

ELT master's Degree Students and Teacher Educators' Perceptions of Learner Autonomy Regarding Language Learning

¹Nouhaila EL KHAYATY, ²Osman SABANCUOGLU

¹Nouhaila El- KHAYATY, MA student, Istanbul Aydin University, Institute of Social Sciences, English Language and Literature, ekhayatynouhaila@stu.aydin.edu.tr

²Assist. Prof. Osman SABANCUOGLU, Istanbul Aydin University, osmansabuncuoglu@aydin.edu.tr

Abstract: Learner autonomy has been a major topic of interest in foreign language teaching and learning. Many experts in the field have considered it as an essential part of the language learning process as it places a great deal of emphasis on being independent, self-directed and feeling a sense of ownership. This study aims to explore ELT master's degree students' and teacher educators' perceptions of learner autonomy as well as their understandings of autonomous learning regarding language learning. To achieve the objectives, mixed-methods research combining elements of qualitative and quantitative data was undertaken with a view to collecting and analysing them. A questionnaire in which 100 master's degree students were the participants and an interview with four ELT teacher educators was administered by the researcher. The findings of the study reveal that despite the master's degree students' positive attitudes towards their abilities and their awareness of their responsibilities, they still prefer to hold their academics responsible for the learning process. This research has also found that the academics have positive attitudes towards promoting learner autonomy and are aware of its importance of enhancing the role of students in the learning process. Due to the role of learner autonomy in a successful learning process, suggestions and recommendations for a further study to promote learner autonomy have been made.

Keywords: Learner Autonomy- ELT department – Responsibility- Ability- Activity- Language Learning.

Özerk öğrenme, yabancı dil öğretimi ve öğreniminde önemli bir araştırma konusu olmuştur. Öğretmeden bağımsız çalışmayı, öğrenme sürecini yönetmeyi ve öğrenmeden sorumlu olmayı kapsamasından dolayı, bu alanda birçok uzman özerk öğrenmeyi dil öğrenim sürecinin önemli bir parçası olarak görmektedir. Bu çalışma, İngilizce öğretmenliği alanında yüksek lisans yapan öğrencilerin ve bölüm akademisyenlerinin yabancı dil öğreniminde özerk öğrenme üzerine tutumlarını ve onların özerk öğrenme uygulamalarından ne anladıklarını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu hedefleri gerçekleştirmek amacıyla nicel ve nitel bilgi toplama araçlarını içeren karma yöntemle bilgi toplama süreci gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma, 100 İngilizce öğretmenliği bölümü yüksek lisans öğrencisinin katılımcı olduğu anket ve 4 öğretmen eğitimcisi akademisyenin katılımcı olduğu mülakattan oluşmaktaydı. Araştırmanın bulguları, öğrencilerin yeteneklerine yönelik olumlu tutumlarına ve sorumluluklarının farkında olmalarına rağmen yine de akademisyeni sorumlu tutmayı tercih ettiklerini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu araştırma aynı zamanda akademisyenlerin özerk öğrenmeyi geliştirmeye yönelik olumlu tutumlara sahip olduklarını ve öğrencilerin öğrenme sürecini geliştirmedeki önemini farkında olduklarını ortaya koymuştur. Başarılı bir öğrenme sürecinde özerk öğrenmenin önemli bir oynamasından dolayı, özerk öğrenmeyi teşvik etmek üzerine daha fazla çalışma yapılmasıyla ilgili öneriler ve tavsiyeler sunulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Öğrenen Özerkliği- ELT bölümü - Sorumluluk- Yetenek- Etkinlik- Dil Öğrenme

1. INTRODUCTION

Learner autonomy has been a key topic in the field of foreign language learning and teaching. Much has been written about what learner autonomy means, the rationale for developing it and its implications for teaching and learning languages. With regard to rationale, learner autonomy develops the quality of language learning and assists learners in becoming successful and prepares them for the future. Master's degree students and teacher educators' voices are not available in the literature and little is known about master's degree students' perceptions of learner autonomy and teacher educators' attitudes towards the encouragement and application of learner autonomy in the classroom. Many learners do their best to master a foreign language, especially English, which is viewed as today's lingua franca used as a tool of communication worldwide. Communicative language use and fluency in four skills have been the main reason for learning English. However, while some students succeed in learning English and reaching a good level of proficiency in English, others fail to master English because they still rely on their teacher, they need to learn how to learn and should learn by using it. Therefore, language learners need to create more opportunities for themselves to develop their language skills and become more responsible for their own learning process.

Such theories of learning as constructivist and humanistic approach emphasize the role that learners play in the achievement of the learning process. One of the most important aspects of this concept is the focus on the learner rather than on the teacher who has much control over the learning process and decides what to teach, i.e., content or materials, how to teach, i.e., methodology including activities, and how to assess learning in class. Therefore, active learner involvement in the learning process is a very important characteristic of today's learners, who want to manage to learn English.

Learner autonomy has become a crucial topic of research that has emerged due to the development of student-centred instruction. Learner needs, goals and preferences for learning are considered to be highly important by many course planners. Therefore, learner-centred principles like learner autonomy have become a central concern among EFL and ESL researchers and theorists. This enthusiasm for investigating learner autonomy has coincided with the adoption of the Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT), which is a learner-centred approach to teaching languages (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003). This approach encourages learners to learn by doing and using language to communicate. Therefore, new directions in language learning have affected the relationship between CLT and learner autonomy in terms of the role of teacher and learner. As Johnson (2009) states, the encouragement of being autonomous learners marks a shift from learning the second language to using the second language to learn.

Autonomy in language learning is very important. This concept not only improves the quality of language learning or even promoting democratic societies, but it also prepares individuals for life-long learning which provides students with best learning opportunities both inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, no one can deny the fact that learner autonomy is based on the concept that learners are responsible for their own learning and that teacher can only guide and cannot force learning (van Lier, 1996) and learners will be able to go beyond the limitations of their own learning environment and even learning process. Students will be more successful and effective if they are conscious and aware of their learning process involving setting goals, monitoring progress and evaluating the progress (Little, 2001). However, learners face difficulties to become autonomous learners. So, the question here; Are students aware of their learning goals and are they able to take responsibility for their own learning?

