

Full Length Research Paper

The differences in the conceptualizations of autonomy by English language instructors regarding some variables

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With the changing trends and approaches in education various new concepts have emerged. Of these, learner autonomy stands out as a major concept. This study examined how Turkish instructors of English conceptualize learner autonomy and what they do to promote learner autonomy in their particular teaching contexts. Additionally, the study aimed at investigating the differences in the conceptualizations of autonomy by English language instructors with respect to some variables such as the years of teaching experience, gender, the highest degree obtained, and the type of institution. A total of 109 instructors working in the Schools of Foreign Languages at four state and two private universities participated in the study. The data were collected through an adapted version of the questionnaire originally developed by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012). Several differences were found in the participating instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy with respect to gender and the type of institution. Female instructors were found to be more positive than their male counterparts about involving students in choosing their own learning materials. The study revealed that the instructors working at private universities, as compared to their colleagues working at state universities, were less in favor of involving students in the decisions about what would be learned, which learning materials would be used, and how learning would be assessed.

Key words: Autonomy, English Language teaching, conceptualizations of autonomy, practices of autonomy, Turkish instructors.

INTRODUCTION

As stated by Smith (2008), the notion of learner autonomy is not new. It has appeared in the field of English language teaching since the late 1990s. The concept of learner autonomy was first introduced in the field of language teaching through the Modern Languages Project initiated by the Council of Europe. The primary aim of the project was to provide adults with opportunities for lifelong learning. The project gave birth

to the establishment of the Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues (CRAPEL) in France in the early 1970s. To fulfill its mission, that is, to equip adult learners with lifelong learning skills, the first self-access resource centers were opened at CRAPEL and at Cambridge University. The underlying rationale for self-access centers was that the language learners would be exposed to a rich collection of second language

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materials through which they would be able to experiment with self-directed learning.

Since its conception, learner autonomy has been the focus of attention in foreign language teaching. In its broadest terms, learner autonomy operates on the premise that “learners have the power and right to learn for themselves” (Smith, 2008:2). Although much research has been done on the theoretical bases, application and potential benefits of autonomy with regard to language learners, the studies of how teachers conceptualize autonomy have been relatively limited.

According to Borg (2007), teachers’ instructional choices are influenced by their beliefs. Thus, it is important to know about teachers’ conceptualizations of autonomy. It should be noted that concepts come to life, serve better and can be translated into informed practices when they are well understood and interpreted by the practitioners. With this in mind, the current study had several goals. It first aimed to investigate how Turkish instructors of English conceptualize learner autonomy. Second, the study examined whether their conceptualizations of autonomy differed based on some variables, and finally the current study looked at the ways they translate their conceptualizations of learner autonomy into practices in their teaching. Using the definition of learner autonomy based on relevant literature, the importance of learner autonomy and the ways to promote it will be discussed.

With regard to the studies on learner autonomy, Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) argue that the existing studies on learner autonomy neglect the views of teachers. The present study will endeavour to provide insights into the concept of learner autonomy thereby contributing to a relatively limited body of research.

What is learner autonomy?

Although autonomy has been defined in various ways by a number of researchers to date, Holec’s (1981:3) following definition of learner autonomy still remains the most preferred one. Holec defined learner autonomy as “the capacity to take charge of one’s own learning [which is] ...to have and to hold the responsibility for all decisions concerning all aspects of this learning, including, but not necessarily limited to, determining the objectives, defining the contents and progressions, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring the procedures of acquisition, and evaluating what has been acquired”.

Benson, another influential researcher who contributed to the literature on learner autonomy, defined learning autonomy as ‘the capacity to take control of one’s own learning’ (2001:2). Similarly, Little (1991:4) defined learner autonomy as “essentially a matter of the learner’s psychological relation to the process and content of learning – a capacity for detachment, critical reflection,

decision-making, and independent action”. On the other hand, Dam and colleagues (1990) pointing out the social orientation of learner autonomy, that learning is a social activity processing in cooperation with others, defined learning autonomy as “a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a social, responsible person” (1990:102).

Defining autonomy as “the freedom and ability to manage one’s own affairs ...” Scharle and Szabo (2000:4) highlighted the connection between learner autonomy and responsibility. Likewise, in Thanasoulas’s terms, (2000) ‘learner autonomy is an ideal...that can, and should, be realized if we want self-sufficient learners and citizens capable of evaluating every single situation they find themselves in...’ (2000:10).

Given that the related literature is crowded with variants of autonomy definitions by either replacing the word ‘*capacity*’ with ‘*ability*’ or adding new dimensions such as ‘*cooperation*’, and ‘*language-awareness*’ it will be wise to look at what learner autonomy is not. Esch’s (1998; cited in Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012:4) following quote clarifies the complexities over the definition. According to Esch:

“it is not self-instruction/learning without a teacher;... it does not mean that intervention or initiative on the part of a teacher is banned; ... it is not something teachers do to learners; i.e. a new methodology; ... it is not a single easily identifiable behaviour; ... it is not a steady state achieved by learners once and for all”.

Similarly, Borg (2013) provided a list of attributes which characterize learner autonomy. Following are the core attributes of learner autonomy: Despite the many definition variations, what is obvious is that learner autonomy made its premier thirty some years ago and still maintains its status as one of the attention-raising topics in the field of language teaching and learning.

Why is learner autonomy important?

In general terms, one of the major promises learner autonomy has for learners is that it provides a quality language learning experience equipping learners with life-long learning skills and creating democratic societies (Little, 2003; McCarthy, 1998; Cotterall, 1995).

Operating on the premise that “learners have the power and right to learn for themselves” (Smith, 2008: 2), learner autonomy encourages learners to get involved in a number of decision-making processes. More specifically, within the concept of learner autonomy, learners are provided with the opportunity to set goals, get involved in organizing the learning process by selecting appropriate methods and to monitor and evaluate the outcome of the whole learning process.

By being the decision-makers, learners themselves develop ‘a personal agenda for learning’ (Little, 1994;

Chan, 2003). According to researchers, when learners are involved in the decision-making processes they turn out to be more enthusiastic about learning and their learning experience becomes more focused and meaningful (Littlejohn, 1985; Little, 1991; Dam, 1995). Furthermore, learner autonomy helps learners find their own paths of learning thereby providing them with space to adjust the whole learning process at their own pace. Along with these benefits, when learners are involved in some forms of planning and taking responsibility of their own learning, their awareness and motivation increase (Little, 2003; McCarthy, 1998).

