

Learner Autonomy: How Teacher Trainers Understand and Apply?

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Abstract

In last decades, being autonomous language learners has been the spotlight of researchers and accepted as crucial and worth to think carefully about it's applications in teacher training institutions. As a consequence, the Ministry of Education in Turkey always emphasises the learner autonomy in their language curriculums and official documents related to language learning. Even in European context, especially in CEFR, it is also stressed that to learn a language, an individual should be autonomous and monitor his own language learning process. Autonomous learning has been defined by Holec (1981, p.3) as "to determine objectives, to define the contents and progressions, to select methods and techniques to be used, to monitor the procedures of acquisition and to evaluate what has been acquired". One of the results taken into account is being autonomous learner while learning a language really helps and speeds up learning process. In this context, the main question of the study is "What are the views of academics working in an English Language Teaching (ELT) department about 'learner autonomy' and how they implement it in their classes?". This study was designed as a basic qualitative research. The study group was consisted of six teacher trainers of ELT department of a state university in Turkey. Results indicate that teacher trainers know the importance of autonomy, value it and try to implement and foster it. They also thought that they are supporting students to become autonomous and to some extent they are successful in doing so in spite of difficulties.

Keywords: learner autonomy, teacher training, basic qualitative research, Elt, language learning.

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Introduction

In last decades, being autonomous language learners has been the spotlight of researchers and accepted as crucial and worth to think carefully and precisely about its application in teacher training institutions. As a consequence, the Ministry of Education in Turkey always emphasises the learner autonomy in their language curriculums and official documents related to language learning. Actually even in European context, especially in Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR) it was also stressed that to learn a language, an individual should be autonomous and monitor his/her own language learning process. Autonomous learning has been defined by Holec (1981, p.3) as “to determine objectives, to define the contents and progressions, to select methods and techniques to be used, to monitor the procedures of acquisition and to evaluate what has been acquired”. One of the results taken into account is being autonomous learner while learning a language really helps and speeds up learning process.

Over the last two decades ‘learner autonomy’ has become a 'buzz-word' within the context of language learning (Little, 1991; p. 2). Learner autonomy is currently one of the most widely discussed concepts in second language pedagogy and a common goal of second language curricula (Little, 2010). The concept of learner autonomy was first introduced into the ongoing debate about L2 learning and teaching by Henri Holec in a report published by the Council of Europe in 1979 (Holec, 1981). According to Holec, autonomous learners are capable of setting their own learning objectives, defining the “contents and progressions” of learning, “selecting methods and techniques to be used”, monitoring the learning process, and evaluating learning outcomes (1981: 3). The ability to take charge of one’s learning in this way it is “not inborn but must be acquired either by “natural” means or (as most often happens) by formal learning, i.e. in a systematic, deliberate way” (ibid.). Little (2009) defines learner autonomy as “in formal educational contexts autonomous language learners are able to take charge of their own learning”.

Also in Little (1995; p.4), learner autonomy has been defined as a “capacity for active, independent learning and learners accepting responsibility for their learning and sharing in the decisions and initiatives that give shape and direction to the learning process”. Aoki (2002) defines learner autonomy as “a capacity to take control of one’s own learning in the service of one’s perceived needs and aspirations”. Aoki (2002; p.154) also express that “autonomy only develops through practice which leads to a recognition of the students as legitimate members of decision-making body concerning their learning”. Hence, the primary task of in-service and pre-service teacher education programs should be to create conditions for present and prospective teachers to need to move away from a method-based pedagogy to a post method acquire the necessary knowledge, skill, authority, and autonomy to construct their own personal pedagogic knowledge. Thus, there is an imperative pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). The relationship between post-method era and learner autonomy is really so obvious. In a post method era, language teachers are expected to be capable of choosing and combining and reshaping the methods or techniques they would like to use in accordance with their own situation and context. To this end, teachers needs to be autonomous, as well. Here is the value of being an autonomous teacher can be seen. Nowadays, as in many curricula in various countries, language curriculum in Turkey also emphasizes the importance of autonomous learners. In

curriculum especially with the reference to the CEFR and its applications such as language portfolio, teachers are expected to implement portfolios as an assessment tool and design their courses in accordance with the principles of CEFR. In other words, teachers should be aware of value of being an autonomous learner and fostering learner autonomy in their classes. As an education system, namely in language teaching if we aim to train autonomous learner, our language teachers should also be autonomous and have flexibility while teaching the target language. So, “learner autonomy depends on teacher autonomy” (Little, 1995). Teachers cannot be expected to foster the growth of autonomy in their learners if they do not themselves know what it is to be an autonomous learner (Little, 1995). Little (1995) also stresses that “we must provide trainee teachers with the skills to develop autonomy in the learners who will be given into their charge, but we must also give them a first-hand experience of learner autonomy in their training” as a consequence, “language teachers are more likely to succeed in promoting learner autonomy if their own education has encouraged them to be autonomous”. As Little points out, we need to give experience of being an autonomous learner to our prospective teachers while they are learning how to teach it. Here we can say that in teacher training institutions, namely in ELT departments, we need to create a place for learner autonomy and give our prospective teachers a chance to see and taste of learner autonomy while they are still students before being practitioner teachers. Whatever orientation one pursues, what should be remembered is that practicing and prospective teachers need a framework that can enable them to develop the knowledge, skill, attitude, and autonomy necessary to devise for themselves a systematic, coherent, and relevant personal theory of practice that is informed by the parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility. While the purpose of such a framework is to help teachers become autonomous decision-makers, it should, without denying the value of individual autonomy, provide adequate conceptual underpinnings based on current theoretical, empirical, and experiential insights so that their teaching act may come about in a principled fashion. (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). However, Little (1991, cited in Aoki, 2002) says that “the learner who displays a high degree of autonomy in one area may be non-autonomous in another”. So, as teacher trainers, we need to develop a holistic way to train prospective teachers who can be autonomous in many areas and show at least some degree of it in any other areas about their teaching characteristics.