There is not much previous research in Turkey that explores teacher educator's perceptions of learner autonomy regarding language learning as well as master students' attitudes towards learner autonomy. This study aims to investigate the perceptions of ELT master's degree students and their academics regarding learner autonomy in the English Language Teaching (ELT) department at Istanbul Aydin University (IAU) in Istanbul, Turkey and evaluate its relationship with language learning.

Statement of Purpose and Problem

In order to take responsibility and become autonomous, learners must be provided with a share in the control according to certain aspects of their learning processes (Little, 2001; Dam, 1995; Wenden, 1991; Benson, 2001). The centre in English language classrooms in Turkey are still on the teacher who plays an important role for the students because they believe that the success of their learning depends on him/her. Yumuk (2002) states that in the Turkish educational system,

“Teachers are the main authority in the classroom and it might be difficult for them to change their teaching” (p.152). Thus, students find it hard to regulate their learning and take different decisions concerning their education.

The purpose of this research paper is to first contribute to the literature in order to identify the general aspects of learner autonomy which language teachers find most effective for both teaching and learning in Turkish English classrooms. The second purpose of this study is to prove or disapprove the hypothesis that ELT academics are ready to promote learner autonomy in their classes by investigating the perceptions and attitudes towards learning autonomy among ELT students and instructors, as well as evaluating its relationship with the success of language learning.

Statement of Significance

Learner autonomy has become one of the most interesting and critical topics since the 1980s. It presents a great shift from teacher-centred instruction to student-centred learning. However, in some traditional classes, the teacher is still the centre of attention in these traditional classrooms in which the process of autonomous learning does not take place. Therefore, in formal learning environment, the development of learner autonomy is very important because it not only teaches them how to take responsibility for their own learning, but it also enables learners to apply the school knowledge and skills to situations in the outside world (Little, 2001). Furthermore, the growth of learner autonomy depends on the development of learners’ understanding of what they are learning, how they are learning, how successful they are in learning and why they are learning (Little, 1999). However, a large number of learners in Turkey learn through traditional educational methods, so it is difficult to become successful in the language learning process in Turkish classrooms. That is, becoming a more successful language learner depends on becoming an autonomous learner who is able to take responsibility for his/her own learning. Therefore, this study aims first to explore what the concept “learner autonomy” means to ELT academics or teacher educators, identify their perceptions of learner autonomy, how it can be realized and how it can be promoted or developed in the language classroom. The purpose of the study is also to investigate ELT master’s degree students’ perceptions of learner autonomy and find out to what extent they are autonomous. The last purpose of this research paper is to evaluate the relationship between learner autonomy and a successful language learning process.

Research Questions

The questions that will be addressed in this research are as follows:

1. How do master’s degree students view the responsibilities for learning English?
2. How do they view their abilities to make some decisions to learn English?
3. What different learning activities have they utilized and how often have they done them?
4. To what extent are ELT teacher educators ready to promote learner autonomy in their classes?
5. What are the challenges ELT teacher educators face to help their students become autonomous?
6. What are EFL teachers’ suggestions for promoting autonomy in their classes?
7. What is the relationship between the demographic variables (age, gender, length of programme) and learner autonomy?

2. METHODOLOGY

Setting and Participants

This research was conducted in English Language Teaching (ELT) Department at Istanbul Aydin University (IAU), which is located on the European side of Istanbul, Turkey. Two different participants were selected for this study. A non-probability sampling technique was used in this study, which is based on the selection of participants according to the basis of availability, accessibility and convenience (Davis, 2015, p.199). The first participants were ELT master’s degree students from different nationalities who agreed to participate in this research. The target group consisted of a total of 50 females and 50 males, aged 18-27. Students who participated in this research were varied. Participants have been attending this programme for 1-3 years. The demographic data on gender, age, and nationality were gathered in the online survey and were analysed statistically, using SPSS 25. Table 1 presents the information and the professional characteristics of the ELT master’s degree students who participated in this study:

Table 1: Background information of the respondents

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	50	50.0
	Female	50	50.0
Nationality	Turkish	39	39.0
	Arab	39	39.0
	Other	22	22.0
Age	18-20	1	1.0
	21-23	23	23.0
	24-26	62	62.0
	+27	14	14.0
Total		100	100.0

As can be seen in Table 1, the females and males share an equal percentage of participation (50%). Concerning nationality, the majority of respondents are 39 Turkish students and 39 Arab students. However, 22 participants come from different nationalities, Concerning the age, the majority of the participants are between 24-26 (62%). This is followed by participants aged 21-23 (23%), +27 (14%) and 18-20 (1%).

The second participants are ELT master's degree teacher educators, who are selected and who have agreed to participate in this study. A total of 4 instructors (2 males and 2 females) have participated and have claimed that they have been generally teaching for more than 8 years and have been teaching courses in the ELT master's program at IAU for more than 4 years. The instructors who have participated in this study are actually from two different nationalities: Turkish and Iranians.

Data collection Instruments

In order to achieve the purpose of this research, this study adopts a mixed-methods design combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. To this end, two data collection tools including an online questionnaire and a semi-structured interview have been employed. Quantitative (QUAN) data are collected through an online questionnaire and the qualitative (QUAL) data are collected through a semi-structured interview. Dörneyei (2007) sees that combining the QUAN and QUAL methods helps increase the strengths and decrease the weaknesses of the study. Moreover, combining both QUAN and QUAL provides methodological flexibility. In other words, mixed methods have great flexibility and most importantly, they are adaptable to many study designs (Sandelowski, 2003). Thus, this study has employed both the QUAN and QUAL respectively in order to achieve the objectives of the research.

The questionnaire

The first instrument used for this study is an online questionnaire prepared via (Google Forms) for ELT master's program students. The researcher has adopted a questionnaire from Evrim (2009). The questionnaire consists of two parts: The first part includes demographic questions on students' gender, age, nationality and the reason for choosing an ELT program for their master's degree in order to have a clear view about students' perceptions of being autonomous. The second part of the questionnaire used for this study (see Appendix 1) is made up of three sections, all of which are related to learner autonomy. The second part deals with students' perceptions of their responsibilities, abilities and activities. In this part, ELT master's degree students state their opinions about who is responsible for the learning process: themselves or their teacher educators. They also state their opinions about their abilities in a five-point Likert scale which are ranked as very poor, poor, OK, good and very good. The last section of this questionnaire investigates students' perceptions of the activities in which they may engage both inside and outside the classroom. In this section, students are asked to rank 10 statements as never, rarely, sometimes, often and always.

