	send e-mails in English?	2.01	1.135
43	read books or magazines in English?	3.18	.920
44	watch English TV programs?	**3.52**	1.106
45	listen to English radio?	2.46	1.460
46	listen to English songs?	**4.06**	.952
47	speak English with native speakers?	3.12	1.225
48	practice using English with friends?	3.21	1.122
49	watch English movies?	**3.82**	1.043
50	write a diary in English?	2.27	1.388
51	use the Internet in English?	**3.51**	1.106
52	review your written work on your own?	2.69	1.131
53	attend a self-study center?	2.31	1.362
54	talk to your teacher about your work?	2.48	1.330

The results indicate that students most frequently engage in receptive activities. **Listening to English songs** yielded the highest mean score (item 47), followed closely by **watching English-language movies** (item 49), **watching English TV programs** (item 44), and **using the Internet in English** (item 51). These activities share common features such as ease of access, entertainment value, and limited cognitive demand. Furthermore, **noting down new vocabulary items and their meanings (**item 39) was also reported at a relatively high frequency, suggesting a degree of lexical engagement that complements passive input exposure. In contrast, the least frequently performed activities were basically written or formal communicative tasks. These included **sending letters to pen friends (**item 40), **sending emails in English (**item 42), and **reading newspapers in English** (item 41). The low frequency of these tasks may be a consequence of the shift in communication practices among younger learners. The findings suggest that the students tend to prefer informal contexts that allow for incidental language acquisition rather than structured, reflective, or formally communicative activities.

7. Strategic Use of Learning Resources and Reflection

Table 7, results of the strategies section show that the participants pay attention when someone is speaking English (item 57), try to find ways to be a better learner of English and use their English (item 58), learn from their mistakes to do better (item 56), are determined to improve their English and monitor their learning (item 55). These findings demonstrate active engagement in self-regulated learning behaviors which reflect motivated and reflective learning behaviors, useful for their academic development. The fact that they sometimes think about their progress (item 62) and look for opportunities to improve their reading comprehension (item 60) indicates a need for development to gain advanced proficiency in these areas.

Table 7. Strategies

		$\bar{X}$	SD
55	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English	**3.79**	.962
56	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	**4.00**	.905
57	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	**4.25**	.823
58	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	**4.12**	.808
59	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	3.25	1.092
60	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	**3.48**	1.172
61	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	**3.93**	.974
62	I think about my progress in learning English.	**3.52**	1.106

8. Moderate Academic Performance and Weak but Significant Correlations

Table 8 shows the overall grades of the learners which were used in the correlation tests. As we can see, most of the learners (77%) have an average overall grade. The findings in Table 9 indicate that there was a significant weak correlation between the students' learner autonomy sections and their overall grades (r-obtained=0.367). Learner autonomy contributes to academic achievement, the weak correlation here indicates that their autonomy is developing, but it is limited in impact. This reminds us the fact that autonomy is not the sole or strongest predictor, there are other important factors that may arise from students' individual differences, teachers' professional competencies, or characteristics of the learning environment.

Table 8. The score distribution of students' overall grades $_{Total}$ (N=67)

Interval	Category	Number of Students	Percentage	$\bar{X}$	SD
25 – 71	Low	6	9.7%		
72 – 97	Moderate	49	76.7%	84.62	12.418
98 – 125	High	8	13.6%		

Lack of Significant Correlation Between Learning Strategies and Grades

Table 10 shows that Activities in High School, Responsibilities, Abilities, and Activities had a significant correlation with the students' overall grades while strategies were considered as having no significant correlation to overall grades. This raises questions about the effectiveness or quality of the strategies used, suggesting a need for more targeted strategy training.

Table 9. Correlation Between Learner Autonomy Sections and Overall Grades

Variables	N	r-obtained (Pearson Correlation)	*p*-value Sig (2-tailed)
Learner Autonomy Sections Overall grades	67	0.367	.000

Table 10. Correlation among Each Learner Autonomy Sections and Overall Grades

Learner Autonomy Sections	r-obtained (Pearson Correlation)	*p*-value Sig (2-tailed)
Activities in High School	0.335	.001
Responsibilities	0.242	.014
Abilities	0.313	.001
Activities	0.239	.015
Strategies	0.166	.093

The regression analysis was used to figure out the contribution of the students' social-emotional competencies to their overall grades. As seen in Table 11, it was 12.6%.

Table 11. The Regression Analysis Between Learner Autonomy Sections and Overall Grades

Variable	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Sig. F Change
LAS to OG	0.367[a]	0.126	17.108	0.135	0.000

The findings show that the significance F change is (0.000), indicating that learner autonomy sections significantly influence the students' English academic achievement (0.000<0.05). Moreover, the adjusted R square is 0.126 which means that learner autonomy sections explained 12.6% of the variability in English academic achievement.

