

Full Length Research Paper

The effect of a learner autonomy training on the study habits of the first-year ELT students

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the possible effects of a learner autonomy training on the study habits of first-year university students as future EFL teachers. To this end, a questionnaire was used as the research instrument to elicit the study habits of the students. The questionnaire was administered to 122 students enrolled in a 'Learner Autonomy' class at Anadolu University, Turkey at two different times: at the beginning and end of the semester. The quantitative analyses of the data revealed a significant difference in the study habits of students before and after the 12-week learner autonomy training in terms of study skills such as managing school work stress, note-taking and reading, and preparing an assignment/project. The findings emphasized the impact of learner autonomy training on alleviating students' anxiety and concerns related to dealing with their school work. The study also suggests a learner autonomy training for EFL learners, especially for the students as teacher candidates.

Key words: Learner autonomy, study habits, university students, ELT, anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

Study habits can be defined as the propensity of a learner to absorb the necessary knowledge or skills in an orderly and effective manner. In other words, it is the consecration of time and attention to obtain knowledge or skills especially from the available resources; hence, it is the quest for academic information within a comprehensive examination of a subject or state. Decent study habits can easily result in an effective use of the study for learners as study habits of learners curb the effect of the amount of time spent studying on success (Nonis and Hudson, 2010). Incorporating autonomy into university level is also promising as university students are advantageous learners and as they are better motivated

for autonomous learning intrinsically in terms of both physical and psychological states (Chuan, 2010).

In the foreign language context, language learning strategy use might be confused with study habits as successful learners are successful strategy users (Ehrman and Oxford, 1990, 1995) and have better study habits as well. Moreover, learning strategy use is a part of study habits; therefore, it is quite probable that the study habits be in association with success in foreign language learning. In point of fact, "language learning strategy research has suffered from an overemphasis on metacognitive and cognitive strategies, which are admittedly very important, at the expense of other strategy

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types that are also very useful" (Oxford, 1989: 2). In other words, learning strategies denote activities preferred by learners in order to assist their learning; therefore, learning strategies emphasize deliberate actions (McIntyre, 1994: 190). Then again, some study habits possibly will consist of efforts to facilitate learning such as making outlines of a chapter whereas several habits characterize either inactions such as not recopying lecture notes or ineffective techniques such as drinking alcohol while studying (Bailey and Onwuegbuzie, 2002).

Previous research on study habits

Most of the research on students' study habits has focused on relationship between these habits and students' academic achievement. For instance, Osa-Edoh and Alutu (2012) found a high correlation between study habits and academic performance and gender of secondary school students. Recently, Quinco-Cadosales (2013) conducted a study to investigate the study habits of Philipian first year students at the Faculty of Education using a Study Habits Questionnaire prepared based on the framework of study skills introduced by Lucas and Corpuz (2007). It was observed that the first year students possessed the skills in organizing and planning their work, preparing assignments or projects, and note-taking and reading as the study habits. Also, their academic achievement was in correlation with their skills in organizing and planning their work, working with others and utilizing resources and feedback, note-taking and reading, and preparing an assignment/project. Lastly, note-taking and reading was found to be the best predictor of the academic performance of the first-year university students they were found to be in need of to improving their study habits related to studying their lessons, reading, and taking down notes to increase their academic performance. From an EFL perspective, learners' study habits associated with reading and listening in both English as a foreign language and in Japanese as their mother tongue were not different while study habits of these learners from diverse EFL proficiency levels related to speaking and writing skills in both L1 and L2 were dissimilar (Taferner, 2009). Moreover, learners, who have low levels of proficiency in foreign language, take their notes with irrelevant or trivial information, hesitate to request help from their teachers when they experience trouble with their coursework, put their lecture notes away after the test and never refer back to them, need a good mood before starting studying, are likely to doodle or to daydream while studying, and do not use their dictionaries for the unknown words (Bailey and Onwuegbuzie, 2002).

Some studies focused on the contextual and cultural differences in study habits. For example, White British students had significantly better study habits than the Pakistani British although their academic performance

levels were not significantly different (Rana and Kausar, 2011). In a similar study, most Turkish and American students reported preferring deeper and more strategic approaches to learning rather than surface ones (Senemoğlu, 2011). Moreover, students from non-formal system of education were found to have had better study habits than the students of formal system; however, while students of formal system were significantly better on time management, general studying strategies, general setting and motivation, and note taking, students of non-formal system were significantly better on class attendance and participation, exam preparation, and text book reading (Bajwa et al., 2011). Interestingly, students living away from home are found to be spending significantly more time studying alone (Morris, 2012). Finally, it was observed that the urban women distance learners were found to have better study habits than rural women distance learners while no significant differences were observed in overall study habits of demographic characteristics such as course, employment, marital status, and age (George, 2014).