The semi-structured Interview

In addition to administering a questionnaire, interviews have been conducted with the ELT department instructors in order to explore their attitudes and perceptions of learner autonomy regarding language learning. They have been asked nine open-ended questions adopted from prepared for ELT master's program instructors of Istanbul Aydın University. The purpose of this interview is to find out ELT master's degree teacher educators' attitudes and practices of learner autonomy, investigate to what extent they promote learner autonomy in their classrooms and find out what kind of activities they use to motivate students to become autonomous learners. Therefore, the interview is divided into five sections. The first section includes 2 questions (Q1 – Q2), which deal with instructors' personal information concerning their experience of working as a teacher educator. The second section has 2 questions (Q3 – Q4), which are concerned with evaluating instructors' opinions about learner autonomy. The third section of this interview deals with promoting and engaging learner autonomy in instructors' classroom through motivation and activities and it covers 4 questions (Q5- Q6- Q7- Q8). The fourth section has only 1 question (Q9) that tries to find answers to the relationship between the learner and language learning according the ELT department instructors. The last section tries to find out the challenges that instructors face and suggestions for more effective promotion of learner autonomy in 3 questions (Q9- Q10- Q11).

Procedure

As quantitative data precede the qualitative data, the online questionnaire is first administered. After receiving an email of approval to use the questionnaire from the researcher, the necessary modifications on the questionnaire have been made to adjust it to the purpose and the objectives of this research paper and then sent to Istanbul Aydın University administration in order to get the permission to conduct it in the ELT department. After receiving the email of approval from the administration of the university, the questionnaire has been prepared online through 'Google Forms' and e-mailed to the 100 participants. The purpose of the study and the necessary explanations are provided in the introduction of the survey.

In fact, online questionnaires have many advantages. For instance, they are not time consuming and they can be easily transformed to Microsoft Excel and analysed via SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Little (2001) claims that pen-and-paper requires human labour to review responses that have low confidence. In other words, they may have illegible handwriting, invalid responses, or responses which are not valid based on some sets of rules. The data acquired through the online questionnaire have been transferred to a Microsoft Excel sheet and then are statistically analysed through SPSS.

The first part of the questionnaire has 5 questions concerning the participants' age, gender, nationality, the reason behind choosing an MA in ELT, and how long they have been attending a master's degree. The findings of these personal elements are presented with their frequencies and percentages. The second part of the questionnaire is divided into three sections; responsibilities, abilities, and activities. Each of these sections has 10 statements to be scored. In the first section, participants are asked to decide whose responsibility it should be when taking an English language class. In the second section, students are asked to score 10 statements on a five-point scale, ranging from "very good" to "very poor". In the last section, participants are asked to score 10 statements on a five-point scale, but this time from 'always' to 'never'. After transferring all the data received into a Microsoft Excel sheet, this has been statically analysed through SPSS Software (version 24). The descriptive statistics include frequencies, means, percentages, and standard deviations. Furthermore, an ANOVA and T-test has been conducted in order to see the differences in demographic variables and the other autonomy Likert scales.

Concerning the quantitative data, a semi-structured interview has been adopted from Evrim (2009) for the ELT master's degree program instructors. The questions are designed to elicit detailed answers from teacher educators. Normally the interview would have taken place in the ELT department at Istanbul Aydın University. However, because of the international pandemic Covid-19, the Turkish government has decided to cancel all face-to-face classes and has gone fully online. Therefore, the researcher has decided to email the interview questions to the participants after explaining to them the purpose of this research paper. ELT master's program instructors have done their best and have returned their feedback very quickly. Thus, after reading the participants' responses and examining them, they have been transferred to a table in a Word document with no changes in order to be compared and analysed.

3. RESULTS

This study aims to investigate ELT master's degree program students' and teacher educators' perceptions of learner autonomy. To this end, a questionnaire with the students and an interview with the instructors have been conducted. Thus, the result obtained from the questionnaire is represented first in the first section followed by the results obtained from the interview which is represented in the second section.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of two parts: The first part of the questionnaire consists of five demographic questions and its results are presented in Table 2. The following table presents the demographic information of the respondents as frequencies and percentages.

Table 2: Background information of the respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	50	50.0
	Female	50	50.0
Nationality	Turkish	39	39.0
	Arab	39	39.0
	Other	22	22.0
Age	18-20	1	1.0
	21-23	23	23.0
	24-26	62	62.0
	+27	14	14.0
Total		100	100.0

Concerning the number of the participants, 100 students have participated in this research. In terms of the gender, there are 50 male and 50 female students from different nationalities. According to the table above, there are 39 Turkish students and 39 Arabs, whereas the rest of the students are from different nationalities. With respect to the age, the majority of the students are between 24-26 which represents (62%). This is followed by the ages between 21-23 that represents (23%), +27 that represents (14%), and finally 18-20 that represents only (1%). These demographic variables are more likely to influence students' level of autonomy.

Regarding the reasons for choosing to do an MA degree in ELT, Table.3 represents the frequency and percentage of both the reason why they are doing an MA degree and how long the participants have been master's degree students.

Table 3: The reason for choosing an MA in ELT and length of being master's degree students

		Frequency	Percent
The reason behind the choice to do MA in ELT	For better career opportunities	79	79.0
	For professional Development	15	15.0
	For earning a better salary	2	2.0
	Other	4	4.0
How long they have been master students	1 year	21	21.0
	2 years	70	70.0
	3 years	8	8.0
	More than 3 years	1	1.0
Total		100	100.0

It has been found that the majority of the respondents which represents 79% have chosen to do an MA in ELT in order to get better career opportunities. While 15% have done their MA to develop themselves professionally, only 2% of these participants confirm that they have done this program in order to develop their financial situation. Therefore, these results show that ELT students prefer to work for their future career and gain specialized knowledge and skills to advance in their field. Concerning how long the participants have been master's degree students, the majority of them which represents 70% have been doing a master's program for 2 years. However, the last three categories present low percentages. For example, a category with students that have been doing a master's degree for just 1 year represents 21% while those who have been master's degree students for 3 years represent 8%. Finally, the lowest category that presents 1% refers to the students that have been doing their master's degree for more than 3 years.