Harmer (2001) states that since teaching time in classrooms is limited teachers are expected to find ways to help language learners be involved in learning practices beyond the classrooms. He maintains that motivation among learners can be sustained “by giving students ‘agency’ (enabling them to be the doers rather than the recipients of learning action)” (2001:394). It is worth noting that people learn better and their learning experiences become more meaningful and permanent when they are taking responsibility for their own learning (Crabbe, 1993). With regard to the quality of learning experienced through autonomy, Little (2000) argues that once learners reflect on their own learning they will tend to be more focused which, will lead to more efficient and effective learning.

Simply put, as stated by Benson (2001:2), “autonomous learning is more effective than non-autonomous learning, and naturally the development of autonomy implies better language learning”.

The ways to promote autonomy and teacher roles

According to Scharle and Szabo (2000), autonomy is closely linked with learners’ responsibility. The development of learners’ responsibility can be ensured through a process involving three stages. *Raising awareness*, being the first stage, includes the presentation of “new viewpoints and experiences to the learners...” (2000:9). In the second stage, *changing attitudes*, learners are encouraged to develop new roles and habits. They warn that, “this is a slow process requiring a lot of practice and patience”. The last stage, *transferring roles*, requires teachers to give “...a considerable amount of freedom to the students in accomplishing tasks, or even, in deciding about tasks” (2000:9).

Benson (2001), on the other hand, classified practices to promote autonomy under six broad titles as resource, technology, learner, classroom, curriculum and teacher-based approaches. The resource-based approaches emphasize the learner’s independent interaction with learning materials placed in, for example, self-access centers. Benson states that this type of learning “offers learners the opportunity to exercise control over learning plans, the selection of learning materials and the

evaluation of learning” (2001:113).

Technology-based approaches to the development of autonomy, on the other hand, include computer-assisted language learning and, internet applications. Learner-based approaches vary from giving direct advice to learners on language-learning strategies, encouraging them to discover the strategy which works well for them to giving training to learners about being a ‘good language learner’.

For the last three of the approaches, that is, classroom, curriculum and teacher-based ones to be effective, Benson states, “the key factor... is the opportunity for students to make decisions regarding their learning within a collaborative and supportive environment” (2001:151).

Illes (2012) identified a number of initiatives to promote learner autonomy such as self-access facilities, involving learners in the decision making process varying from choosing topics, materials to activities. Chan (2003) argued that, encouraging self-assessment, peer evaluation and group and pair work can also serve the aim of developing learner autonomy.

Another way of supporting the practice of language learner autonomy on a larger scale is the ‘European Language Portfolio’ which makes learners keep track of their own learning and assess their proficiency through “can do statements” (Little, 2009). Parallel to learners’ involvement in the decision making process, is a concept, which is becoming popular, called ‘process syllabus’. Categorized under the curriculum-based approaches to fostering autonomy, students have a say in each and every phase of the preparation of the syllabus. The syllabus designed through this concept is of a dynamic nature rather than a static one. According to Ma and Gao (2010), negotiating the syllabus with learners by prioritizing students’ choices, will definitely have a positive effect on motivation.

In order for autonomous learning to occur in the learning contexts teachers play a pivotal role since “the ability to behave autonomously for students is dependent upon teachers creating a classroom culture where autonomy is accepted” (Barfield et al., 2001:3). Likewise, according to Dam, ‘it is largely the teachers’ responsibility to develop learner autonomy’ (2003:135). Little (1995) argues that if teachers do not know what it means to be an autonomous learner it will be irrational to expect them to foster autonomy. Along the same line, Tütüniş (2011) states that students should be trained by their teachers to grasp things themselves in learner-centered classrooms where they can make decisions regarding their own learning endeavours.

As mentioned earlier, Borg (2007) states that teachers’ beliefs affect their *instructional choices* in the classroom. Therefore, understanding teachers’ beliefs about any particular concept is of importance. Learner autonomy requires teachers to take up roles as catalysts, consultants, observers, and facilitators. In line with this, an autonomous teacher is expected to help his students

set objectives, select instructional materials, and evaluate themselves. Additionally, in order to foster autonomy, teachers are expected to provide learners with adequate training to help them identify their learning styles and strategies.

To date, a number of research studies have been conducted on learner autonomy with regard to teachers' views. In a study, Camilleri (1999 cited in Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012:6) collected data via a 13-item questionnaire from 328 teachers working in six European countries to investigate whether teachers allow students to participate in a variety of decisions related to instruction such as setting up objectives of a course or deciding on course content. The findings revealed that although teachers were positive about students' involvement in decisions regarding the arrangement of desks and periodical self-assessment they were not positive about students choosing the textbooks or deciding the time and place of the lesson.

Another study was conducted by Al-Shaqsi (2009 cited in Borg and Al-Busaidi 2012:6) to investigate teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy. A total of 120 teachers working in state schools in Oman participated in the study. The teachers were asked to describe autonomous learners. The teachers described autonomous learners as the ones who can use a computer, use a dictionary and the ones who can ask the teacher to explain what they do not understand. In the same study, teachers stated that they try to promote learner autonomy by trying out different types of quizzes, increasing learners' talk time and rewarding learners' good performances. With regard to the types of activities the teachers reported, Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) argue that there is not an obvious connection between the proposed autonomy-fostering activities and learner autonomy.

In Turkey, learner autonomy has been investigated in a number of studies. In a comparative study, Çoban (2002) investigated the attitudes toward learner autonomy of the instructors working at two state universities. The findings of the study revealed that although the instructors at two institutions were positive about encouraging learners to take part in the learning process, they were found to be unwilling to involve students in decision-making processes regarding the selection of the course contents and methods.

In a study conducted by Özdere (2005) instructors' attitudes toward learner autonomy were investigated. A total of 72 instructors working at six state universities participated in the study. The data for the study were collected through a questionnaire and interviews with the participation of ten instructors. The findings revealed that the instructors have attitudes toward learner autonomy varying from neutral to slightly positive. One major finding of the study, though, was that the participating instructors were not positive about students' involvement in materials selection.

Balçikanlı (2008) conducted an experimental study to investigate learner autonomy with 40 participants at a

state university in Turkey. The majority of the participants were enrolled in different departments at a state university and the majority of the students had preparatory English instruction experience. The control group took autonomy-free education and the experimental group took training with practices of learner autonomy. The implementation took 12 weeks and the comparison was made via pre and post questionnaires. The research proved that, the participants in the experimental group had a higher degree of learner autonomy after twelve weeks. Throughout the study, the portfolios kept by learners were found to be effective in promoting learner autonomy. Learning logs and language journals were also stated to be effective in fostering learner autonomy. As a major finding of the study Balçikanlı stated that teachers should prepare their students to take more responsibility for their own learning, thereby making the students familiar with the concept.