Ellis and Sinclair (1989) outline the teachers can play an instrumental role in learner training by:

- Negotiating with learners about course content and methodology, if appropriate
- Sharing with learners, in a way that is accessible to them, the kind of information about language and language learning that can teachers have but that is not always passed on to learners
- Encouraging discussion in the classroom about language and language learning.
- Helping learners become aware of the wide range of alternative strategies available to them for language learning,
- Allowing learners to form their own views about language learning, and respecting their points of view
- Counselling and giving guidance to individual learners when possible.

Dörnyei (2006) also lists some tips what teachers can do to promote learner autonomy in classes:

- Increased learner involvement in organising the learning process.

- Allow learners choices
- Give students positions of genuine authority
- Encourage student contributions and peer teaching
- Encourage project work
- When appropriate, allow learners to use self-assessment procedures.

Before starting on this process of negotiation, the teacher should decide on the areas in which she will seek to promote learner autonomy. She must decide, in other words, whether and to what extent it is possible for the learners to determine their own learning objectives, select their own learning materials and contribute to the assessment of their learning progress. In this she will be guided by such factors as the institutional framework within which she is working, and the age, educational background and target language competence of her learners. It is important to emphasize that even aims and learning targets prescribed by a government department can, by process of negotiation, become the personal aims and learning targets of a group of learners; and that by the same token, highly structured learning materials can be exploited in ways calculated to develop learner autonomy (Little, 1995). Littlewood (1999, p.71) interprets that taking responsibility involves learners in taking ownership (partial or total) of many processes which have traditionally belonged to the teacher, such as deciding on learning objectives, selecting learning methods and evaluating progress. If teacher trainers cannot create an atmosphere and show how learner autonomy in classes be assured and supported, teacher candidates would be no experience of learner autonomy and most probably they will not be able to create such environments in their own classes when they are appointed as English teachers in primary, secondary or high schools throughout the country. The main assumption of this present study is that an individual should have a first-hand experience and should have seen what a learner autonomy is, and how it is achieved to become a teacher who can foster and provide a lesson situation which students have somewhat autonomy and can take their own decisions about learning. Students are expected to have autonomy while learning a language so, as teacher trainers, we should train our prospective teachers in such a way and as a result they would be teachers who can train autonomous learners in their classes, as well. If teacher trainers aim to create an autonomy-supportive environment in classes, before designing such an environment, teacher trainers firstly need to know what autonomy is, how autonomy can be fostered, what kind of behaviours and activities support or damage students' autonomy in language learning classrooms. Autonomy and learner autonomy has been thoroughly discussed in the literature but still there isn't many studies related to learner autonomy in ELT teacher training programmes, institutions and what teacher trainers understand from it and how they are fostering, creating and supporting such an environment aiming that their students to become autonomous learners in the Turkish higher education context. So, in that sense, the main question to be addressed in this study is;

What are the views of academics working in an English Language Teaching (ELT) department about 'learner autonomy' and how they implement it in their classes?

English Language Teaching Training in Turkey

All teachers in Turkey obtain a university degree. Primary and secondary school teachers take a 4-year course of study in subjects such as English, physics and so on. Prospective teachers do not take content courses only, but take additional courses in

pedagogy and educational psychology. Practice teaching in a school is a nationally required course conducted collaboratively by mentors in the university and the school. Currently, despite the fact that some people from other professions can get a teaching certificate, the responsibility for preparing qualified and competent teachers rests primarily with teacher education programmes in universities (Haznedar, 2012, p.52).

Method

This study was designed as a basic qualitative research. The intent of basic qualitative research is to understand the meaning individuals have attached to a certain phenomenon they have experienced. Merriam states that researchers conducting basic qualitative research would be primarily interested in “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). Researchers conducting basic qualitative research typically collect data through analysis of documents, observations, and interviews. Data analysis then occurs with data being organized according to themes, or reoccurring patterns (Merriam, 2009).

Participants

Six teacher trainers teaching in ELT department of a state university in Turkey were the study group of the study (see Table 1.). Participants were coded as T1, T2, and so on and their quotations were given with these codes in the findings.