The second part of the questionnaire includes three sections: responsibility, abilities, and activities. The results of the first section 'Responsibilities' are presented in Table 4. and Table 5. Table 4 represents the descriptive statistics of ELT master's degree students' perceptions of their responsibilities inside and outside the classroom in terms of percentages while Table 5. represents the same results in terms of (N Valid, Mean, Missing, Median, Code, Std Deviation).

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics (Percentages) of Responsibilities

Statements	Yours	Your teacher's	Both	Mean
1. To ensure you make progress during your lessons	11%	24%	65%	2.54
2. To ensure you make progress outside the class	64%	2%	33%	1.69
3. To stimulate your interest in learning	14%	33%	52%	2.38
4. To identify your weakness in the lesson	7%	59%	33%	2.26
5. To decide the objectives of each course	3%	84%	12%	2.09
6. To decide what you should learn in the next session	4%	80%	16%	2.12
7. To choose what activities should be used outside to learn and make progress	27%	16%	57%	2.30
8. To decide how long to spend in each activity	7%	76%	16%	2.09
9. To choose what materials should be used for a successful lesson	2%	75%	68%	2.21
10. to evaluate your learning	2%	28%	68%	2.67

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Responsibilities

Items	N Valid	Missing	Mean	Median	Code	Std. Deviation
1. To ensure you make progress during your lessons	100	0	2.54	3.00	3	0.688
2. To ensure you make progress outside the class	99	1	1.69	1.00	1	0.944
3. To stimulate your interest in learning	99	1	2.38	3.00	3	0.724
4. To identify your weakness in the lesson	99	1	2.26	2.00	2	0.582
5. To decide the objectives of each course	99	1	2.09	2.00	2	0.380
6. To decide what you should learn in the next session]	100	0	2.12	2.00	2	0.433
7. To choose what activities should be used outside to learn and make progress]	100	0	2.30	3.00	3	0.870
8. To decide how long to spend on each activity	99	1	2.09	2.00	2	0.476
9. To choose what materials should be used for a successful lesson	99	1	2.09	2.00	2	0.476
10. To evaluate your Learning	99	0	2.12	2.00	2	0.433

According to Table 4. , the majority of the students that presents almost 84% believe that it is certainly their teacher's role and responsibility to decide on the objectives of each course. They also think that it is not their responsibility to decide what they should learn in the next session, how long they can spend on each activity, or whether they can choose the perfect materials for each lesson. However, they see that it is their teacher's job to do so. They only see that they share the responsibility when it is related to ensuring their progress during the lesson and evaluating their learning process. On the other hand, it is worth noting that 64 % of the participants feel that they are responsible for making progress outside the classroom

In Table 5. , the responsibilities are divided into students' responsibilities (coded 1) teachers' responsibilities (coded 2) and both (coded 3). According to the dataset above, the majority of the respondents have attributed the responsibility to teachers or both teachers and students when taking English classes at university. To ensure they make progress outside the class is ranked as the responsibility of students. The majority of students have ranked (identifying their weakness in the lesson, deciding the objectives of each course, deciding what they should learn in the next session and, deciding how long to spend on each activity) as the responsibility of teachers. Furthermore, the results indicate that most of the participants believe ensuring they make progress during the lesson and stimulating their interest in learning are both the responsibility of them and their teachers.

The second section of the questionnaire deals with students' perceptions of their abilities. Thus, in order to gauge students' perceptions of their abilities inside and outside the classroom, 10 statements have been provided and have been ranked in a five Likert-scale from "Very poor" to "Very Good". The results of this section are provided in two different tables. The first table (Table 6.) represents the descriptive statistics of students' abilities in terms of percentages as shown below while the second table (Table 7.) represents students' abilities in terms of Mean, Median, Mode, and Std. Deviation.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics on Abilities

Statements	Very poor	Poor	Ok	Good	Very good	Mean
1- Choosing learning activities in class]	2%	3%	23%	63%	6%	3.70
2- Choosing learning activities outside the class	0%	4%	24%	64%	7%	3.75
3- Choosing Learning objectives in class	1%	11%	60%	23%	5%	3.20
4- Choosing learning objectives outside the class]	2%	4%	67%	23%	4%	3.23
5- Choosing materials in class	1%	12%	24%	54%	8%	3.57
6- Choosing materials outside the class	0%	3%	34%	56%	7%	3.67
7- Deciding what you should learn next in your lessons]	5%	15%	36%	38%	6%	3.25
8- Deciding how long to spend in each activity	6%	14%	44%	28%	8%	3.18
9- Identifying your weaknesses in English	2%	6%	31%	51%	10%	3.61
10- Evaluating your learning and progress	0%	9%	20%	61%	10%	3.72

Table 7: Descriptive statistics of responsibilities

Items	N	Missing	Mean	Median	Code	Std. Deviation
	Valid					
1. Choosing learning activities in class	97	3	3.70	4.00	4	0.724
2. Choosing learning activities outside the class	99	1	3.75	4.00	4	0.644
3. Choosing Learning objectives in class	100	0	3.20	3.00	3	0.739
4. Choosing learning objectives outside the class	100	0	3.23	3.00	3	0.679
5. Choosing materials in the class	99	1	3.57	4.00	4	0.847
6. Choosing materials outside the class	100	0	3.67	4.00	4	0.652
7. Deciding what you should learn next in your lessons	100	0	3.25	3.00	4	0.957
8. To decide how long to spend in each activity	100	0	3.18	3.00	3	0.978
9. Identifying your weaknesses in English	100	0	3.61	4.00	4	0.827
10. Evaluating your learning and progress	100	0	3.72	4.00	4	0.766

According to the results of the second section of the questionnaire which is presented in the tables above, participants believe that they can be good actually at choosing learning materials inside and outside the class. Moreover, 61% of the students consider themselves to be good at evaluating their own learning process which seems to be interesting. Furthermore, almost half of the participants representing 51% think that they can be quite good at identifying their weaknesses in English. However, choosing activities outside the classroom seems to be more efficient and more convenient for the students; 67% of them think of themselves as good. On the other hand, 61% of see themselves as adequate with choosing these materials inside the classroom. The results also show that only 38% of the participants feel that they can be good at deciding what they should learn in the next session while 36% of them are OK with that. Concerning taking the decision about how much to spend on each activity, 44% are OK with that while 14% see themselves as poor at this point.