In another study conducted by Balçikanlı (2010), 112 teacher trainees' of English were investigated concerning their beliefs about learner autonomy. The researcher collected data via questionnaires and focus group interviews with 20 volunteer student teachers. The findings of the study revealed that although the participants were in favor of the principles of learner autonomy in general, most of them were not positive about involving their future students in the decision making process regarding when and where lessons would be delivered. The student teachers were also found to be less positive about their future students' involvement in coursebooks selection.

In a recent study, Oğuz (2013) investigated Turkish teachers' views of autonomy. The research was carried out with the participation of 492 teachers from different subject matters and different school types such as primary, secondary, regular and vocational high schools. Female teachers were found to be more positive about learner autonomy than their male counterparts. In addition to that, primary school teachers were found to be already utilizing autonomy-friendly activities in their classroom settings. Additionally, teachers working at vocational high schools reported having implemented learner autonomy less than teachers working at primary schools and other high schools.

The study conducted by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) investigated the teachers' beliefs and practices regarding learner autonomy. A total of 61 out of 200 teachers working at the language center of Sultan Qaboos University in Oman participated in the study. The data for the study collected through the questionnaire which was developed by the researchers and the interviews with 20 volunteer instructors. The questionnaire was constructed based on the key themes included in the relevant literature on learner autonomy. After a series of rigorous drafting procedures the final version of the questionnaire yielded 37 items which were arranged on a five-point Likert scale with '*strongly disagree*', '*disagree*', '*unsure*', '*agree*' and '*strongly agree*'. The 37 items included in the

questionnaire were organized in a way that the groups of items represented different orientations regarding learner autonomy such as; psychological, technical, social, and critical. Using data collected through questionnaires and interviews, professional development workshops were organized to further teachers' understanding of learner autonomy.

The findings of the study revealed that teachers at the language center were positively disposed to learner autonomy. Their conceptualizations of learner autonomy were primarily found to be attached to the psychological orientation that 'learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy' received the highest level of agreement from the participants.

The analysis of the questionnaire data revealed that for 95.1 of the participating teachers autonomy means learners' making choices about how they learn. A great majority of teachers (93.4 %) agreed that learner autonomy has a positive effect on the overall success of the learners. Additionally, 85.2 % maintained that learner autonomy leads language learners to learn more effectively than they could achieve in educational settings which lack autonomy. The autonomy-fostering practices adopted by the teachers at the language center included activities such as talking to students about the importance of learner autonomy, motivating students to reflect on their own learning experiences, encouraging the learners to reflect on their learning preferences and learning strategies, designing in-class activities which encourage cooperative and peer learning, and assigning students out of class tasks which they bring them back to the classroom.

As mentioned earlier, teachers have an important role in promoting learner autonomy. However, in the related literature, "language teachers' perspectives on what autonomy means have not been awarded much attention" (Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012:283). With this in mind, the present study investigated English language instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy.

The study included English language instructors working at four state and two private universities in Turkey. To the best of this author's knowledge, there has not been a study on learner autonomy representing comparative conceptualizations of instructors who work at state and private universities.

Purposes of the study

The present research was guided by the following research questions. The research was conducted,

1. to find out the conceptualizations of autonomy by Turkish instructors of English
2. to investigate the differences in the instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy with respect to years of teaching experience, highest degree obtained, gender and the type of institution

3. to find out the major practices adopted by the instructors to promote autonomy in their teaching contexts

METHOD

Quantitative research method was employed in the present study. Descriptive statistics and non-parametric tests were used to analyze the data collected via questionnaires.

Participants

The study was conducted with 109 instructors working at four state universities and two private universities. 70 of the participants were females and 39 of the participants were males. 66% per cent of the participants obtained BA degree and 31% of the participants were MA holders. Of the participants only 2 participants had Ph. D degree. 54 participants presently work at state universities while 55 participants work at private universities. 46% per cent of the participants (51 participants) are ranked in the scale from 0 to 4 years of teaching experience. 28% per cent of the participants (31 participants) are in the scale of 5-9 years of experience. 12% per cent of the participants (14 participants) have 10-14 years of experience and 9 participants have been working for 15-19 years. 4 participants have 20-24 years of teaching experience.

Data collection instrument

Questionnaire

Data were collected through the adapted version of the questionnaire originally developed by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012). Permission from both researchers and the directors of the Schools of Foreign Languages where the instructors work was obtained. The questionnaire was piloted with 20 instructors working in the School of Foreign Languages at the host university. The reliability of the questionnaire was found as 0.79. As the research was carried out with the participation of English instructors, the questionnaire was not translated into Turkish. The adapted version of the questionnaire included three parts. The first part included 37 items designed on a five point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5) eliciting instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy. The second part included an open-ended question regarding the practices to promote learner autonomy. The last part included questions to elicit information about the demographics of the participants.

Data collection

Questionnaires were administered in the Fall Semester of the 2013-2014 academic year. Data collection lasted almost four weeks. The envelopes of the questionnaires were mailed to the institutions and the directors were asked to randomly distribute them to the instructors.

Data analysis

SPSS version 17.0 was utilized to obtain frequencies and percentages of the first part of the questionnaire. In order to identify relationships between variables, inferential statistics computations were performed. Frequencies were computed. In order to investigate two independent groups median Mann-Whitney was

Table 1. Core attributes of learner autonomy:

Learner autonomy is	Learner autonomy is NOT
capacity	teacher-less
willingness	individual
responsibility	technology
motivation	Methodology
independence	State

used. In addition, Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric tests were carried out to investigate more than two group comparisons. To analyze the open-ended question located in the second part of the questionnaire, content analysis was carried out and emerging themes were categorized. In order to realize the content analysis, each response was read several times and emerging categories were tabulated and the necessary grouping was made.

FINDINGS

In order to answer the first research question means values for each item in the first part of the questionnaire were computed. In the discussion of major findings, the means above 4.00 representing 'strongly agree' and 'agree' and the means below 2.56 for the 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' were included. The table below shows the means of items (Table 1).

As can be seen from the table, the participants were in agreement with (means above 4.00) the items: 37, 36, 35, 33, 29, 28, 25, 16, 14, 12, 11, 7, 4, 2. A close investigation of these items reveals that the participating instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy are associated with a psychological orientation of the concept. That is, the item '*learning how to learn is the key to develop learner autonomy*' has one of the highest mean degrees ($M=4.46$). This was found to be the most-agreed upon item in the original study conducted by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012). As mentioned earlier, learner autonomy is the state of being aware of learning. The other items which refer to the psychological orientation of the concept of learner autonomy are '*motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated*' ($M=4.57$), and '*confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence*' ($M=4.30$), and the item 37 '*to become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning*' ($M=4.33$).