Recent studies conducted upon the study habits of students from different contexts in Turkey have also shed some light on the issue. For example, it is now evident that fourth grade primary school pupils' academic achievement develops with the growth of their study habit skills (Çetin, 2009). Furthermore, study attitudes, self-perceptions of achievement and positive views of their teachers are significant aspects of study strategies for university-level students at a Vocational Educational Faculty for whom study strategy use is not influenced by their views of the school and grade (Erdamar Koç, 2010). From the teacher candidates' perspectives, an increase in study skills of teacher trainees is in parallel with the increase in their academic risk-taking behavior (İlhan et al., 2013).

Learner autonomy

Learner autonomy has long been defined as 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning' (Holec, 1981). In other words, learners must be independent from others' instructions and directing in order to develop autonomy (Benson, 1996). Teachers hold positive attitudes toward the promotion of learner autonomy in language learning as the facilitators, counselors, and valuable resources (Duong and Seepho, 2014). Similarly, student teachers are positive about the implementation of the philosophy of learner autonomy (Balçıkanlı, 2010; Tok, 2011). According to teacher candidates, 'finding their own learning strategies' and 'formulating their own explanations' are among the most appropriate instructional responsibilities for promoting learner autonomy (Tok, 2011). On the other hand, female language instructors and the instructors working in state universities are more willing about giving learners the responsibility about their

own learning experiences than their male colleagues and the ones working in private universities (Büyükyavuz, 2014).

Nevertheless, practices related to promoting learner autonomy in language classrooms are not obstacle-free. There seems to be some discrepancies between teachers' views about learner autonomy and their actual practices (Duong and Seepho, 2014). Likewise, student teachers are concerned about the idea of giving the students the responsibility of deciding on their own learning processes due to time constraints and restrictions stemming from the curriculum (Balçıkanlı, 2010). In fact, both teachers and students are conscious about learner autonomy; however, it is not employed by most teachers because of the burden stemming from the curriculum and physical restraints, and most students lack motivation and adequate training to be autonomous learners (Farooq, 2013). In reality, the content of fixed school classroom teaching as the eloquent setting for the growth of responsibility of students' own learning does not only augment learning, but also provides the teachers with the extra time for possible strategy training (Chuan, 2010). In sum, promoting learner autonomy constitutes the teacher's long standing educational objective (Wang, 2010).

Designing courses to promote learner autonomy among language learners is in the agenda of teachers and researchers bearing in mind the prominence of the phenomenon because as Cotterall (2000: 109) suggested, "learner autonomy should not be seen as a goal only for highly committed students completing optional courses, or for students operating within selected educational or cultural contexts. Rather, it should be seen as an essential goal of all learning". In order to design and run a course to promote learner autonomy, five principles have been suggested: learning goals, the language learning process, tasks, learner strategies, and reflection on learning. In a Turkish context, Yıldırım (2014) introduced a course to promote learner autonomy among Turkish EFL teacher trainees, and investigated the effectiveness of the course on the perceptions of those student teachers related to learner autonomy. The findings revealed that the learner autonomy training resulted in several positive changes in the students' perceptions related to learner autonomy such as making sure they make progress during English lessons, making sure they make progress outside class, stimulating their interests in learning English, identifying their weaknesses in English, making them work harder, deciding how long to spend on each activity, evaluating learning, and evaluating the English course. The study successfully called for a learner autonomy training for EFL learners, especially the learners as future EFL teachers.

Cooperative learning is a virtuous way to promote learner autonomy as cooperative learning has positive influences on both students' willingness and their skill in being more autonomous, boosts self-esteem and self-

confidence, increases motivation, improves learners' learning responsibility, augments self-management abilities, upsurges support for language learners on their quest to transfer their interdependence to independence (Wang, 2010). Also, use of blogs (Lee, 2011), use of CALL (Jones, 2001), and reflective lessons (Miller, 2009) have been suggested for promoting learner autonomy.