The last part of the questionnaire deals with ELT master's degree students' perceptions of the activities they have done so far in their English language classroom. Table 8. represents the percentages of the descriptive statistics on these activities while Table 9. represents the same results in terms of Mean, Median, Mode, and Std. Deviation.

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics on Activities

Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Mean
1. Done assignments which are not compulsory	1%	32%	37%	21%	9%	3.05
2. Noted down new words and their meaning	2%	3%	14%	21%	60%	4.34
3. Read books or magazines in English	1%	3%	15%	19%	62%	4.38
4. Looked for extra-exercises on internet	7%	21%	43%	17%	12%	3.06
5. Done grammar exercises on your own	11%	44%	20%	13%	14.2%	2.71
6. made suggestions to your teacher	3%	11%	25%	53%	8%	3.52
7. Activated your prior knowledge while studying	2%	1%	12%	25%	60%	4.40
8. Made inferences about your lesson	2%	5%	22%	52%	19%	3.81
9. used resources while studying	1%	4%	10%	19%	66%	4.45
10. worked cooperatively with your friends	1%	2%	14%	12%	71%	4.50

Table 9: Descriptive Statistics on Activities

	N Valid	Missing	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
1. Done assignments which are not compulsory	100	0	3.05	3.00	3	0.968
2. Noted down new words and their meaning	100	0	4.34	5.00	5	0.966
3. In this academic year, how good have you [Read books or magazines in English]	100	0	4.38	5.00	5	0.919
4. Looked for extra-exercises on internet	100	0	3.06	3.00	3	1.071
5. Done grammar exercises on your own	100	0	2.71	2.00	2	1.192
6. Made suggestions to your teacher	100	0	3.52	4.00	4	0.904
7. Activated your prior knowledge while studying	100	0	4.40	5.00	5	0.888
8. Made inferences about your lesson	100	0	3.81	4.00	4	0.873
9. Used resources while studying	100	0	4.45	5.00	5	0.903
10. Worked cooperatively with your friends	100	0	4.50	5.00	5	0.882

As it is demonstrated in Table 4.7, 44% of the participants have rarely done grammar exercises on their own. 43% of them have sometimes looked for extra exercises on the Internet, and only 37% of the students have sometimes done assignments which are not compulsory in this academic year. When it comes to making suggestions to the teacher and making inferences about their own lessons, almost 51% have often done it. On the other hand, between 60% and 71% of the participants have always noted down new words, their meanings and activated their prior knowledge, read books or magazines in English, used resources while studying cooperatively with friends. In other words, these results show that even if the participants are not really interested in doing grammar exercises on their own, they use different activities in order to promote their learning autonomy.

The next tables represent the differences between demographic variables and autonomy scales.

Table 10: Group Statistics of T-test

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Responsibilities	Male	50	2.1998	.23888	.03378
	Female	50	2.2684	.26497	.03747
Abilities	Male	50	3.4444	.65354	.09242
	Female	50	3.5236	.53197	.07523
Activities	Male	50	3.7880	.52824	.07470
	Female	50	3.8560	.57077	.08072

Table 11: Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary

Total N	100
2Mann-Whitney U	1506.500
Wilcoxon W	2781.500
Test Statistic	1506.500
Standard Error	142.935
Standardized Test Statistic	1.795
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.073

The results of the independent samples T-test in Table 4.9 demonstrate that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores of male and female students in terms of responsibilities, abilities, and activities, $T(98) = -1.36, -.664,$ and $-.618, p = .17, .50$ and $.53$, respectively. Similarly, the non-parametric independent samples T-test in Table 4.10 show that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores of the two categorical groups.

Table 12: ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Responsibilities	Between Groups	.904	2	.452	8.049	.001
	Within Groups	5.450	97	.056		
	Total	6.354	99			
Abilities	Between Groups	1.936	2	.968	2.844	.063
	Within Groups	33.015	97	.340		
	Total	34.952	99			
Activities	Between Groups	1.115	2	.558	1.889	.157
	Within Groups	28.636	97	.295		
	Total	29.752	99			

The results of the parametric one-way analysis of variables show that there is no statistically significant difference between learner autonomy, demographic variables and three Likert scales on autonomy. On the other hand, the results of the non-parametric one-way analysis of variable namely the Kruskal Wallis H Test shows that there is no statistically significant difference.

Table 13: Correlations

			Responsibilities	Abilities	Activities
Spearman's rho	Responsibilities	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.180	.143
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.072	.156
		N	100	100	100
	Abilities	Correlation Coefficient	.180	1.000	.083
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.072	.	.411
		N	100	100	100
	Activities	Correlation Coefficient	.143	.083	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.156	.411	.
		N	100	100	100

The results of Spearman correlation show that there is a slight positive correlation between responsibilities, abilities and activities, $r(156) = .180, .143, p = .072, .156$, respectively.

The Results of the Interview

The interview is the second instrument used for this research paper. It has been conducted with four ELT department teacher educators coded as (T1), (T2), (T3), and (T4) in order to evaluate their perceptions of learning autonomy and to find out how they promote it while teaching their students. According to the participants' answers, it has been confirmed that they have been teaching English language for more than 20 years.