The least agreed-upon items in the questionnaire were found to be 8, 20, 23, 24, and 18. The participating teachers are positive that the Turkish students can develop learner autonomy by disagreeing with the item '*learner autonomy is a concept which is not suited to non-Western learners*' ($M=2.37$). The results revealed that the participating instructors disagree with the item '*learner autonomy means learning without a teacher*' ($mean=2.56$). As stated earlier, one of the misconceptions

attributed to learner autonomy is the idea that learner autonomy is regarded as a '*teacher-less*' way of learning. Similarly, another item '*learner autonomy requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher*' ($M=2.34$), as being one of the least-agreed upon items, prove that the instructors are familiar with the key elements which make up the core of the learner autonomy.

The second research question in the study aimed to find out whether the instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy change among the participants with regard to years of teaching experience, gender, the highest degree (Table 2).

The differences in instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy with respect to the years of teaching experience

In order to find out whether there is a significant difference in instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy according to the years of experience, Kruskal-Wallis test was used. The results of the analysis are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3 shows that there is a significant difference in instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy in terms of the responses given to item 16 according to the years of teaching experience ($p=0,049$).

In order to find out the direction of the distribution, frequencies analysis was computed. The majority of the participating instructors (46.8 %) have teaching experience less than five years.

As can be seen from the table, instructors with less teaching experience favor cooperative activities more than instructors who have more than ten years of teaching experience. Of the instructors with 0-4 years of teaching experience 43.1 % ($N=22$), and 49 % ($N=25$) agree with the item that '*learner autonomy is promoted through cooperative activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other*'.

The differences in instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy with respect to the highest degree obtained

In order to find out whether there is a significant difference in instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy with respect to the highest degree obtained, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used. The results of the analysis are shown in Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Table 5 shows that there is a significant difference in the instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy in terms of the items 1, 20, and 33.

In order to find out the direction of the distribution, frequencies analysis was computed.

Of the instructors with bachelor's degree, 53% ($N=36$) agree that language '*learners of all ages can develop learner autonomy*' while 22.4% ($N=15$) of them are

Table 2. Conceptualizations of learner autonomy by the instructors

Item No:	Statements	Mean	SD
1.	Language learners of all ages can develop learner autonomy.	3,52	1,05
2.	Independent study in the library is an activity which develops learner autonomy.	4,28	0,67
3.	Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete tasks alone.	3,84	0,81
4.	Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn.	4,22	0,72
5.	Individuals who lack autonomy are not likely to be effective language learners.	3,54	1,05
6.	Autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside the classroom.	3,72	1,12
7.	Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy.	4,01	0,94
8.	Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher.	2,56	1,16
9.	It is harder to promote learner autonomy with proficient language learners than it is with beginners.	2,46	1,04
10.	It is possible to promote learner autonomy with both young language learners and with adults.	3,80	0,97
11.	Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence.	4,30	0,87
12.	Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more effectively than they otherwise would.	4,04	0,82
13.	Learner autonomy can be achieved by learners of all cultural backgrounds.	3,68	0,98
14.	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they do.	4,07	0,73
15.	Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centered classrooms.	3,67	1,20
16.	Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other.	4,24	0,77
17.	Learner autonomy implies a rejection of traditional teacher-led ways of teaching.	3,36	1,06
18.	Learner autonomy cannot develop without the help of the teacher.	2,99	1,06
19.	Learner autonomy is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together.	3,97	0,73
20.	Learner autonomy is only possible with adult learners.	2,21	0,98
21.	Learner autonomy is promoted by independent work in a self- access centre.	3,77	0,74
22.	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed.	3,53	0,94
23.	Learner autonomy is a concept which is not suited to non-Western learners.	2,37	0,99
24.	Learner autonomy requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher.	2,34	0,83
25.	Co-operative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy.	4,17	0,67
26.	Promoting autonomy is easier with beginning language learners than with more proficient learners.	2,81	0,96
27.	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials.	3,75	0,88
28.	Learner-centered classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy.	4,23	0,74
29.	Learning how to learn is the key to develop learner autonomy.	4,46	0,60
30.	Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy.	3,49	0,96
31.	Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the Internet promote learner autonomy.	3,97	0,79
32.	The ability to monitor one's learning is central to learner autonomy	3,90	0,84
33.	Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.	4,57	0,58
34.	The proficiency of a language learner does not affect their ability to develop autonomy.	2,99	1,08
35.	The teacher has an important role to play in supporting learner autonomy.	4,24	0,69
36.	Learner autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner.	4,51	0,59
37.	To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.	4,33	0,70

unsure and 23% (N=16) disagree with this item.

However, more than half of the instructors with MA degrees (67%) are positive that language learners of all ages can develop learner autonomy while only 16% of them disagree with the item.

As can be seen from Table 7, the groups of instructors

with BA and MA holders both disagree that '*learner autonomy is only possible with adult learners*'. More specifically, 78.8 % (N= 52) of the BA holders and 75.1 % (N= 24) of the MA holders reject the idea that learner autonomy can be achieved with only adult learners. However, the responses given to this item by the

Table 3. The Distribution of instructors' conceptualizations with respect to the years of teaching experience

Hypothesis Test Summary (Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test)								
Item No	Statistic	Sig.	Item No	Statistic	Sig.	Item No	Statistic	Sig.
1	1,845	0,764	14	5,446	0,245	27	3,286	0,511
2	6,004	0,199	15	7,070	0,132	28	3,145	0,534
3	4,565	0,335	16	9,555	0,049*	29	6,198	0,185
4	3,064	0,547	17	1,669	0,796	30	3,962	0,411
5	3,632	0,458	18	5,378	0,251	31	3,832	0,429
6	1,108	0,893	19	4,844	0,304	32	6,713	0,152
7	4,006	0,405	20	6,077	0,193	33	4,588	0,332
8	7,623	0,106	21	5,802	0,214	34	5,144	0,273
9	2,724	0,605	22	0,725	0,948	35	3,254	0,516
10	3,759	0,440	23	3,026	0,553	36	3,089	0,543
11	2,023	0,731	24	7,864	0,097	37	3,783	0,436
12	1,475	0,831	25	6,239	0,182			
13	1,923	0,750	26	1,427	0,840			p* < 0,05

Table 4. The Distribution of the responses to item 16 with respect to the years of teaching experience