Learner autonomy and study habits

Study habits and learner autonomy are the two important notions for a better learning; thus, it is probable that these concepts be in relation with each other, especially for a learner autonomy training to be a prominent factor for students to acquire better study habits.

According to Field (2007), obtaining the know-how is essential to an effective learner autonomy training especially about using learning strategies, transferring content, cognizing the teacher's objectives, reaching a profound language awareness, reflecting on the learning process, and identifying learning styles as the ones to develop in the classroom; and self-valuation, general study skills, and managing learning as the ones to develop outside the classroom. In a sense, gaining these abilities guarantee that learners take part in the language classrooms more productively, benefit from the self-access amenities properly, and nurture more decent study habits (Field, 2007). To this end, certain attempts were made to promote learner autonomy to foster the acquisition of better study habits by learners, especially by the university-level students. For example, Iimuro and Berger (2010) developed a curriculum for a semester-long course engaging in numerous methods in order to enhance the students' autonomous learning skills and English skills over four months and reported that the most of the students showed positive attitudes towards the structure and advanced in English language skills, motivation, and study habits. Journal writing was also found to be a valuable tool to help students organize and assess their self-study as well as a device to help them become more independent to reflect upon their learning experiences, to define their goals, plan their learning, and to choose and apply correct means and operative tactics to reach their goals (Tao, 2007).

As for the role of autonomy training as the means for good study habits for university students, the amalgamation of interesting educational content with learning systems that meet their psychological needs for autonomy is likely to confidently inspire intrinsic motivation and boost empowering and influence their reflection processes positively (Glas and Cárdenas-Claros, 2013). It is also suggested that students be encouraged to become more autonomous by joining study activities that endorse autonomous learning. It is also evident that students' study habits change in the course of such a training program by means of increasing their time of

studying English and resulting in an improvement in their English proficiency levels (Wagner, 2014). In an earlier study, Bailey et al. (2000) had found a correlation between foreign language learning anxiety and study habits of college-level foreign language learners. According to the researchers, high anxious foreign language learners tended to spend their time ineffectively, did not sleep enough to concentrate on their school work, did not arrange their study and break times for an effective work, and were not able to start studying as they wanted to do so.

Although the review of the literature on both the study habits of university students and the learner autonomy training for language learners suggest that both concepts are quite important in language learning and teaching research, no study to date attempted to investigate the mutual relationship between the two concept, namely, the effect of learner autonomy training on the study habits of students. However, study habits are important to the extent that it might mislead the learners while they are studying for a particular subject, the foreign language in this case. Also, promoting learner autonomy among students, as research suggested, would naturally enhance the quality of teaching and success in learning. In an attempt to correlate these two momentous educational notions, the following research questions were structured:

1. What are the study habits of first-year ELT students before and after the learner autonomy training?
2. Does learner autonomy training have a significant effect on the study habits of the students?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The population for this study was 188 (136 female and 52 males) students enrolled in the 'Learner Autonomy' class at Anadolu University English Language Teaching Program in 2013-2014 Spring Semester. However, 66 of them were extracted from the study because of not attending classes regularly and failing (12 students), not taking the first (12 students) and second (27 students) administrations of the survey or both administrations of the survey (15 students). At the end, 122 (94 female and 28 male) students comprised the sample of the study.

The participants were in their first year in the Faculty of Education, who had almost the same educational backgrounds. They were placed into the program by the Turkish Student Placement and Selection Center (ÖSYM) from different geographical regions of the country. Moreover, all were accepted to the program after obtaining a C1 level of English Language proficiency based on the exam given by the School of Foreign languages at Anadolu University at the beginning of the academic year. In their first year, the students are required to take courses to improve their English language skills. To this end, students had taken courses including Oral Communication Skills I, Contextual Grammar I, Listening Comprehension, Academic Reading, and Written Communication in the first semester. In the second semester, they were enrolled in Oral Communication Skills II, Contextual Grammar II, Listening Comprehension and Note Taking, Critical Reading, Academic Writing and Report Writing as well as the Learner Autonomy classes.

The Instrument

A study habits questionnaire (Quinco-Cadosales, 2013) was utilized in order to determine the study habits of the participants both before and after the autonomy training. Although there are some other measures to identify learners' study habits, the present instrument was selected as it served best for the research purposes of this study in reflecting the content of the learner autonomy training. The scale, originally in English, is a 5-point Likert-type scale (from *Not True* to *Absolutely True*) with 55 items in six sub-sections. The sub-sections and some sample items reflecting the study habits are as follows.