Table 1. Participants

Code	Gender	Academic Status
T1 (T1 means teacher trainer one, she is women and has PhD).	Female	PhD
T2	Male	PhD
T3	Male	PhD
T4	Male	PhD
T5	Female	PhD Candidate
T6	Male	PhD Candidate

Data collection tools

A semi-structured interview form (see Appendix-1) consisted of nine questions was designed and shared with one colleague who has PhD. With colleague’s comments, form was redesigned and used in interviews. Also, an observation form was designed by the researcher.

Data collection process

Each interview took approximately 30 minutes. Interviews were conducted in each lecturers’ own offices. Observations for each lecturer were at least three class hours, each class hour took nearly 45 minutes. But for one of the lecturers, six class hours of observation and for one another lecturer’s course four class hour of observation were done. And in total 22 class-hours observations were done for seven different courses given by six lecturers. Observation notes were taken by the researcher himself. Generally, while observing the lecture those points were taken into account; how

lecture starts, what kind of activities or how lecturer use and arrange the procedure, whether or not the lecturer creates a place for autonomy and if so how do this, does lecturer really share the power or not?, teacher and students' talking time during lecture.

Data analysis

Content analysis was applied to data collected through interviews and observations with the help of QSR-NVivo 10 programme. Eight themes and 17 codes have been formed as a result of the analysis.

Findings

Themes and codes under themes emerged in the analysis are presented in this section according to interview and observation data (see Table 2.).

Table 2. Themes and codes

Definition	Procedure	Role	Learner	Teacher	Advantages	Difficulties	Facilities
<i>Defining the concept</i>	<i>Application</i>	<i>Teacher role</i>	<i>Learner characteristics</i>	<i>Teacher characteristics</i>	<i>Competition to teach in ELT department</i>	<i>Educational</i>	
	<i>Evaluation</i>		<i>Learner reactions</i>	<i>Teacher own experiences</i>	<i>Current situation</i>	<i>Cultural</i>	
	<i>Situation in other cycles</i>			<i>Teacher expectation from students</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Family</i>	
						<i>Institutional</i>	

1. Definition

The first theme is definition.

1.1. Defining the concept

Under this code teacher trainers gave their own definition and how they see autonomy and give clues of understanding and applying it in their own context. (see Table 3.)

Table 3. Defining the concept

Being an autonomous learner is very similar to literature for personal enrichment approach
Autonomous learner knows their capacity. If you are an autonomous learner you are honest with yourself. You ask yourself what do I know what I want to know
Well, to be autonomous you have to take a lot of responsibility, self-learning is a huge responsibility and it is not something that everyone would like to do. (T5, interview)

<i>learner autonomy is letting students take their own responsibilities for learning (T1, interview)</i>
<i>learner autonomy as name suggests deal with the learners' own choice of learning and as the way how the students take learning actually I mean it is total different from the classical perception of learning. That leads to students to learn on their own the basic principle of learner autonomy is to make to students aware of what they are going to learn and what they want to learn and how they can do it (T6, interview)</i>
<i>learner autonomy is about learners' freedom, learners' willingness in doing on their own, learner autonomy without the teachers pressure in then students carry on their studies basically that's what I understand from learner autonomy. I mean learner autonomy that not something that you achieve in a minute, it is a kind of process (T3, interview)</i>
<i>as an autonomous learner they are self-directed they make decisions on their own to choose what to do and how to do what to read what to listen to. It involves decision making (T4, interview)</i>
<i>the learner will have three qualifications first freedom to choose what to learn when to learn how to learn they have got this freedom they are going to be independent learners the most important thing in autonomous learning is you take charge of your own responsibility (T2, interview)</i>

2. Procedure

The second theme is procedure.

2.1. Application

Under this code teacher trainers extracts show that they are trying to apply autonomy and they explain how they are trying to implement it. They also mentioned what kind of techniques they are using in class to foster autonomy. (see Table 4.)

Table 4. Application

<i>In the beginning of the year we give them syllabi we tell them exactly what we are expecting we make them by books there are chapters in the course they have to prepare presentations, autonomous learner will look at the chapter even if he or she is not presenting Group work, presentations because unfortunately listening class is limited they can listen they adapt maybe I can ask them to create materials. And share it with other learners. Ask them what they like to do in their free time Even the second the acquisition class because you learn how you learn languages when you are doing this when I am doing this I give examples of myself and I ask my students to give examples from their own learning, their siblings, their environment. (T5, interview)</i>
<i>we should let them discover things we should let them present things, we should let them discuss things in class I let them interact with each other, we start a discussion we have a certain topic of the day whatever the topic is they have to prepare at least one question at the end of each PowerPoint slide, they first present some theories but at the end they pose some questions to their friends</i>

I expect them not to accept everything in the book but to you know approach things critically. Are they all fine in turkey do you think we should accept them you know all together localizing knowledge how we can localise that knowledge could be another name for the things we're doing in class and preparing questions in my group designs I ask them to work with their close friends I don't design the group members myself I let them choose (T1,interview)