	Years of teaching experience					Total
	0-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-19 years	20-24 years	
Strongly Disagree	1	-	-	-	-	1
	2,0%	-	-	-	-	0,9%
Disagree	1	-	2	-	-	3
	2,0%	-	14,3%	-	-	2,8%
Item 16 Unsure	2	3	2	-	-	7
	3,9%	9,7%	14,3%	-	-	6,4%
Agree	22	18	7	8	1	56
	43,1%	58,1%	50,0%	88,9%	25,0%	51,4%
Strongly Agree	25	10	3	1	3	42
	49,0%	32,3%	21,4%	11,1%	75,0%	38,5%
Total	51	31	14	9	4	109
	46,8%	28,4%	12,8%	8,3%	3,7%	100,0%

Table 5. The Distribution of instructors' conceptualizations with respect to the highest degree obtained

Hypothesis Test Summary (Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test)								
Item No	Statistic	Sig.	Item No	Statistic	Sig.	Item No	Statistic	Sig.
1	6,170	0,046*	14	5,591	0,061	27	4,000	0,135
2	4,522	0,104	15	3,147	0,207	28	4,854	0,088
3	3,046	0,218	16	1,330	0,514	29	0,050	0,975
4	1,966	0,374	17	2,776	0,250	30	0,415	0,813
5	1,721	0,423	18	2,985	0,225	31	1,758	0,415
6	2,869	0,238	19	2,675	0,263	32	2,861	0,239
7	0,812	0,666	20	6,620	0,037*	33	7,220	0,027*
8	0,026	0,987	21	0,225	0,894	34	2,798	0,247
9	0,948	0,623	22	2,892	0,235	35	2,174	0,337
10	0,217	0,897	23	1,869	0,393	36	0,162	0,922
11	4,145	0,126	24	1,043	0,594	37	3,134	0,209
12	0,398	0,819	25	0,516	0,773			
13	4,152	0,125	26	1,613	0,446			p* < 0,05

Table 6. The Distribution of the responses to item 1 with respect to the highest degree obtained

	Highest Degree Obtained			Total	
	Bachelor's	Master's	Ph.D.		
Item 1	Strongly Disagree	3 4,50%	- -	- -	3 3,00%
	Disagree	13 19,40%	5 16,10%	- -	18 18,00%
	Unsure	15 22,40%	5 16,10%	- -	20 20,00%
	Agree	31 46,30%	13 41,90%	1 50,00%	45 45,00%
	Strongly Agree	5 7,50%	8 25,80%	1 50,00%	14 14,00%
	Total	67 67,00%	31 31,00%	2 2,00%	100 100,00%

Item 1: Language learners of all ages can develop learner autonomy.

Table 7. The Distribution of the responses to item 20 with respect to the highest degree obtained

	Highest Degree Obtained			Total	
	Bachelor's	Master's	Ph.D.		
Item 20	Strongly Disagree	17 25,80%	6 18,80%	- -	23 23,00%
	Disagree	35 53,00%	18 56,30%	- -	53 53,00%
	Unsure	9 13,60%	5 15,60%	- -	14 14,00%
	Agree	3 4,50%	3 9,40%	1 50,00%	7 7,00%
	Strongly Agree	2 3,00%	- -	1 50,00%	3 3,00%
	Total	66 66,00%	32 32,00%	2 2,00%	100 100,00%

Item 20: Learner autonomy is only possible with adult learners.

instructors with BA degree are not consistent with the responses of this group instructors gave to the item 1 that '*language learners of all ages can develop learner autonomy*'. The mismatch in the responses of the instructors with BA degree can be interpreted in a way that the instructors with bachelor's degree are not sure about learner autonomy with regard to age factor.

In order to find out the direction of the distribution, frequencies analysis was computed.

27.9% of BA holders (N=19) agree and 69.1% (N= 47) strongly agree that learner autonomy works well with motivated learners. Of the MA holders, 46.9% (N=15) agree and 46.9% (N=15) strongly agree that motivated

learners make the best of learner autonomy.

The differences in instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy with respect to gender

In order to find out whether there is a significant difference in instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy with respect to gender, Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test was used. The results of the analysis are shown in Tables 9, 10 and 11.

Table 9 shows that there is a significant difference in instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy

Table 8. The Distribution of the responses to item 33 with respect to the highest degree obtained

	Highest Degree Obtained			Total
	Bachelor's	Master's	Ph.D.	
Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-
Disagree	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-
Item 33 Unsure	2	2	-	4
	2,90%	6,30%	-	3,90%
Agree	19	15	2	36
	27,90%	46,90%	100,00%	35,30%
Strongly Agree	47	15	-	62
	69,10%	46,90%	-	60,80%
Total	68	32	2	102
	66,7%	31,4%	2,00%	100,00%

Item 33: Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.

Table 9. The Distribution of instructors' conceptualizations with respect to gender

Hypothesis Test Summary (Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test)								
Item No	Statistic	Sig.	Item No	Statistic	Sig.	Item No	Statistic	Sig.
1	-1,237	0,216	14	-0,075	0,940	27	-2,598	0,009**
2	-0,505	0,614	15	-0,079	0,937	28	-1,547	0,122
3	-0,024	0,981	16	-2,241	0,025*	29	-1,007	0,314
4	-0,065	0,948	17	-0,451	0,652	30	-1,128	0,259
5	-1,083	0,279	18	-1,447	0,148	31	-0,242	0,809
6	-0,861	0,389	19	-0,872	0,383	32	-0,444	0,657
7	-1,702	0,089	20	-1,573	0,116	33	-0,289	0,773
8	-0,431	0,667	21	-1,179	0,238	34	-0,286	0,775
9	-0,920	0,357	22	-1,063	0,288	35	-1,575	0,115
10	-0,403	0,687	23	-1,072	0,284	36	-0,047	0,962
11	-1,009	0,313	24	-1,110	0,267	37	-1,645	0,100
12	-0,563	0,574	25	-0,683	0,495			
13	-0,120	0,905	26	-0,612	0,540			

p* < 0,05 and p** < 0.01

according to gender in terms of the responses given to items 16 ($p=0.025 < 0.05$) and 27 ($p=0.009 < 0.01$).

In order to find out the direction of the distribution, frequencies analysis was computed.

As can be seen from Table 9, 59% (N=23) of male instructors agree and 25.6% (N=10) strongly agree with the item that '*learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other*'. As for the female instructors, 47.1% (N=33) agree and 45.7 % (N= 32) strongly agree that interactive activities help promote learner autonomy. Female and male instructors who participated in the study think differently in terms of promoting learner autonomy by allowing students to choose their own learning materials. While 75 % of female instructors think positively that

learner autonomy can be promoted when students are allowed to choose their own learning materials; only 58% of the males are positive about giving freedom to the students in terms of choosing learning materials. This result might be attributed to the assumption that male teachers give more importance to classroom management and it might be possible that they consider that making the students choose their own materials is a potential risk for classroom management.