Motivation (8 items)

I am willing to do the work I do not enjoy because I see it as important.
I exert effort to find out why I need to do a particular task.

Organizing and planning one's work (10 items)

I make a review schedule for the examinations.
I make lists of things to do.

Working with others and utilizing resources and feedback (8 items)

I share resources with other students.
When I am listening to someone, I try to anticipate what they will say next.

Managing school work stress (8 items)

I get so worried about assignments that they make me feel ill.
I let these concerns about the work get on top of me.

Note-taking and reading (11 items),

My notes indicate the main ideas, rather than merely repeat what has been said.
I have a shorthand technique of my own.

Preparing an assignment/project (10 items)

I see to it that I understand what is really being asked for in the assignment/project.
I review assignments/project before submitting it.

The instrument was translated into Turkish, participants' mother tongue, using the 'back-translation' method in order to avoid any misinterpretations because of the participants' proficiency in English. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the scale exhibited a high levels of reliability for both the first (Cronbach's $\alpha = .882$) and the second ($\alpha = .799$) administration as a research instrument to find out the study habits in this study.

Learner autonomy training

The learning autonomy training was given along with a compulsory course 'İNÖ218 Learner Autonomy' (4 ECTS) in 2013-2014 Spring Semester. The courses were given in eight different classes each having 18 to 27 students by four highly experienced instructors from the department. The course had the following purposes in the form of learning outcomes (Anadolu Info Package, 2014):

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- define the basic concepts and skills of autonomous learning.
- explain the concept of autonomous learning and the features of autonomous learning.
- define note-taking strategies.
- list and defines learning styles and strategies.
- explain learning anxiety and find out the ways to cope with it.
- define motivation and its types.
- use autonomous learning concepts and skills to become an autonomous learner.
- plan his time effectively.
- find out ways to cope with demotivation and high-anxiety and applies them.
- use the appropriate learning styles and strategies to make the learning process easier.
- gain skills of individual and group work.
- plan for individual and group work.
- evaluate the efficiency of individual and group work by questioning, criticizing and comparing.
- make reflection and self-evaluation related to his own learning process by using analytical and critical thinking.
- analyze his own learning skills to change and correct the weak ones and develop comparatively weaker ones.
- realize the effectively used learning skills and adapts them to new learning situations.
- construct his own lifelong learning by realizing his learning strengths and weaknesses.

In order to achieve these outcomes outlined above, a number of themes were presented to the students in a coherent manner within a variety of teaching techniques. In fact, the content of the course was not a one-to-one match with the items in the study habits questionnaire. It rather aimed to promote learner autonomy among university-level students as future teachers. First of all, the concept of learner autonomy was introduced. In this way, students were more aware of the fact that learner autonomy is not the same as self-instruction that students can learn by themselves without a teacher or a formal learning context (Benson, 2001), nor a new teaching methodology or a state gained by the learners. They were taught to be more responsible for their own learning instead. Second, students were given instruction about important skills and strategies that would help them become better language learners. Note-taking skills, as one of the vital study habits, were presented to the students explicitly and via some practice opportunities. As for oral language development tools, the students were given the chance to practice their skills, in form of in-class presentations. For the writing skills development, students were taught the components of a research paper. Although these activities look like parts of a language skill-development training, they were helpful tools to promote learner autonomy among students. Third, students were made to become more aware of the learning process and becoming a better learner. To this end, lectures on learning styles and brain dominance were provided. The working system of memory was also instructed accompanied with a lecture on Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP). Learning strategies with a specific focus on the language learning strategies were also introduced. As mentioned earlier, language learning strategies are not the same with the study habits, but only a part. Fourth, the concept of language learning anxiety was introduced with a special emphasis on the possible negative consequences of a high level of language learning anxiety. Dealing with anxiety is not only a matter of promoting learner autonomy but also among the study habits described in this study; hence, the lecture was of great importance to the learners to see the possible relationship between the two concepts. Fifth, as components of being a responsible learner and as indicators of good study habits, time management, motivation, collaborative and cooperative learning, and reflective learning and self-evaluation were introduced to the students by means of lectures and in-class presentations given by the students

themselves.