The study puts forward a group of learners in a transitional stage of autonomy development, supported by a partially autonomous educational culture. Students are beginning to take more responsibility and develop skills associated with self-directed learning but still rely significantly on teacher guidance. The significant impact of learner autonomy on academic achievement suggests the need for systemic efforts to cultivate autonomy; fostering effective learning strategies that meaningfully influence academic success through training students on language learning strategies to empower them with greater control over their learning choices.

Discussion

This study aimed to figure out students' readiness for learner autonomy to take learning realities of learners with a particular focus on how their prior educational experiences and cultural context shape their engagement with independent learning. The overall results indicated that participants had weak control over their own learning process, indicating a low level of autonomy. Also, learners position themselves between autonomy and teacher dependency which reflects an internalized negotiation between their perceived role as passive recipients of knowledge and their emerging desire to act as self-directed learners. Secondly, the overall results show that the students had moderate level readiness for learner autonomy. Thirdly, most of the participants reported that in their high schools, they were rarely engaged in activities that require autonomy which suggests that most of the participants came to the university without having been exposed to autonomous activities in their early education. The absence of earlier exposure to autonomy-supportive environments in high school appears to have formed learned dependency, where students wait for instruction rather initiate it themselves. These teacher-dependent behaviors delay self-regulatory habits and confirms Holec's (1985) notion of autonomy. It is a capacity that must be fostered over time, rather than assumed at a particular educational stage.

Moreover, the results indicated that learners seemed to take more responsibility upon themselves for outside-of-class responsibilities such as making progress outside the class; deciding what they learn outside the class and making themselves work harder. By evaluating these findings, it can be said that Turkish learners have some definite lines in their minds about teacher and student roles in the classroom. Although they feel that they can take responsibility for certain areas of their learning, they still see the teacher as an authority and expert who makes most of the decisions about students' learning in the classroom. reported greater confidence and initiative in taking responsibility for learning outside of the classroom. The difference between in-class and out-of-class autonomy may reflect an implicit cultural schema; obedient in teacher-centered formal education, while autonomous in informal spaces, learner activities. Thus, this may hinder the full internalization of autonomous practices.

Finally, the results in "abilities" part indicated that participants considered their own decision-making abilities to be good for the responsibilities taken mostly outside the class such as choosing learning activities outside the class, choosing learning objectives outside the class, choosing learning materials outside the class, and identifying their own weaknesses in learning English. On the other hand, they rated their abilities lower regarding responsibilities taken in the class. These responsibilities mostly include the methodological aspects of their learning as in the previous section. This result suggests that these students do not feel very competent in making decisions about their own learning, at least within the formal classroom environment. This issue raises the question whether current classroom practices unintentionally impede the development of learner autonomy by restricting students' opportunities to engage meaningfully in decision-making processes concerning their own learning.

The related research indicates that employing strategies in language learning process results in a higher academic success, especially in beginner level (Okumuş Ceylan, 2015). However, these findings suggest that autonomy should not be viewed as a fixed learner attribute, but rather as a competence shaped by the learning environment, encouraged through instructional support, and constrained when opportunities for learner agency are limited.

Conclusion

The analysis of the learner autonomy questionnaire results exhibited limited control over their own learning process indicating a general low level of autonomy. Moreover, they do not feel inadequately equipped in making decisions about their own learning in formal classroom settings. These findings raise critical questions about the feasibility of promoting learner autonomy in higher education without first addressing foundational gaps created during earlier stages of schooling. Expecting students to make the leap from a culture of teacher dependency to full autonomy upon entering university reflects a disconnection between educational ideals and classroom realities.

Research on language learning strategies in Turkey (Okumuş Ceylan, 2015) has pointed to strategy instruction as a promising means of bridging this gap. It suggests that employing language learning strategies provides students with the necessary help a teacher can give by making them teachers of their own through making them aware of the language learning process itself and their strengths and weaknesses. By increasing learners' awareness of their own cognitive and metacognitive processes we can help them internalize skills necessary for self-directed learning. We might conclude that learner autonomy and the use of language learning strategies are related. Moreover, autonomy is a continuum of capabilities, as Holec (1985) suggests and supports, we should prepare students to direct their own

learning so that they may gradually move from a state of dependence on a teacher to the greatest degree of independence or autonomy, realizing their potential for autonomy. Therefore, emphasis should be focused on providing them with skills and raising awareness for language learning strategies to teach how to learn languages. In short, we should cultivate autonomy through scaffolded experiences.

The more strategies the students employ or more frequently the higher level of autonomy they have by shouldering the responsibility of their own learning process. If we include learner training in our curriculum, we can help our learners in fostering their autonomy (Okumuş Ceylan, 2015).

Recommendations

As it is difficult for learners to make the leap from total domination to full autonomy in higher education, they need assistance to learn autonomously. Language teachers may play a key role in providing them assistance by raising learner awareness of how languages are learned and providing them with the skills they need to do it through language learning strategies.

Limitations

This study was conducted in one university with 67 language learners in one cultural context.

Ethics Statements

This study was reviewed and approved by Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Generative AI Statement

The author has not used generative AI or AI-supported technologies.

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