Firstly, the participants have been asked about the meaning of learning autonomy. They have defined it in different ways. For example, two instructors (T1 and T4) have emphasized the fact that learner autonomy is all about taking full responsibility and control over the learning process. T1 mentions "*the learner takes the responsibility for the learning*

process and makes decisions about the strategies”, and T4 agrees on the same idea, and defines learner autonomy as *“an individual process involving full control over the learning.”* On the other hand, the two other instructors have focused on the ability to set goals and become independent. T3 points out *“The learner sets goals, selects and decides on the learning materials by himself/herself.”* and T2 has given further explanations, saying that learner autonomy is *“being able to get gleaned from the formal education and learn independently of any formal instruction setting. This requires some coaching and training to make sure the learner is equipped with sufficient and efficient strategies to guide himself/herself through the process.”*

In response to the questions concerning the characteristics of an autonomous learner, the participants in general have reported that an autonomous learner should train himself/herself to be self-directed in terms of acting independently of the teacher and shows a great passion for learning. In other words, they see that an autonomous learner has to work within and beyond the classroom to develop skills. Here are some reports highlighting this:

Teacher (A): *“An autonomous learner is an individual who is responsible, independent, logical, and disciplined.”*

Teacher (B): *“They must have reached a certain level of knowledge which is called a threshold level.”*

Teacher (C): *“An autonomous learner knows how to set learning goals, take actions to achieve the goals s/he has set, monitor learning, know how to use resources, use out- of- class time to learn, and use language learning strategies.”*

Teacher (D): *“Autonomous learners are aware of their learning goals; they have the freedom to decide on the learning methodology and they have access to educational resources.”*

Regarding to what extent ELT educators think their students are autonomous, three of them have confirmed that only few students can be considered autonomous. T3 mentions *“Concerning the education at university level, the students are supposed to be independent of their teacher and the classroom. Unfortunately, very few students can be considered autonomous.”* On the other hand, T4 thinks that it is very hard to generalize. He/she believes that most of the students are autonomous or partly autonomous *“as far as I have observed, the level is average or above.”* He/she also believes that the most important point is that the students are interested and motivated to become autonomous: *“At least they are open to learning how to learn.”*

Concerning the question Q6 in which ELT instructors have been asked about the kind of activities they engage in order to promote learner autonomy among their students. They have responded differently. Each teacher educator engages in different activities. For instance, T1 focuses more on self-assessment activities in order to test their performance and evaluate the quality of their work: *‘I give them rubrics for self-assessment sometimes and I want them to reflect on what parts they need to work on and how to do that.’* While T2 and T3 give their students activities that help them discover their own learning styles and learning strategies: *‘The assignments/literature reviews/projects and homework are examples of the assignments that students are expected to do individually so that they can discover their own particular way of learning.’* Whereas T4 confirms that he/she uses different activities in order to promote autonomous learning among his/her students, she/he focuses on activities that help the students become more active and more involved in the learning process: *“Of course, I am using different kinds of activities. Some of them include performance tasks, projects, presentations and reports.”*

To respond to Q7 (How do you motivate your students to be autonomous?), all the participants insist on the fact that they do their best to motivate their students to become autonomous, but the way they do so differs from one teacher trainer to another. For example, T1 keeps reminding the students that the teacher is only a guide and they are fully responsible for their own learning process: *“Besides the activities, I generally tell them that they are responsible for their own learning and I can only guide them.... but students are used to receiving everything from the teacher.”* On the other hand, T2 uses different tips to motivate students like using monolingual dictionaries, watching YouTube tutorials, encouraging students to take risks and work cooperatively: *“In terms of improving their language proficiency I usually make them work with their peers, remind them to use monolingual dictionaries, encourage them to take risks, I also keep telling them to watch YouTube tutorial videos. That way they realize that not only the general competency but also the subject matter of their majors can be mastered when there is no one there to teach them.”* While T3 and T4 have almost similar ideas to motivate their students, they usually motivate them by giving them the chance to make choices on the topics they want to

work on and create flexible tasks for themselves. T4 points out *‘I usually motivate my students through explicit training and follow-up tasks’* and T3 says *‘I always let them become flexible and free to decide on the project topics they would like to work on.’*

Regarding the following question (How feasible ‘i.e., realistically achievable’) is to promote learner autonomy among language learners?), all the instructors think that it is feasible. However, T1 and T2 believe that even if promoting learner autonomy is feasible, it should start from an early age. Otherwise, it becomes harder to be promoted: *‘This should start from the very early ages in the families and should be emphasized in the elementary school curriculum. At university level, it seems to be too late to make a change.’* T2 also points out *‘The potential of developing autonomous learners has got more to do with the children’s growth in general and educational culture in specific. There should be a scene set before inviting the learners to work autonomously and independently.’* Yet, the other participants think that as long as the teachers are aware of the importance of promoting learner autonomy among their students, helping them develop their skills, provide them with different activities and give them the chance to take decisions, it is quite feasible to promote learner autonomy: *‘As long as the teachers are well aware of the nature of learner autonomy, I believe, it is feasible.’*

When it comes to asking ELT instructors about how they see the relationship between learner autonomy and language learning, all of the instructors agree that there is an intimate relationship between learner autonomy and language learning. They believe that language learning is an essential component in students' lives, and the effectiveness of students' language proficiency is positively related to their autonomy. One of the ELT instructors mentions *‘Language learning is a lifelong process. It has no final point—so only the ones who know how to be independent learners can be successful on this path.’* Moreover, other participants believe that working cooperatively, for example, not only develops students' skills to make choices and become responsible, but it also develops their language learning skills: *‘Autonomous learning at the same time requires working smoothly and collaboratively in group activities. Therefore, enabling students’ potential to collaborate actively with the other learners helps them to acquire the production language skills.’*

The participants have also been asked about the challenges they have faced in trying to promote learner autonomy in their language learning classroom. Three participants argue that some students are not ready to become autonomous. In other words, they do not want to take any responsibilities for their own learning: *‘Actually, some students are not willing to become autonomous, they do not like to become autonomous, and more importantly they do not give themselves the chance to try to become autonomous.’* Moreover, they think that it may be related to the cultural and educational background as long as they have multicultural classes. T2 gives an example in order to support his/her idea: *‘Most of the students have the habits of being dependent on the teacher all the time. Some even ask us to complete the task for them.’* According to T4, he/she has not faced any difficulties because they believe that most of the students are always open to take control over their learning and do different kind of activities like working in groups and pairs: *‘I have not faced any difficulties so far as I have always worked with adult learners who are ready to take responsibility for their own learning.’*