In order to study the above-mentioned themes related to learner autonomy, teachers had 3 h contact with the students each week for 12 weeks by lecturing, conducting class discussions, and giving students opportunities for in-class presentations and pair and group works. The assessment and evaluation of the course consisted of a mid-term (40 %) and a final exam (60 %) in the form of paper-and-pencil in-class exam. The main course books used as the bases for the discussions in the classroom were *Essential study skills: The Complete Guide to Success @ University* by Burns and Sinfield (2003) and *The Study Skills Handbook* by Cottrell (1999).

Data collection and analysis procedure

The research instrument was first given to the students at the beginning of the semester (in the 2nd week) during their class hours by their instructors. The survey was given to the participants again at the end of the semester (in the 12th teaching week) again by their instructors during their class hours. Each administration took approximately 10 min. For the purpose of the study, the students were told to write their names or any nicknames on the questionnaire papers; they were also told that it was not about assessing their performance or it would have an effect on their grades in the 'Learner Autonomy' or any other course.

For the analyses of the data, first of all, the total scores for each student in each subsection of the questionnaire for both administrations were calculated. The calculations were made according to a scoring scheme and corresponding descriptions for each score range (Quinco-Cadosales, 2013) by giving points to each answer (*Not True: 2 points, Somewhat True: 4 points, I don't know: 6 points, Mostly True: 8 points, Absolutely true: 10 points*). Second, in order to find out whether there was a significant difference between the study habits of the participants before and after the training, mean scores for each item and each subsection for both administrations were calculated. Following that, paired samples t-tests (two-tailed) were run between each mean score obtained for the subsequent section of the study habits questionnaire.

RESULTS

As for the first research question "*What are the study habits of first-year ELT students' before and after the learner autonomy training?*", the total score for each student in each subsection of the questionnaire for both administrations were calculated. Table 1 presents the results related to students' study habits before and after the training in frequencies and percentages as well as the descriptions of each score range.

First of all, at the beginning of the semester, more than half of the students (54.1 %) reported that they sometimes got down to work but could be distracted. On the other hand, 45.9 % of them did not appear to have many problems in getting down to work and keeping to it before the learner autonomy instruction. When it comes to the end of the semester, this time, majority of them reported that they did not have many problems in getting down to work and keeping to it (68%) as an indicator of motivation. The autonomy training, furthermore, resulted in a decreased number of students in terms of being distracted when they got down to work (29.5 %) while only three of the students totally had hard times for being motivated to study.

Table 1. Score ranges, descriptions, frequencies, and percentages.

| Study habits | Score range | Description | Before training | | After training | |
|--|--------------|---|-----------------|------|----------------|------|
| | | | F | % | F | % |
| Motivation | 55 - 80 | does not appear to have many problems in getting down to work and keeping to it | 56 | 45,9 | 83 | 68,0 |
| | 35 - 50 | sometimes gets down to work but can be distracted | 66 | 54,1 | 36 | 29,5 |
| | 30 and below | experiences problems in getting down to work | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2,5 |
| Organizing and planning work | 70 - 100 | well-organized and plans future work | 72 | 59,0 | 86 | 70,5 |
| | 40 - 65 | not as well-organized as could be | 48 | 39,3 | 36 | 29,5 |
| | 35 and below | has confusing organization | 2 | 1,7 | 0 | 0 |
| Working with others, utilizing resources and feedback | 55 - 85 | makes full use of resources available | 53 | 43,4 | 47 | 38,5 |
| | 35 - 50 | probably collect resources | 69 | 56,6 | 75 | 61,5 |
| | 30 and below | important resources around are ignored | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Managing school work stress | 65 - 80 | has the skills of knowing how to minimize problems and look after oneself | 5 | 4,1 | 7 | 5,7 |
| | 40 - 60 | handles anxieties and concerns moderately well | 85 | 69,7 | 93 | 76,2 |
| | 35 and below | gets overwhelmed with problems | 32 | 26,2 | 22 | 18,1 |
| Note-taking and reading | 75 - 110 | prepares well and read efficiently | 70 | 57,4 | 101 | 82,8 |
| | 45 - 70 | reading and note taking skills are adequate | 52 | 42,6 | 21 | 17,2 |
| | 40 and below | notes are likely to be of little use | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Preparing an assignment/project | 70 - 100 | demonstrates ability to prepare an assignment/project | 90 | 73,7 | 101 | 82,8 |
| | 40 - 65 | needs to demonstrate some skills | 31 | 25,4 | 21 | 17,2 |
| | 35 and below | poor ability to deal with an assignment/project | 1 | 0,9 | 0 | 0 |

F= Frequency; %= Percentage.