I usually ask questions so how do they perceive language, English as language and then how to improve their English how to improve their language skills. And then I can give some more examples and how they can do it and of course assignments are practical in that situation because you know more or less we are all test oriented I give assignments from the internet sources which we can follow in to see how they are good at it because these students are coming from multiple choice test and they are good at some grammatical points and some points those assignments and ... should also be appropriate for their levels so it should be carefully decided I guess and I think project work is also another point I think it is also you know a point to take into consideration. (T6,interview)

there are a lot of activities that can foster learner autonomy reflective activities, reflection on their own learning. Maybe but basically I mean the project work group work, pair work project work field work the rest upon the learner or the learners themselves they search for information and they gather information they present information with others. it is what can we say not only application but also of course synthesis analyse and then you know in the end also you know for example as part of the school practice students reflect on their own learning They write weekly reports and then they come and share their views with other classmates and with me as well I think you know the idea is here to give them an idea of who they are how they teach how the students learn and then you know critically review on this kind of experience in my writing courses I used to teach writing at prep level and themselves opened up of their own blogs, students has the blog and the so it is a real autonomous leaning setting up their own blogs and then afterwards they uploaded all their materials to the blogs. (T3,interview)

they can be guided to read something on their own out of the class they can join a discussion on it they can make a summary of it we can give them topics alright they can write about it on their own again out of the class they can come back to the class they can have a little discussion on it which will be done orally ok. They can share opinions they can get the support of the technology in the class, within the class, so technology or smart phones can be incorporate into classroom use Give them an assignment today that was a creative writing and I just gave a beginning of the story I expect them to create an imaginary story about that person. They are going to discuss their own stories with their friends Inside the class we focus on PowerPoint presentation, we discuss in class we talk about it prepared by me I am sharing it they can also obtain so they have to study on their own as well. through activities, through assignments, through tasks, ok in class and out of the class, so that they can have a better awareness about the fact that they can do something independently on their own without any dependence on the teachers on their instructor. We provide extracurricular material (T4, interview)

I teach Approaches and methods in language teaching I have to you know help to students encounter those ideas hopefully learn hopefully digest some of the

information
 So, I cannot change the topic, it is fixed then in that case where is the place of autonomy
 I say okay each week one group will present one of the methods and then what I tell my students you know freedom to choose, you can choose your friends to work with as a team as a group work, so they decide first they try to understand syllabus
 I give them a week I say these are the contents go to YouTube go to google read about them check them if you believe that you enjoy it choose them an ok also decide your group members so they have a week to think to plan and then the following week decide who is going to, which group and which method they are going to study or present
 I never tell them you are going to be the first person, second person they sit together, they decide who is going to present what they decide about the content they divide, but what I do control is that before they present they bring it to me and I check the content, especially the outline the main points if everything is alright no problem. It is a kind of last check before the presentation.
 from time to time I stand up I asked I pose questions but I padlock from the list so make them responsible. You see we have to force the responsibility
 when we start another week, a new topic, we do the revision again and the students have to go home reread outlines
 I encourage them to watch some people for example some interviews with Krashen Chomsky, Gardner so they can see, watch the interviews from YouTube, at the end of each method, we always discuss where can we use or what can we take from this method to Turkish context like kindergarten, primary, secondary school, university prep, ELT department etc. so as a pair and group work they discuss and then present it in the classroom
 I encourage them to read journals and write review and what do them to and also what I ask them to do write, put their reviews on the Moodle ,
 we encourage students to watch anything they like and do some presentations regarding that in the classroom or least introduce
 the syllabus is on the Moodle throughout the semester (T2, interview)

2.2. Evaluation

From the point of assessment, autonomy is also related and connected to the evaluation. Teacher trainers explain how they design their assessment procedures to help learners become autonomous. (see Table 5.)

Table 5. Evaluation

<i>because of the system, testing system the students are very used to being spoon fed Being spoon fed, they are not autonomous learners I realised that for every year of study. First year students last year students(T5, interview)</i>
<i>I give them grades for their in class performance, attendance, participation 50 % of their mid-term comes from their actual presentations and participation into classroom discussions (T1, interview)</i>
<i>that blog is their assessment, as portfolio as well ok, yes as part of assessment so you can make use of that project work kind of things everything that they do we don't have to test them (T3, interview)</i>
<i>Their portfolio will be part of their part of the assessment procedure They will be monitoring their progress and they will be assessing their self-</i>

<p><i>evaluation as well. so phonemic transcription is a kind of an assignment done by distance individually on their own and it is also part of assessment (T4, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>they may say well I have no idea all the time but also I give them marks because of their participation another hint or clue so that they will become autonomous is that I believe in liberal market which means in liberal market if you produce something you should earn money at the end of the day so that's the same in autonomy at the end of the day you do a lot of homework reading project etc. if they are assessed as marks, (T2, interview)</i></p>

2.3. Situation in other cycles

Teacher trainers also mentioned the situation in other education cycles in terms of autonomy. Mainly, they stress that autonomy should be started in primary schools and should be supported throughout the other cycles which students go through. However, they are not so positive about the current situation of autonomy in primary, secondary and high schools. (see Table 6.)