The differences in instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy with respect to the type of institution

In order to understand whether there is a significant

Table 10. The Distribution of the responses to item 16 with respect to gender

	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Item 16	Strongly Disagree	1 1,4%	1 0,9%
	Disagree	3 7,7%	3 2,8%
	Unsure	3 7,7%	7 6,4%
	Agree	23 59,0%	56 51,4%
	Strongly Agree	10 25,6%	42 38,5%
	Total	39 35,8%	70 64,2%

Item 16. Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other.

Table 11. The Distribution of the responses to item 27 with respect to gender

	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Item 27	Strongly Disagree	-	-
	Disagree	9 23,1%	13 11,9%
	Unsure	7 17,9%	20 18,3%
	Agree	20 51,3%	57 52,3%
	Strongly Agree	3 7,7%	19 17,4%
	Total	39 35,8%	70 64,2%

Item 27: Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials.

difference in instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy according to the type of institution Independent Samples Mann-Whitney U Test was used. The results are shown in Tables 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18.

Table 12 shows that there is a significant difference in instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy in terms of the items 7, 8, 16, 22, 27 and 29.

Of the instructors working at private institutions only 70% agree or strongly agree (N=24 and N= 14, respectively) that '*involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes autonomy*' while 88% of the instructors working at state universities agree or strongly agree (N=28 and N=20, respectively) with this item. Of the instructors working at private universities 18% are

unsure whether involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy while 11% of them are not positive about involving students in decisions at all. It seems that the instructors from state universities are more willing than their colleagues working at private universities in terms of involving learners in decision making process about what to learn. This finding is interesting as the private universities are presumably expected to follow more learner-centered approaches including the voices of students in decision making processes about teaching and learning practices.

More than half of the participants (69 %) from the private universities disagree that 'learner autonomy means learning without teacher' (N=10 strongly disagree

Table 12. The Distribution of the responses to item 7 with respect to the type of institution

Hypothesis Test Summary (Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test)								
Item No	Statistic	Sig.	Item No	Statistic	Sig.	Item No	Statistic	Sig.
1	-0,066	0,948	14	-0,940	0,347	27	-2,639	0,008**
2	-0,220	0,826	15	-1,483	0,138	28	-0,563	0,573
3	-1,102	0,271	16	-2,409	0,016*	29	-2,185	0,029*
4	-0,583	0,560	17	-0,081	0,935	30	-0,730	0,465
5	-0,758	0,448	18	-0,077	0,938	31	-1,178	0,239
6	-0,153	0,878	19	-0,296	0,767	32	-0,246	0,806
7	-2,067	0,039*	20	-1,887	0,059	33	-0,298	0,766
8	-2,049	0,040*	21	-0,188	0,851	34	-0,129	0,897
9	-0,542	0,588	22	-2,309	0,021*	35	-1,042	0,298
10	-0,438	0,662	23	-0,025	0,98	36	-1,834	0,067
11	-0,037	0,971	24	-1,764	0,078	37	-0,244	0,807
12	-0,301	0,763	25	-0,373	0,709			
13	-1,747	0,081	26	-1,894	0,058			

p* < 0,05 and p** < 0.01

Table 13. The distribution of the responses to item 7 with respect to the type of institution

	Type of Institution		Total	
	Private	State		
Item 7	Strongly Disagree	1 1,90%	2 3,70%	3 2,80%
	Disagree	5 9,30%	-	5 4,60%
	Unsure	10 18,50%	4 7,40%	14 13,00%
	Agree	24 44,40%	28 51,90%	52 48,10%
	Strongly Agree	14 25,90%	20 37,00%	34 31,50%
	Total	54 50,00%	54 50,00%	108 100,00%

Item 7: Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy.

Table 14. The Distribution of the responses to item 8 with respect to the type of institution

	Type of Institution		Total	
	Private	State		
Item 8	Strongly Disagree	10 18,20%	7 13,20%	17 15,70%
	Disagree	28 50,90%	19 35,80%	47 43,50%
	Unsure	9 16,40%	11 20,80%	20 18,50%
	Agree	5 9,10%	10 18,90%	15 13,90%
	Strongly Agree	3 5,50%	6 11,30%	9 8,30%
	Total	55 50,9%	53 49,1%	108 100,00%

Item 8: Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher.

Table 15. The Distribution of the responses to item 16 with respect to the type of institution

	Type of Institution		Total
	Private	State	
Item 16	Strongly Disagree	-	1
		-	1,9%
	Disagree	1	2
		1,8%	3,7%
	Unsure	4	3
		7,3%	5,6%
	22	34	56
	40,0%	63,0%	51,4%
	28	14	42
	50,9%	25,9%	38,5%
Total	55	54	109
	50,5%	49,5%	100,0%

Item 16: Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other.

Table 16. The Distribution of the responses to item 22 with respect to the type of institution

	Type of Institution		Total
	Private	State	
Item 22	Strongly Disagree	-	-
		-	-
	Disagree	14	6
		25,5%	11,1%
	Unsure	15	10
		27,3%	18,5%
	20	30	50
	36,4%	55,6%	45,9%
	6	8	14
	10,9%	14,8%	12,8%
Total	55	54	109
	50,5%	49,5%	100,0%

Item 22: Learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed.

and N=28 disagree). Of the 53 instructors working at state universities 49% disagree with this item. That is, 30% of the instructors from state universities agree that (N=10 agree and N=6 strongly agree) learner autonomy means *teacher-less* learning. As mentioned earlier, learner autonomy by no means is a *teacher-less* learning. The presented percentages suggest that the instructors who work at private universities are more aware that learner autonomy does not mean *teacher-less* learning. Of the 55 instructors from the private universities 50 are positive that *'learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from*

each other' while 48 instructors from the state universities out of a total of 54 have agreement regarding this item (N=34 agree and N= 14 strongly agree). The percentages can be interpreted that both groups of the instructors favor activities through which learners can learn from each other. Of the 55 respondents from the private universities 25.5% (N=14) disagree while some others (N=15) are unsure. What is noteworthy is that unlike the instructors from the private universities, that is, only 47% agree that learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide the assessment type, the great majority of the instructors (70%) working at state universities

Table 17. The Distribution of the responses to item 27 with respect to the type of institution

	Type of Institution		Total
	Private	State	
Item 27	Strongly Disagree	-	-
	Disagree	10 18,2%	3 5,6%
	Unsure	14 25,5%	6 11,1%
	Agree	23 41,8%	34 63,0%
	Strongly Agree	8 14,5%	11 20,4%
	Total	55 50,5%	54 49,5%

Item 27: Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials.