Second, majority of the students reported that they had the skills in organizing and planning work both at the beginning (59%) and at the end (70.5 %) of the semester. On the other hand, some mentioned that they were not as well-organized as they could be both before (39.3 %) and after (29.5 %) the learner autonomy training. Only two students had confusing organization at the beginning of the semester, but their status changed to a more organized stage at the end of the semester. Therefore, a slight change was observed in the study habits of the students' study skills related to organizing and planning their school work.

Third, as for the study habits related to students' working with others, utilizing resources and feedback, both before and after the training, about half of the participants indicated that they were able to make full use of resources available (43.4

and 38.5% respectively). However, majority of them were found to be probably collecting resources but needed to ask someone about how to use the resources more effectively not only at the beginning of the semester but also after taking a learner autonomy training (56.6 and 61.5 % respectively). There were no students in both times who ignored the important resources around.

Fourth, most of the students (69.7%) indicated that they were able to handle anxieties and concerns related to school work moderately well at the beginning of the semester, and some of them (26.2%) were really overwhelmed with problems. On the other hand, only five of them (4.1%) had the skills of knowing how to minimize problems and look after themselves. At the end of the semester, while the percentage of students who were able to handle anxieties and concerns

related to school work moderately well and who had the skills of knowing how to minimize problems and look after themselves increased (76.2 and 5.7% respectively), the number of students who was really overwhelmed with anxieties and concerns related to school work from 22 students to 32 students.

Fifth, almost half of the students reported preparing well and reading efficiently for their school work (57.4%) while the other half had adequate reading and note taking skills (32.6%) at the beginning of the semester. After the training, on the other hand, most of them were able to prepare well and read efficiently for their school work (82.8%) while some of the students' reading and note taking skills remained at an adequate level (17.2). There were no students whose notes were likely to be of little use either before or after

Table 2. Comparison of mean scores related to study habits before and after training.

| Study habits | Before training | | After training | | df | t | Sig. |
|--|-----------------|------|----------------|------|-----|-------|-------|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | | |
| Motivation | 3,43 | 0,52 | 3,51 | 0,54 | 121 | -1,52 | .131 |
| Organizing and planning one's work | 3,59 | 0,71 | 3,72 | 0,60 | | -1,86 | .066 |
| Working with others and utilizing resources and feedback | 3,21 | 0,52 | 3,25 | 0,45 | | -0,83 | .410 |
| Managing school work stress | 2,58 | 0,80 | 2,35 | 0,81 | | 2,99 | .003* |
| Note-taking and reading | 3,52 | 0,56 | 3,76 | 0,47 | | -4,50 | .000* |
| Preparing an assignment/project | 3,71 | 0,61 | 3,84 | 0,48 | | -2,16 | .003* |

*Significant at .05 level.

the learner autonomy training.

Sixth, the majority of students (73.7%) were found to be able to prepare their assignments and/or projects well while some needed to demonstrate some skills (25.4%) at the beginning of the semester. Only one student was not totally doing well. After the training, on the other hand, most of them were found to be able to prepare their assignments and/or projects well (82.8 %) while only some of them needed to demonstrate some skills (17.2 %). Also, there were no students with inability to prepare assignments and/or projects (Table 2).

Finally, as an answer to the second research question "Does learner autonomy training have a significant effect on the study habits of the students?", a paired samples t-test was run for each study habit in the questionnaire (Table 2).

Although the mean scores for all study skills were different for the first and second implementation of the questionnaire, the differences were significant for three study skills: managing school work stress [$t= 2,99$, $p<0.05$], note-taking and reading [$t= -4,50$, $p<0.05$], and preparing an assignment/project [$t= 2,16$, $p<0.05$]. In other words, students were more able to deal with school work stress; they developed their note-taking and reading skills; and they were better at preparing an assignment/project after they were trained about learner autonomy.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study showed that first-year EFL teacher trainees had relatively good study habits related to motivation, organizing and planning their work, working with others and utilizing resources and feedback, note-taking and reading, and preparing an assignment/project at the beginning of the semester. However, they were found to be experiencing problems related to managing their stress about school work before the learner autonomy training.