Table 6. Situation in other cycles

<p><i>if the same teacher can control instruct the class in years he or she can easily design activities that will prompt learner autonomy (T1, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>at the present situation it seems that it is not that easy to implement learner autonomy in Turkish high schools it should start at the primary school level and all teachers working in primary schools and high schools should be hoped should be guided should be trained in service training (T4, interview)</i></p>

3. Role

The third theme is role.

3.1. Teacher role

Teacher trainers also aware that teacher role is so important and effective while implementing autonomy. They have clear ideas how they behave and what a teacher should do to promote it. (see Table 7.)

Table 7. Teacher role

<p><i>although I am there I do not interrupt and I try to stop myself sometimes sharing responsibility not the whole control of the teacher teachers must be also ready to share power with students (T1, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>the only thing to me the teacher can do is that is to release students to aware themselves and can raise their awareness convincing them, persuading them to do so In that sense, the only thing you can do to me to make them more excited and motivated to the class and to let them know their weaknesses and strengths so that they can train and educate themselves (T6, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>without teacher intervention teacher is only the guide and the source there, facilitator Encourage them, and then make them believe in themselves (T3, interview)</i></p>

*I am the facilitator, guide, counsellor, so that is my role
I push them to be autonomous (T2, interview)*

4. Learner

The fourth theme is learner.

4.1. Learner characteristics

Teacher trainers believe that learner characteristics is also important while fostering autonomy and it also has impact on the success of promoting autonomy. (see Table 8.)

Table 8. Learner characteristics

They are not just passive learners when they learn to approach things critically they will start criticise you as well (T1, interview)
students' perceptions and view of learning is very important, students should be eager to do so
If they don't want to learn, if they don't want to study, but they want to pass I know when they want to, they can do it (T6, interview)

4.2. Learner reactions

They also mentioned what kind of reactions they got throughout the years on what they are doing in class and outside the class. They gave some examples of learner reactions they have received. (see Table 9.)

Table 9. Learner reactions

I receive positive reactions from learners as we liked doing presentations, we liked acting like teachers in class kind of (T1, interview)
first they resist they say this is too much
they criticised they just try to compare me with another instructor (T4, interview)
I also give them questionnaire at the end of each semester, they always complain that there were really some irresponsible people in the teams groups that they cannot you know work
when I read their feedback there are cases that they really lose their friendship because of that and they said I got to know that person thanks to this project and he/she is not my friend anymore they say (T2, interview)

5. Teacher

The fifth theme is teacher.

5.1. Teacher characteristics

They also stress that teacher characteristics might also affect autonomy and they are aware that firstly teacher should be open to be criticised and their style, techniques and method should be open to be questioned and they should believe and accept that they are not the only source of knowledge. (see Table 10.)

Table 10. Teacher characteristics

Our students usually come and ask any questions any time whenever they wish I am an autonomous learner in order to continue teaching I have to learn constantly
I am not doing enough for my students for them to be autonomous. I am impatient

<p><i>maybe what I should do is make them do more pair work, more group work more research</i></p> <p><i>I realise that I am not autonomous even buying a T-shirt I have to ask someone I don't have any opinion. And all of a sudden I realised that I really don't have a personality (T5, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>it is modern teachers who are ready to be criticised or who are ready to learn from students (T1, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>if you become imaginative with yourself and then if you believe in it in the students you know let's say students potential in achieving the task on their own yes they can (T3, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>again my slogan is when you teach English, teach English from the books is over it belongs to before 2000, book era is over what they can do, they can use books to introduce stories, novels that the students may be interested</i></p> <p><i>I hope all teachers or future teachers prospective teachers will be brought up with this awareness that especially in this century we need autonomous learners in order to have life-long learning. Otherwise the other system creates dependent people, not independent people (T2, interview)</i></p>

5.2. Teacher own experiences

Teacher trainers also shared their own experiences they have with autonomy from their own academic and social life. (see Table 11.)

Table 11. Teacher own experiences

<p><i>And to tell you the truth do I feel myself too late at this age, yes I do, at age 20, at age 18, it is not impossible but difficult (T5, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>that is the main point that I want to achieve and I have been here in from you know my newly graduates, newly appointed teachers and they say that they try to apply it is hard but they are trying</i></p> <p><i>most of them try and they see the rewards as well, that's what I feel is ok I mean they are achieving, I achieve, what I achieve and then also they are also transferring whatever they learned here in real classes even in the hardest situation even in the eastern part of turkey (T3, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>even in the family we have to give options to pupils to have or to feel this autonomy not just learner but the autonomy you can give simple responsibility to children let's say at the age of ten. For example they can go to market and buy a bread or they can you know telephone the water company to bring some water</i></p> <p><i>another hint or clue so that they will become autonomous is that I believe in liberal market which means in liberal market if you produce something you should earn money at the end of the day</i></p> <p><i>that's the same, so that's the same in autonomy at the end of the day you do a lot of homework reading project etc. if they are assessed as marks (T2, interview)</i></p>

5.3. Teacher expectation from students

They also expressed what they are expecting from students. They also explained how they clarify their expectations to the students and how they support students to meet those expectations. (see Table 12.)