Table 18. The distribution of the responses to item 29 with respect to the type of institution

	Type of Institution		Total
	Private	State	
Item 29	Strongly Disagree	-	-
	Disagree	-	1 1,9%
	Unsure	1 1,9%	2 3,7%
	Agree	20 37,0%	29 53,7%
	Strongly Agree	33 61,1%	22 40,7%
	Total	54 50,0%	54 50,0%

Item 29: Learning how to learn is the key to develop learner autonomy.

believe that learner autonomy can be promoted when learners are involved in decisions about the assessment types (N=30 agree and N= 8 strongly agree). This finding refutes the prevailing idea in Turkey that the private universities have a tendency to involve students in decisions regarding overall learning process. Another striking finding of the study was that while 83% of the instructors from the state universities (N=34 agree and N= 11 strongly agree, respectively) believe that *'learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials'* only 56% of the instructors from private universities believe the item is true. That is, the instructors working at state universities are more willing

to involving learners in selection of learning materials. The percentages of the instructors from the private universities regarding the item 27, as can be seen from the table, 41.8 % (N=23) agree and 14.5 % (N=8) strongly agree; while 25.5 % (N= 14) are unsure. This finding is also striking as somewhat refuting the prevailing belief in Turkey that private universities provide students with more freedom in the matters regarding teaching/ learning practices.

'Learning how to learn is the key to develop learner autonomy' stands out as one of the core elements of learner autonomy. Of the participating instructors from both state and private universities almost all of them

Table 19. The Responses Given to the Open-ended Question by State School Instructors

Activity	Number of the Teachers
Asking the students to reflect on their own language learning experiences	11
Designing group work activities	11
Assigning out-of-class tasks	10
Sharing language-related websites with their students	7
Pair Work	6
Asking the students to prepare presentations in line with their interests	3
Trying to appeal different learning styles	3
Making the students organize classroom activities	3
Trying to make the students discover their learning styles	3
Peer Correction	2

Table 20. The Responses Given to the Open-ended Question by Private School Instructors.

Activity	Total number of the instructors
Designing group work activities	19
Assigning out-of-class tasks	15
Designing pair work activities	15
Familiarizing the students with language learning strategies	9
Sharing language-related websites with their students	8
Using Authentic Materials	7
Making the students organize classroom activities	6
Asking the students reflect on their own language learning experiences	4
Trying to make the students discover their learning styles	3
Peer Correction	3
Ask the students to keep diaries about their language learning experiences.	3
Initiating autonomous syllabus	3
Organizing debates	3
Setting the class rules together.	2
Creating a relaxing atmosphere	2
Encouraging self correction	2

agree that *'learning how to learn is the key to develop learner autonomy'*.

Open-ended question

The third research question aimed at finding out the common practices the instructors employ to promote autonomy in their particular teaching contexts. In order to analyze the responses given to the open-ended question content analysis was used. Content analysis has been defined as the process of finding out the significance of certain words and concepts (Cooper and Schindler, 2003). In order to figure out the emerging themes the responses were read several times. Broad categories were created based on the emerging themes. The major themes and the counts for each theme were given in

Tables 19 and 20.

The results revealed in the tables show that designing group work activities are favored by both groups of instructors, 19 and 11 instructors from private and the state universities, respectively. However, it is worth noting that more instructors from the state universities ask their students to reflect on their own learning experiences (N=11 instructors from state and N=4 instructors from private).

Another popular practice to promote autonomy among instructors seems to be assigning out-of-class activities (15 and 10 instructors from private and state universities, respectively). As can be seen from the table, there is almost no theme which echoes 'freedom' or 'the right to choose' regarding the classroom practices except for a few instructors who make the students organize classroom activities and set the classroom rules together

with their students.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated conceptualizations of autonomy by Turkish instructors of English working in the Schools of Foreign Languages at four state universities and two private universities. The study also looked at the differences in the conceptualizations of autonomy with respect to years of teaching experience, highest degree obtained, gender and the type of the institution where the participants work. A total of 109 instructors, 54 from state universities and 55 from private universities participated in the study. The data were collected through the adapted version of a questionnaire originally developed by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012). The adapted version of the questionnaire included three parts. The first part included 37 items arranged on a five-point Likert scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *Strongly-agree* (5). In the original study, data were collected from both questionnaires and interviews, that is, mixed-method research design has been adopted whereas the data for the present study were collected through only questionnaires, and this might be considered to be one limitation of the present study. However, the findings of the present research have potential to shed light onto the conceptualizations of instructors who work in state and private universities.

The first research question investigated the conceptualizations of learner autonomy of the participating instructors. In order to answer the first research question, means and standard deviations were computed. The results were consistent with the findings of the original study conducted by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012). In both studies almost the same items received the highest agreement from the participants. The participating instructors' conceptualizations were primarily associated with a psychological orientation with regard to learner autonomy. That is, item 29 *'learning how to learn is the key to develop learner autonomy'* ($M= 4.46$), a mental attribute, was found to be one of the most-agreed upon items by the participants in both studies. The other items which were agreed by the participants in each study were items 33, 36, 37, 11 (Table 2). In both studies, the majority of the participating instructors believe that 'learner autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner'.

Of the questionnaire items with the lowest mean values such as *'learner autonomy means learning without a teacher'* ($M=2.56$), *'learner autonomy requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher'* ($M= 2.37$), and *'learner autonomy cannot develop without the help of the teacher'* prove that the participating Turkish instructors are well aware of the fact that 'autonomy is not limited to learning without a teacher' (Little, 1991:3)

The second research question investigated whether the instructors' conceptualizations of learner autonomy differ

based on some variables such as the years of teaching experience, gender, the highest degree obtained and the type of institution where instructors work.

Gender was found to be significantly related to two items. While 65 of the female instructors (47.1% $N=33$ agree and 45.7% $N= 32$ strongly agree) stated that they agree with *'learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other'* only 33 of the male teachers agree/strongly agree. In a recent study conducted by Rahimi and Asadollahi (2012) on Iranian EFL teachers revealed that female and male teachers are different in terms of the activities they apply in the class. They state that female teachers show activities based on sensing and extroverting which is consistent with the present study's finding that 'learning from each other' is related somehow to sensing and extroverting.