The study habits of the students, in a general understanding, changed to a positive level in all aspects of their study habits. Although the differences between the scores were not significant for some of the study habits

(i.e. motivation, organizing and planning their work, working with others and utilizing resources and feedback), the overall scores suggest that there was a positive change, especially when some individual students' scores are considered. For example, before the training, most of the students could start the work at hand but are distracted by other factors while studying, which could result in a deficiency of concentration in studying (Quinco-Cadosales, 2013). However, after the training, most of them were able to get down to work and keeping to it, which means that they can endure their willingness in studying and molded the study habit (Quinco-Cadosales, 2013). Similarly, such courses are good opportunities for students to boost their level of motivation as Glas and Cárdenas-Claros (2013) pointed out when they offered a course related to cultural diversity. Organization and planning the school work, on the other hand, can be seen as the most successfully used study habit of the students although there are and there will always be some students who are likely to do things at the last minute or not completing their work at all. For sure, there is no single tactic to obliterate all these bad habits, including a learner autonomy training. These findings are in line with the previous work that established no link between students' motivation and their academic achievement (Quinco-Cadosales, 2013). Students in this study mostly did not ignore the resources available to them, worked well with others around them, and benefited from the feedback they obtained they were provided with. Neither the autonomy training nor the other possible training and self-development opportunities increased their study habits related to these points. Indeed, the students probably had the adequate study habits before the training time already. Another interpretation could focus on the possible ineffectiveness of the training on motivation, on planning and organizing work, and on cooperative/reflective learning and self-instruction. These interpretations agree with Yıldırım's (2014) work, which showed that learner autonomy training did not yield a significant change in the perceptions of students about their abilities to decide on the time to spend on activities and to choose their learning objectives outside the class. After the learner autonomy training, the students exhibited

significantly better habits related to note-taking and reading and preparing an assignment/project. One interpretation of this finding is that these students were already taking 'Listening Comprehension and Note Taking' and 'Academic Writing' courses which already aim to develop students' listening and note-taking skills and writing skills respectively. Most of the students' reading and note taking skills are adequate and they do not waste their time reading irrelevant materials; however, this can still be improved to reach the highest levels of reading and note-taking abilities. Likewise, most of the students demonstrate the ability to prepare an assignment or project, and few need to demonstrate some skills. In fact, if these students are provided with the ample support, these students could still progress to be able to demonstrate their full ability. It is well-known from the literature that learner autonomy training results in a number of constructive modifications in the students' views related to learner autonomy such as making sure they make progress during English lessons, making sure they make progress outside class, stimulating their interests in learning English, identifying their weaknesses in English, making them work harder, deciding how long to spend on each activity, evaluating learning, and evaluating the English course (Yıldırım, 2014). Similarly, foreign language learners of English had found self-study as an effective and useful as most students admitted that their English levels were improved with self-study opportunities. Hence, it is not surprising that the university students in this study benefited a lot from the techniques and methods described in the Learner Autonomy lessons, especially to develop their note-taking and reading comprehension skills.

Most students in this study were probably accustomed to a teacher-centered instruction in their previous educational lives in which they did not get a lot of feedback on their written or oral production of the language just like their peers in Japan (Taferner, 2009). When it comes to the university-level ELT program, expectations are higher, especially in terms of producing academic-level written texts and speaking in front of a class full people as teacher trainees. Furthermore, pre-service teachers unfortunately do not enter teacher education programs with a high level of reading proficiency, nor with positive attitudes toward reading and reading-related habits (Benevides and Peterson, 2010). When the case in Turkey is considered, it is no surprise that they mostly possess exam-focused study habits that are shaped by the multiple-choice type of tests before they come into the program. Therefore, it is not unexpected that their study habits are not in the desired level at the beginning of their education as teacher candidates. Training as the one in this study, then, was a great opportunity for them to develop correct habits to deal with their school work. The changes in the study habits can also be accredited to the point that university students might not know the correct studying techniques, and those who are able to

study cannot take on operational study techniques. According to Osa-Edoh and Alutu (2012), lack of proper study habits is one of the chief reasons of dwindling educational standards.