Table 12. Teacher expectation from students

<p><i>No exception, I have to tell them that they have to read this and this chapter or read this and this article for next week if I don't, this is what I get they say you didn't tell us teacher,</i></p> <p><i>they have to prepare presentations, autonomous learner will look at the chapter even if he or she is not presenting (T5, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>I tell them not to memorise things in the book just you know approach thing personally, how to use your own words while you know describing</i></p> <p><i>The first thing to let them know what are, what things are expected of them. The instructions must be clear.</i></p> <p><i>They have to be personally engaged with the issues they need to consider their past learning their high school education their prep year education.</i></p> <p><i>I expect them sometimes to criticise what they read in the book and they have to localise the knowledge, Expect them to collaborate with others, expect them to take the responsibility of teaching something in class, you know help them improve themselves professionally that's why the academicians admire (T1, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>the rest upon the learner or the learners themselves maybe through project works, group work, pair work and they search for information and they gather information they present information with others.</i></p> <p><i>I ask learners and who come up with their own activities that in future they can you know implement apply. I want them to be a little bit I mean researchers and collect information and make use of available sources then in the end come up with their own ideas about it. (T3, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>I expect the students keep a portfolio</i></p> <p><i>They will be monitoring their progress and they will be assessing their self-evaluation as well.</i></p> <p><i>they are also expected to read some course material out of the class.</i></p> <p><i>we expect them to work on some tasks ok and read their own reports in line with what they practice here what they've learned here what they've read teaching methodologies (T4, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>first of all the learners should have self-discipline and they should have clear objectives they should have priorities so they will attain their objectives</i></p> <p><i>what I tell my students you know freedom to choose, you can choose your friends to work with as a team</i></p> <p><i>everybody is expected to read the related chapter before they come to the classroom</i></p> <p><i>we encourage students to watch anything they like and do some presentations regarding that in the classroom or least introduce</i></p> <p><i>I encourage them to read journals and write review and what do them to and also what I ask them to do write, put their reviews on the Moodle, I used Moodle system so that they will be autonomous learners so I just give a due time so before the due time they have to read write down report and then upload (T2, interview)</i></p>

6. Advantages

The sixth theme is advantages.

6.1. Competition to teach in ELT department

One of the teacher trainers also mentioned that their students' being autonomous can also create a competition among academics of other departments to teach in their department and it is an advantage for them. (see Table 13.)

Table 13. Competition to teach in ELT department

many academicians like teaching our students because they know how to discuss issues they are not just silent or passive learners everybody in educational sciences I know they are in a competition to teach in our programme. It is because of learner autonomy as well I think (T1, interview)

6.2. Current situation

Teacher trainers also mentioned how they see their current situation in terms of autonomy. Their ideas show that they believe as the department they are literally trying to support an autonomous learning area and making it to be a part of their courses. (see Table 14.)

Table 14. Current situation

learner autonomy should be part of our courses I mean maybe some courses, in different courses we should assign such readings and they should be aware of this topic, they should be knowledgeable about it they should have sort of awareness in other words, it should be part of curriculum in various courses. (T4, interview)

in our department I believe that we support autonomous learning how if you look at the projects that the students have so they have they do some library study, they read articles they do annotated reading and then I ask students to read at least two or three articles each unit (T2, interview)

6.3. Benefits

Teacher trainers also expressed that they have benefited from autonomy because it also helps to deal with students' psychological side of their character. (see Table 15.)

Table 15. Benefits

we are dealing with their inhibitions you know they lower their anxiety levels. Many issues of course but by giving such level of responsibility (T1, interview)

7. Difficulties

The seventh theme is difficulties. Teacher trainers stated that they have faced with some problems while trying to implement autonomy in their classes. They expressed that those problems mainly stem from students, institution, family, culture, curriculum, class size and etc. They are aware that it is not so easy and have difficulties and they are determined to overcome those issues and continue to try to implement and take advantage of autonomy. (see Table 16., 17., 18., and 19.)

7.1. Educational

Table 16. Educational

<p><i>It is not maybe so easy with first year or second year learners Now I am ready to admire kind of feeling I have but I don't think it is ok to give that much responsibility in the first years of college educations because you know exposure to language is necessary in the first year (T1, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>I have a curriculum I have to finish up (T5, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>it is really hard to motivate students all the time you know I think this is one of the bad sides of our century actually because they have a lot of things to do around and they cannot concentrate on one thing curriculum or something, yes it is difficult to make it in that scale I guess and because it is usually applied in the classroom based environment it is also related to the again the teachers the students as well as the content of the courses (T6, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>freshman level they should be guided. No disadvantage but there are advantages (T4, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>we have some problems like this they start university together one student is thinking about getting this is no nothing wrong I mean in the implementation but the problem is during application I have some resistance one of the problems so it is difficult to have work as a group or team (T2, interview)</i></p>