Gender was also found to be significant in terms of the item *'learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials'*. Compared to the male instructors that participated in the study (58%), females were found to be more positive about students' choosing their own learning materials (75%).

The conceptualizations of learner autonomy revealed significant differences with regard to the variable 'the type of institution' where the participating instructors currently work. The majority of the instructors (out of 55 $N=38$) working at private universities disagree with the item *'learner autonomy means learning without a teacher'* while only 19 out of 53 instructors from the state universities disagree with this item. It seems that the misconception that learner autonomy is a 'teacher-less' way of learning is prevalent among the instructors working at the state universities.

In the present study, a number of differences in the conceptualizations of instructors working at state and private universities with regard to giving students 'choices' about their learning were evidenced.

The responses given to the item *'Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy'* are significantly different in terms of the type of institution. The instructors working at state universities seem to be more in favor of making the students have a say in the decisions about what to learn than the teachers working at private universities. As mentioned earlier, the core of learner autonomy is involving learners in decision making processes such as establishing goals, organizing content, and materials, selecting methods, monitoring the learning process and evaluating what has been acquired (Holec, 1981). In the present study, the majority of the instructors (88%) working at state universities were found to be in favor of including learners in decisions about what to learn whereas this percentage was 70% for the instructors working at private universities (18% of the participants were found to be unsure). This finding can be interpreted that unlike state universities, most of the private universities in Turkey assess the learners' English

proficiency on internationally-recognized, standardized exams. Therefore, they follow a fixed curriculum to help their students to succeed in the high-stakes exams.

Similarly, another striking finding was related to the item '*learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed*'. Surprisingly, more than half of the instructors (N=38 out of 54) working at state universities agree/strongly agree (N=30 and N=8, respectively) with the statement while only half of the instructors from the private universities agree with this item. Despite the fact that the assessment is more centralized at state universities teachers from state universities seem to be more willing to provide the students with the chance of having a say in the assessment procedure.

Additionally, teachers working at state and private universities were found to think differently in terms of students' role in determining the learning materials. Out of 54, 45 of the teachers working at state universities agree/strongly agree with item '*learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials*'. However, only 31 out of 55 of the instructors working at private universities agree/strongly agree with this statement while 25% of them stated they were not sure. This result also shows that the instructors working at state universities tend to be more flexible and involve the students in the decision-making process than the instructors working at private universities. This finding can be explained in relation with the competitive nature of the education system at private universities. As the majority of the students attending private universities are required to take high-stakes exams such as TOEFL and IELTS in order to receive a passing score the instructors have to follow a fixed syllabus designed toward success in these exams.

In Turkey to date, a number of studies have been conducted on learner autonomy. Of these studies, a few were conducted to investigate the views of English language teacher trainees' or instructors' regarding learner autonomy and their tendency toward sharing instructional responsibilities with their learners (Çoban, 2002; Özdere, 2005; Durmuş, 2006; Balçıkanlı, 2010). In general terms, the findings of the present study related to providing choices with students over instructional responsibilities are consistent with the findings of the studies conducted on teacher trainees and instructors in the Turkish context. For instance, Çoban (2002) investigated the instructors' attitudes toward learner autonomy at two state universities. The findings of the study revealed that although the instructors working at two state universities were generally positive about involving learners in the learning process they were not willing to include them in the decision making processes regarding course contents and methods. Similarly, Özdere (2005) investigated the attitudes of a total of 72 instructors working at six state universities toward learner autonomy. One major finding of the study was that the participating

instructors were not positive about involving students in materials selection. Likewise, Durmuş (2006) studied a total of 108 instructors' views of learner autonomy via questionnaires. The study revealed that the participating instructors were found to be positive about involving learners in the decisions regarding short-term objectives. The study conducted by Balçıkanlı (2010) on teacher trainees of English to investigate their beliefs about autonomy revealed that although the teacher trainees were positively disposed to learner autonomy they were not positive about including their future students in decisions about selection of the textbooks.

The above studies included either teacher trainees enrolled in state universities or the instructors working at state universities as sample. In the present study, though, the sample included the instructors who work at private universities along with the instructors working at state universities. The results concerning decision making processes were found to be more positive in favor of the instructors working at state universities. From this perspective, it is true to say that, although Turkish instructors of English are generally positive about learner autonomy, in light of the findings of the present study and, of course, within the limitations the study bears, the instructors who work at state universities have a tendency toward students' involvement in decision making processes. Although we cannot generalize the findings of the present study beyond its scope, what is obvious is that students' participation in decisions concerning instructional issues remains to be a problematic issue for Turkish instructors of English in general.

The third research question in the study aimed to find out the practices adopted by the participating instructors to foster autonomy. The findings revealed that *designing group work activities* are the most popular activities by instructors from both state and private universities as well. However, a close investigation of the findings showed differences with regard to the institution the participating instructors work. For instance, although 11 instructors from state universities stated that they were '*asking the learners to reflect on their learning experiences*' this was stated by only 4 instructors from private universities. Another activity which was reported by both groups of instructors was '*sharing language-related websites with students*' (N=7 for state and N=8 for private). As for the activities which allow students to take part in decision making processes regarding instructional matters such as setting objectives, selecting teaching materials, deciding course contents and methods, or defining evaluation processes there was no clear account of any kind of these activities.

The studies which have been conducted on learner autonomy, including the present study, to date have included findings collected through either questionnaires or interviews or both. However, in order to get broader views from what is actually going on in the classrooms and also learner autonomy being '*a notion around which*

theoretical ideals and pedagogical realities may not always concur, as argued by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012:7), more studies based on observations of the actual classroom practices need to be conducted. The participants of the current study were found to be knowledgeable about learner autonomy. Their overall agreement was evidenced on some of the core principles of learner autonomy such as *'learning how to learn is the key to develop learner autonomy'*. It is obvious that, the classroom practices stated by the participating instructors do not exactly match with their knowledge.

Therefore, the researcher recommends that workshops be organized, as in the original study, to further familiarize the instructors with the notion of learner autonomy.

Conclusion

Learner autonomy has long been attracting researchers' attention in the field of English language teaching. It is evident that the concept of learner autonomy has a great potential to offer to language learning. From this perspective, we can say that learner autonomy should be prioritized in educational settings by teachers. Once we make teachers believe in the potential of learner autonomy and familiarize them with the foundational practices to foster it their efforts will pay off in the long run. The famous Chinese proverb summarizes the essence of learner autonomy in two sentences: *'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime'*.

When we stop giving our students fish within teaching hours and instead equip them with tools with which they can catch fish, we will guarantee them a way of learning which will last for a lifetime.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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