As the most striking finding of this inquiry, students were more able to deal with their school work stress after they got the learner autonomy training. These findings corroborate with the case of Philippian university students who tended to get overwhelmed with their stress which affected their performance in a negative way as a student, and resulted in inefficiency as university students (Quinco-Cadosales, 2013). The finding is also associated with the concept of language learning anxiety that is probably experienced by many language learners from diverse learning contexts and diverse proficiency levels. Language learning anxiety is mostly considered as an individual notion that reveals itself in different ways. The literature has also suggested that not only university students but also pre-service (Akinsola, 2014; Hart, 1987; Merç, 2010; Rieg et al., 2007) and in-service (Borg, 1990; Chaplain, 1995; Horwitz, 1996; Jepson and Forrest, 2006; Tytherleigh et al., 2005) EFL teachers suffer from the anxiety and stress caused by the inability to manage school work. It is also evident that anxiety is caused by weak self-expression (Caldwell-Harris and Ayçiçeği-Dinn, 2009) or being exposed to only classroom-based education (Dewaele et al., 2008). One of the outcomes of the 'Learning Autonomy' course in this study is as follows: "Students will be able explain learning anxiety and find out the ways to cope with it". The findings showed that the learner autonomy training was highly successful to help university students identify and handle the different types of anxieties they are likely to experience, in other words, it helps students to gain good study habits related to managing their stress related to school work.

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings of this study put forward some implications for language teaching institutions and teacher education programs. First of all, study habits training is not only the responsibility of the higher education programs. Indeed, by executing study skills curricula aiming foreign language learning in secondary schools and even earlier, students could improve the necessary skills and strategies that will promote them in their foreign language classes all through their university lives (Bailey and Onwuegbuzie, 2002). Another implication is that students should be given the adequate training at the university level, especially when the students are the future teacher as study approaches of teacher candidates and self-perceptions of those teacher candidates as well as their lecturers should rather be positive in order to assist them to utilize more effective study skills (Erdamar Koç, 2010). Furthermore, training students to develop their language

skills and strategies is at utmost importance, which is the core of many curricula. However, although most programs include these strategy training components to nurture learner autonomy, training in communication strategies is critically essential (Field, 2007). Also, the goal of higher education is to coach students and coaching students about the ways to learn more effectively should be among the principal goals of the higher education programs. Therefore, bearing in mind the findings of both this study and other studies, a study skills course, talk, or conference that focuses on note taking, outlining, study techniques, test taking, organization skills, time management, and listening and reading comprehension skills is a brilliant idea not only to augment and maintain student achievement but also to assist the instructors and the program itself (Simmons, 2006).

One important implication drawn from this study is the need for designing learner autonomy courses or seminars for university students, especially for the teacher trainees. While designing these courses, it is recommended that institutions pay attention to inserting elements that help university students discover or improve good study habits. Tasks and activities are needed to be inserted to motivate students to study, organize and plan their school work, push them to work with others and utilize resources and feedback, take notes and read effectively, and to be better able to prepare their assignments. The study clearly indicated that the learner autonomy training consisting of elements related to coping with learning anxiety results in students who are better able to deal with school work stress. Therefore, this component must not be skipped by the program designers. Similarly, lectures and presentations about note-taking and writing research papers are not only effective in making students more responsible for their learning, but also valuable tools to make students gain good study habits related to these aspects. Hence, these should be the inevitable components of similar programs.

On the other hand, there are some considerations that future teachers or curriculum planners should bear in mind. The contents of a similar course should pay more attention to certain themes if they want their students to develop good study habits in terms of motivation, planning and organizing their work, and working with others and utilizing feedback.

One suggestion can be about the implementation of the themes in the courses. Lectures on these aspects were probably not sufficient to provide students with a permanent tradition about studying effectively. Instead, they should be given in such a way that the students must be able to elicit and investigate their own tactics and practices on these themes. This would, in turn, probably result in better study habits for students' future experiences as learners.

It is obvious that individuals do not turn into good language learners in a day, yet it is also obvious that

teachers can nurture good language learners who are capable of discovering and operating the existing resources and continue to expand their language skills (Ilmuro and Berger, 2009). The only thing here is a slight push from the teacher together with the tenacious determination of the learner; and this push might be maintained through a learner autonomy training similar to the one described in this study. Finally, it might be worthy to conclude with the following precious words:

It has been argued that too much thinking, research, and practice views learner autonomy in a very instruction-centred way, with a focus on equipping the learner to function better in the classroom or learning centre. We need to change our perspective. True learner empowerment consists of the freedom to learn outside the teaching context and the ability to continue learning after instruction has finished. The most effective teacher is one who provides for her/his own redundancy. (Field, 2007: 37).

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