7.2. Cultural

Table 17. Cultural

<p><i>Culture, we are not taught to be autonomous, we are taught to be obedient, and respectful of the elderly unfortunately, being autonomous is seen as being disrespectful, We are not allowed to be autonomous starting from our family Because we are not really allowed to be autonomous because if we are really autonomous then we are accused of being disrespectful or irresponsible, which is such a shame being autonomous doesn't mean being irresponsible. On the contrary you are taking your own responsibility in your hands Parents have to allow the children to be more autonomous as well. (T5, interview)</i></p>

7.3. Family

Table 18. Family

<p><i>if you let them take the control some of the parents may complain that teachers are not teaching anything, You are just listening the songs and you are watching films you are not doing much that's why my sons SBS (central exam) score is this they can say so they have lots of constrains and restrictions (T1, interview)</i></p>

7.4. Institutional

Table 19. Institutional

<p><i>another problem that I usually encounter is the population of the classrooms so it is very hard to control class over 35 or more so it is very difficult to organise the things (T6, interview)</i></p>

<p><i>Even in university context it is problematic teachers we are not free to do whatever we want we have curricular restrictions, administrative restrictions, (T1, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>as an institution I mean as a faculty we have a problem we don't have a room in which they can easily work with computers</i></p>
<p><i>I need to get institutional support I have to use alternative assessment system but in the system I am very limited (T2, interview)</i></p>

8. Facilities

The eighth theme is facilities. Teacher trainers also mentioned what kind of facilities they have in their department. They also expressed their ideas on what facilities they need and how they can use of those facilities to promote autonomy in students. They also expressed that they have institutional restraints while fostering autonomy. (see Table 20.)

Table 20. Facilities

<p><i>we are trying creating a small space at least for our students' individual silent work or to do further work in their studies because the library has both literature books and books on our field (T1, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>we have a lot of opportunities and facilities to enhance our learning through even social media and all other stuff</i></p> <p><i>I wish we had some self-access laboratories to information</i></p> <p><i>there are some examples in some universities in turkey, just having education with the connection with the outside university and then they can have lecture they can attend a lecture (T6, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>we have a little library in which there are some materials so sometimes students are guided to borrow books from the library and read them on their own we use internet sources so they can self-access and benefit. We don't have a self-access centre ideally there could be a self-access centre where they can borrow, listen, do things (T4, interview)</i></p>
<p><i>not a library but we need a computer library, self-access centre in which students can in their free time can sit down and then work with the computer printout whatever they like etc. so they don't have such facility here in each faculty on the other hand as our department we use online library Moodle and then we have online library, smart boards and we use internet a lot, YouTube as I said before, because there are a lot of facilities that students can make use of so we have enough facilities so that students can be autonomous (T2, interview)</i></p>

Observation notes

Teachers were generally letting students to present topics and trying to create a friendly and stress free environment to discuss issues during the courses I observed throughout the data collection process, but in some theoretical courses such as approaches and methods in ELT, the lecturer of the course has interfered much during the lecture and did not share the power with learners on a desired level. Especially with first and second grades, teachers' talking time were high and students were a bit passive compared to last year students however with third and fourth grades' courses were so supportive to become autonomous and created a way to questioning and a place for fruitful discussions. It might be because of the content of the courses of first graders but still those courses may be designed as an effective way and lecturers

might be more careful about their power and talking time in class. As a conclusion, there is mostly a consistence between interview data and observations. Teacher trainers were mostly doing what they were saying in interviews. Hence, observation notes and interview data validate each other.

Results and Implications

As a result of the study, it can be said that in an ELT department of a state university in Turkey, teacher trainers know the importance of autonomy, value it and they try to implement and foster it. They also thought that they are supporting students to become autonomous and to some extent they are successful in doing so. On the other hand, as a limitation of the study, only teacher trainers' ideas were reflected, students own ideas and how they see autonomy and how they feel in such activities were not taken into account, it is one of the restrictions of this study. Further qualitative or mixed method researches about learner autonomy can be done both with teacher trainers and students. Also this study only focused on ELT department but in further studies other departments in teacher training institutions can be investigated in terms of learner autonomy.