Regarding the last question which deals with the participants’ suggestions for more effective promotion of learner autonomy, all of them have confirmed that all the professors are fully aware of the importance of learner autonomy and do their best to promote it among their students: *‘I believe and I have observed that all the professors are well aware of the importance of learner autonomy and they do their best to promote it.’* Moreover, they see that engaging in more activities and providing them with more opportunities to make choices will be effective for the promotion of learner autonomy in language learning classrooms. T3 mentions *‘An effective sustained silent reading program and the provision of more opportunities for the language learners to access selected language materials that are appropriate for their proficiency and interests would be of importance for an effective promotion of learner autonomy in ELT.’* Furthermore, they see that they need to work more on persuading them to become autonomous by making them work cooperatively and giving them the chance to evaluate their own learning. T1 expresses his/her idea as follows: *‘No matter how they resist, we must persuade them to become autonomous learners as prospective teachers because soon they will have no teachers that will give them the answers. They need to learn how to search for the answers they need’*. Besides that, they believe that the administration should provide the instructors with the opportunity to organize both their teaching and learning in a way that autonomous learning is required.

4. DISCUSSION

In order to encourage students to become autonomous learners, Balçıkanlı (2010) believes that teacher educators should first understand their students' perceptions and attitudes towards learner autonomy. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore ELT instructors' and students' perceptions of learner autonomy regarding language learning as well as to find out to what extent ELT instructors are ready to promote autonomy among their learners.

ELT master's degree students' perceptions of their responsibilities- abilities- activities

According to the findings obtained from the questionnaire, it has been found that the majority of the students hold the teacher for almost all the responsibilities whereas they see themselves as capable only in few areas. For instance, most of the participants agree that it is their teachers' responsibility to decide on the objectives of each course, choose the appropriate materials, and decide what should be learnt in the next session. They believe that they only share the responsibility when it is related to the evaluation of the learning process. Even though it is good to note, students believe that they are responsible to ensure whether they make any progress outside the classroom or not. Thus, according to the students' responses concerning how they view their responsibility, it can be said that they may not value their capacity in learning by analysing and developing their weaknesses and strengths and may not see themselves as capable to create content, but it is clear that they have positive attitudes towards being responsible for their own learning. Balçıkanlı (2008) claims that in order for students to become autonomous, it is very important to be involved in decision-making activities. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) claim "Learners will not develop autonomy unless they are willing to take responsibility for their learning" (p.4).

ELT instructors believe that despite learners' awareness of their responsibilities, they are not fully responsible. They view that students have to spend more time and energy on learning more about their responsibilities, and focus more on developing their understanding in order to develop autonomous learning skills. As Boud (1988) mentions, 'The main characteristic of being autonomous is that students take significant responsibility for their own learning'. Chan (2001) has found in his research that most of language learners do not fulfil any responsibilities for their learning because they still view the teacher as an instructor, a resource, and a facilitator (p. 510). Balçıkanlı (2010) has also figured out that students view their teachers as "the authority rather than the facilitator" (p. 99). It has been argued by Joshi (2011) that the teacher is perceived to be a main component of the success of their learning process. In other words, despite students' awareness of their responsibilities to develop their learning, they unfortunately still express feelings of dependence on the teacher in language learning classroom.

However, a large number of the students hold positive views about their learning abilities. The results obtained from the questionnaire show that ELT students have the desire to be actively involved in the learning process through the application of different learning abilities inside and outside the classroom. In other words, they believe that they can be good with the necessary abilities to develop their learning process. For instance, most of the students believe that if they are given the chance, they will be good at choosing the appropriate learning activities. Moreover, they also view themselves as capable of deciding what should be learnt in the next session, recognize their own needs, identify their weaknesses and strengths and evaluate their own learning. According to a study conducted in Sweden, students generally develop their performance through self-assessment and evaluation on their learning process (Sullivan & Lindgren, 2002). However, unfortunately, the participants still view themselves as inadequate in terms of creating content like choosing the learning objectives, and managing the time for each activity. In fact, learners already have the necessary learning abilities that they can use to develop their autonomous learning skills; they just need to figure them out and improve them. Cotterall (1995) argues in his research paper that learners need to use their abilities to identify their learning goals and objectives, and evaluate their progress. Balçıkanlı (2010) has also found that learners have the ability to recognize or assess their own needs, and identify their weaknesses and strengths. Likewise, Chan (2001) believes "Learners should be actively involved in setting goals, defining content, and working out evaluation mechanism for assessing achievement and progress." (p.105) However, it is interesting to note that even though students consider themselves as capable to assess, evaluate, choose materials and activities, identify the weaknesses and strengths, they prefer to hold their teachers responsible for these issues.

ELT master's degree students' opinions and experience with the activities actually indicate that they have positive attitudes towards developing their language learning process themselves. According to the finding obtained from the last

section of the questionnaire, the majority of the students which represent almost 72% have confirmed that they always try their best to take as many notes of the new words as they can, read English magazines, activate their prior knowledge, make inferences about the lesson, and use different resources. Furthermore, most of the participants confirm that they always try to work cooperatively with their classmates. Little (2004) indicates that learners become motivated to negotiate meaning, set goals and make conscious decisions when they work cooperatively with their classmates. In other words, by collaborating with peers, students become less dependent on the teacher because they are allowed to communicate and take decisions freely based on their interests and needs. In contrast, almost half of the participants mention that they often make suggestions, and look for extra-exercises. However, it would be important to mention that despite the fact that students have no interests in doing extra exercises and making suggestions most of the time, they are active in different activities that will absolutely help them with their autonomous learning skills. Little (1999) believes “Learner autonomy is developed by working on different activities and strategies. Working in pairs or in groups enhances learner motivation and develop their problem-solving skills.”(p.45)

ELT instructors' perceptions of learner autonomy, the challenges and the suggested solutions.

The results obtained from the interview reveal that ELT instructors have positive attitudes towards promoting learner autonomy in language classroom. According to their answers, it can be concluded that they are fully aware of the concept of learner autonomy as well as the importance of fostering it among their students.