Autonomy and self-determination theory has been discussed and some says that it is not suitable for eastern cultures such as Asia, Middle Eastern, and some countries that have some another cultural background from western countries Europe and America- namely Turkey and etc. But, I believe that our students who are learning a foreign language has the potential to become autonomous as much as students who live and raised in western cultures. With the help and support of the teacher, our students can easily realise their potential to improve autonomy and decide on their learning, how and what they want to learn. They can also easily be adapted to such activities which foster autonomy in language learning process if they are encouraged to do so. Because, most probably throughout the education process, those students might have experiences that they were forced not to be autonomous, expected to do only what the teacher says and requests. In many years, throughout the country with the use of traditional methods such as grammar traditional and audio lingual method, teachers were seen and became always the main authority in the class and students were expected to obey rules and just listen. But with the understanding and improving in approaches of language teaching, students are now expected to interact with the teacher and also with their classmates, in doing so they are expected to develop somewhat autonomy and monitor their learning and be aware why they are learning the language, how they can learn more easily and what they need to learn and with what materials they want to learn, as well. I believe before promoting and developing autonomy in learners, teachers should question their belief of language teaching and their own roles in the classroom, are they still thinking that they are the only authority in the class, or they see themselves as a facilitator or a prompter who helps students during their learning process, as a guide who design activities and let the students find ways during the process and help when only requested and etc. I also think that only teachers who always question their own role and their applications in language classes can set a place which develops and promotes autonomy in learners, otherwise it will only be a fantasy with a teacher who believes he or she is the only authority and decides everything on his/her own. Consequently, teachers should be aware of their roles and find ways to develop autonomy even in most difficult situations such as in a central structured education system as in Turkey. Countries such as Turkey, all

curricula and materials are decided centrally in the capital city by MONE and sent to the schools, teachers don't have such a huge amount of autonomy on those documents and processes. Yet they still have some control in differentiating what and how to teach. There are main topics and attainments to reach in the curriculum that restrict teachers but they can choose how to apply and design activities in language classes. Also, they can use activities that can foster autonomy in his or her learners. In addition, teachers can also use a language and show behaviours that give some responsibility to students during learning and teaching process and those indicators can help to share responsibility with the students and hopefully may foster autonomy in them and help them to demand more.

Discussion

Pekkanlı-Egel (2009)'s study shows that although learner autonomy means a reshaping of the view that the learner is responsible for learning, teachers do not abdicate their responsibilities of teaching in the language learning process and on the contrary teachers become the primary agents on fostering the development of learner autonomy within the classroom context. This study's findings also support this result in terms of teacher trainers' views and showing their awareness that autonomy does not mean that teachers become useless in that process instead they have much more responsibilities. Nakata (2011) in the study named "Teachers' readiness for promoting learner autonomy: A study of Japanese EFL high school teachers" concluded that many Japanese EFL high school teachers, while displaying different dimensions of autonomy in different ways, they are not fully ready to promote autonomy in their learners. This result doesn't coincide with the present study's findings. Teacher trainers in this study believe that they are ready and have enough ability to promote it in their department. This can be because of different education levels and teacher trainers also have much more autonomy while making a decision and designing their own course while high school teachers might have some restraints. Yıldırım (2011)'s study found that the use of portfolios assisted the student-teachers in becoming autonomous in regard to their personal and professional development and that the student-teachers perceived the portfolio process they went through positively. The present study also showed that using portfolios as an evaluation technique helps student teachers to become autonomous according to views of teacher trainers. Kahraman (2015) found in her study that the ELT program of a university in Turkey has covered most of the aspects included in the checklist and the teacher educators shared positive views about the program in terms of autonomy development, and seven teacher educators also gave some suggestions about the program and the context of the courses. This study supports this result, too because participants claimed that their department is ready enough to support autonomy and they have not big problems with the program used. However, they had some suggestions to improve the facilities, as well. Also, Shahsavari (2014) in the study named "Autonomy Based on Teachers and Learners Point of Views" found that nearly all the teachers and learners who participated in the study in Iran agreed on the fact that learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more efficiently than they otherwise would, and all the participants agreed that it is more desirable than feasible. The participants of this study also told that it has lots of advantages and believe in it and it is more desirable than feasible.

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Appendix 1

Interview form

Consent Part

This study seeks to answer the research question “What are the views of academics working in an English Language Teaching (ELT) department about ‘learner autonomy’ and how they implement it in their classes?”. Here is the list of questions that I would like to ask you to this end. I plan that this interview session will take nearly 30 minutes. As it is a semi structured interview, you can give more details to any of the questions or you can add new ones or you can choose not to answer any/all of them. At the beginning or during or any time of the study, you can finish and you can wish not to take part in the research at all. All data gathered from the interviews will be used for scientific purposes only in a paper and identity information of participants will not be shared as code names will be used while presenting findings. When requested, all findings and results related to this study will be shared with the participants. I assure you that data will only be reached by the researcher himself.

Questions

1. How do you define “learner autonomy”? Could you tell me about the principles?
2. What kind of activities do you think can foster learner autonomy and can create a suitable place for it?
3. How do you implement “learner autonomy” and it’s principles into your own classes?
4. Can you give examples of activities that you think and do to foster learner autonomy in your own classes?
5. In your opinion, can your students who take courses from you design and support activities related to learner autonomy in their own classes when they are appointed as English teachers within a few years? If you have any experiences, can you give details? How do you understand that?
6. In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of implementing learner autonomy?
7. Have you had any problems while implementing learner autonomy, if so, how did you solve them? What was your reaction?
8. In Turkish education context, do you think it is easy/hard to implement learner autonomy even in university level? If it is, how do you solve those problems?
9. Do you think that in the ELT department of PAU, you -as a group of teacher trainers, can create and support a place for learner autonomy for your teacher candidates?

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