In parallel to what has been mentioned in the literature review (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Dickinson, 1993; Candy, 1988; Thomson, 1996; Nunan, 2000; Thanasoulas, 2000; Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012; Yıldırım, 2012), ELT instructors have focused in their definitions of the concept of “learner autonomy” on essential words like responsibility, control, decision making, freedom, independence, and curiosity for further information. Borg and Al Busaidi (2012), Loi (2016), Joshi (2011) and Yasmin and Sohail (2018) think that teachers have conceptualized learner autonomy as the ability to do different tasks and activities independently. For instance, autonomous learners should take full responsibility and control over the learning process. They also believe that learners must work within and beyond the classroom to develop their learning skills.

It has been confirmed according to the participants' answers that only few students can be considered autonomous. ELT teacher educators point out that despite the students' willingness and interest in becoming independent in their learning, they are not motivated enough to become autonomous. Nunan (1997) argues that young learners may have some interests in becoming autonomous and they just need some gradual help to become autonomous learners. In fact, the participants believe that students' interest is itself important, and it is considered as an initiative step into becoming autonomous learners. Moreover, they ensure that learners in general have the potential to take their own decision, find appropriate solutions to different tasks, and learn cooperatively as well as independently. Nevertheless, teachers' role is also important in promoting learner autonomy. AL Asmari (2013) points out in one of his studies “The teacher plays a significant role in promoting learner autonomy through creating an appropriate learning environment conducive to learning in which EFL teachers understand their learners' needs and previous learning experiences.”(p.9) ELT instructors believe that the students need some gradual help to develop their autonomous learning, and that the teachers in general need to provide their students with different types of activities in which they can learn to become responsible, build self-confidence, make decisions, and find solutions to the problems provided. Some participants, for example, mention that they usually focus on activities that will help the students discover their own learning styles and strategies. Another group of instructors, on the other hand, confirm that they emphasize activities that will help students become more active and more involved in their learning process. While the rest of the participants have insisted on using self-assessment activities that would help the learners reflect on the parts they need to work on, and help them learn how to measure the quality of their performance. From literature, McDevitt (1997) suggests creating activities for students in which they can assess and evaluate themselves. Balçıkanlı has conducted a study in 2010 in which he finds that students benefit from working on decision-making and problem-solving activities. In general, most of the instructors feel that involving students in collaborative activities in which they can take decisions, manage time, and be responsible is useful to develop autonomous learning skills.

Promoting learner autonomy is a lengthy process that generally depends on teachers' motivation skills. ELT teacher educators believe that motivating students plays a significant role in promoting learner autonomy. Deci and Ryan (2000) mention that by triggering a high degree of motivation, students become more willing to work towards their ideal self and

develop their skills and learning strategies. The participants state that they motivate their students by offering them choices on the topics they would like to work on (explicit training and follow-up tasks). They have also mentioned that they usually provide them with tasks which are based on the use of monolingual dictionaries, and encourage them to work cooperatively and take risks. Nevertheless, the participants point out that promoting autonomous learning is not easy. They think that promoting learner autonomy has to do with the children's growth in general and education in particular. In other words, teaching learners to be autonomous should start from an early age first among family members and then should be emphasized and developed in schools among their friends and teachers. Moreover, the fact that students lack enthusiasm of autonomy makes its encouragement difficult. A study conducted by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) has revealed that teachers are ready to promote learner autonomy; however, the lack of enthusiasm and understanding of independence are the greatest barriers to the development of learner autonomy. Actually, ELT educators think that it is feasible to promote learner autonomy as long as the teachers are aware of its importance and the students already have some understanding of the concept and ready to show their interest in it.

However, there are many challenges that teachers in general face while trying to promote learner autonomy. According to the teacher educators' answers, the greatest challenge is when students do not feel ready to become autonomous learners. They also think that this reason is generally related to the cultural and/or educational background. A study conducted by Al Asmari (2013) has revealed that passive learners are identified as the most challenging issue for teachers. Yet, according to ELT instructors, nowadays students are more open to learn and control their own learning process. They may not participate in class discussion, but they will surely participate in cooperative or collaborative activities. Tuan (2010) believes that working in groups or pairs enhances learners' cognitive growth and motivation and increases learners' linguistic and problem-solving skills.

In terms of promoting greater learner autonomy, a wide range of suggestions has been made by ELT instructors. Most of them advise teachers to focus more on collaborative and cooperative activities. Moreover, they believe that motivating the students and providing them with more opportunities to take decisions about their learning objectives will be effective enough to develop their autonomous skills. Besides that, the participants insist on providing the student with different types of classroom activities that focus on self-evaluation and self-assessment. Little et al. (2017) believe that learner self-assessment is a central feature in the promotion of learner autonomy. Nevertheless, the participants believe that it is not only their job to promote learner autonomy, but it is also the administration's responsibility to help the instructors by giving them the chance to organize their own teaching style in a way that autonomous learning is involved.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research paper is to explore ELT master's degree students and teacher educators' perceptions of learner autonomy. Therefore, in order to investigate the participants' perceptions, a mixed-method design combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches has been used. According to the results, most of the students do not perceive themselves as sufficiently autonomous. It has been revealed that despite the students' awareness of their responsibilities, and their positive attitudes towards their abilities and the activities they can be successful at, they still prefer to hold the teacher for the learning process.

ELT teacher educators, on the other hand, hold positive views on the importance of enhancing autonomous learning in their classrooms. Motivating students, providing them with opportunities to make choices, and working on independent and collaborative work were considered as necessary elements for the development of learner autonomy. However, it was found that it is slightly unfeasible to promote autonomous learning in university classrooms due to the cultural and educational background. Therefore, for more effective promotion of learner autonomy, several suggestions that focus more on not only the role of the teachers but also the role of both the students and administration have been made.

This research paper provides only a glimpse of a broad research area. Therefore, in the lights of the findings obtained from this study, some suggestions can be made for further research. First of all, this study was limited in the questionnaire and the interview. Thus, a further study can consider employing other data collection instruments, such as classroom observation in order to obtain more comprehensive results. Moreover, the current study has been conducted only in one university because of the conditions the country has been facing. Therefore, a further study can also take into consideration different settings to conduct the research, such as working on two or three different universities in Turkey. Furthermore, the same study can be conducted in different contexts, for example, in secondary schools, high schools, or even in university preparatory schools.

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