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## **The Portfolio Effect: Enhancing Turkish ELT Student-Teachers' Autonomy**

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*Abstract: This article reports on the use of portfolios to develop ELT major student-teachers' autonomy. The research was carried out for 14 weeks with twenty-one 3rd grade student-teachers in the English Language Teaching Department of Cukurova University, Adana, Turkey. To evaluate the impact of portfolios on fostering the participants' autonomy, data were collected from an autonomy readiness questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with the student-teachers and three portfolio evidences: graded goal sheets, reflection reports, and cover letters. The findings revealed 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.*

### **Introduction**

The concept of learner autonomy emerged in discourse on language learning as early as the late 1960s. It first manifested itself in the adult education movement in Europe and North America (Benson, 2001). Later, the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project in 1971 with its emphasis on the transition from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness in the language teaching context (Benson, 2007, p.734) helped set the stage for the idea of learner autonomy to gain considerable attention. It is widely accepted that one of the most essential outcomes of such transition has been the change in the traditional ideas about learners' and teachers' roles in the language classrooms (Yang, 1998; Thanasoulas, 2000). In the new perspective, learners are expected to show greater responsibility for and capacity to plan and monitor their own learning (Benson, 2001) and teachers act as the source of assistance for the learners in the process of setting up goals and plans for self-directed learning (Holec, 1981), raising awareness of learning styles and strategies (Lamb, 2003), and increasing learning engagement (Nunan, 1997).

Research into learner autonomy is mainly concerned with describing teacher and learner roles and perceptions related to certain practices (Cotterall, 2000; Chuk, 2004; Balcikanli, 2008; Gonzalez, 2009; Barillaro, 2011; Nguyen, 2012) as well as with fostering autonomy through technology integrated instruction (Singh & Embi, 2007; Lee, 2011). While some studies on teacher autonomy, on the other hand, have focused on the relationship between teacher and learner autonomy (Assor, Kaplan, & Roth, 2002; Moomaw, 2005; Ramos, 2006; Reeve, 2006; Phan, 2012), others have identified teachers' autonomy at in-service level (Cakir & Balcikanli, 2012; Ozturk, 2011). However, there are not sufficient amounts of research into the autonomy of teacher autonomy at pre-service level. Therefore,

this study aims to examine the impact of using portfolios on enhancing ELT (English Language Teaching) major student-teachers' autonomy. Portfolios used in this study have been considered useful tools to foster autonomy as they encourage students to take more initiative and control of learning and reflect on their learning (Graves & Sunstein, 1992; McNamara & Debra, 1998; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991).

### **A Discourse on Learner Autonomy**

Learner autonomy with various ways of representation has been the focus of attention in educational research for the last three decades. The notion has been conceptualised in language learning and teaching contexts from such aspects as “technical” (Benson, 1997, p.25; Oxford, 2003, p.76), “psychological” (Benson, 2006, p.23; Reinders, 2011, p.46), and “socio-cultural” (Sert, 2006, p.184; Smith & Ushioda, 2009, p.242; Dang, 2010, p.4). Defined from the perspective of society and/or culture, learner autonomy in language learning is socially driven (Smith & Ushioda, 2009) and “resides in the social worlds of the students, which they bring with them from their lives outside the classroom” (Holliday, 2003, p. 117). In this regard, there are widely held assumptions about how different cultures influence the degree of autonomy of their members. Jones (1995), in his research on the goal of a self-access centre in Cambodia, for example, concluded that autonomy is laden with cultural values - especially those of the West - and therefore is inappropriate for the traditions of learning and teaching in Cambodia. Halstead and Zhu (2009) add to the argument through the case in China by stating that learner autonomy is currently hardly a reality at all in the classroom due to the traditional Chinese expectations of a teacher to dominate the learning process. While Pennycook (1997) argues that certain kinds of autonomy may be associated more with Western values, Nucamendi (2012) suggests that any apparent lack of autonomy in different cultures may mean either that autonomy is not possible in that culture or simply that it is not easily recognized by outside observers.

The above discussion seems to suggest that “autonomy is not a universal and neutral concept and that it encompasses a critical awareness of one’s own possibilities and limitations within particular contexts” (Schmenk, 2005, p.115). Considering the enhancement of learner autonomy in Turkey, the picture does not seem to differ from what has been reported about some eastern countries. Relevant research in the local context shows that the educational system in Turkey is considered as teacher-centred. Traditional teaching methods are widely utilized (Balcikanli, 2010), learning at all levels of education has mainly been directed and evaluated by the teachers (Sert, 2006, p. 181), and Turkish learners are not traditionally supposed to have skills such as taking responsibility for their own learning and evaluating themselves (Yumuk, 2002; Karabiyik, 2008; Karagozoglu, 2008). Hindrance to learner autonomy is attributed to two main factors: first, the centralist tendency of the structure of the Turkish educational system where the Ministry applies a strict control over the curriculum, resources, choice of textbooks, staff deployment, and allocation of instructional time (Vorkink, 2006; Uygun, 2008 as cited in Ozturk, 2011); and second, the previous learning experiences of teachers working in schools (Erdoğan, 2003; Canbolat, 1995; Palfreyman, 2003).

As for the latter, the question is if the teachers themselves are ready to foster learner autonomy in their classrooms because “to help learners become autonomous, the teacher has to be autonomous, but the teacher cannot become autonomous until she has experienced the process with her learners for a substantial period of time” (Thavenius, 1999, p. 163). In Turkey, the education of pre-service English teachers is composed of a four-year theoretical and practical training during which they take courses related to language proficiency,

pedagogical formation, and content area. Upon graduation, they are subjected to a standardized test called the Civil Servant Selection Examination (KPSS) which is composed of 'General Ability,' 'General Knowledge,' 'Educational Sciences,' and 'Content Knowledge.' Those who obtain the score required by the Ministry of National Education are appointed to teach in public schools. The curriculum for the education of pre-service language teachers which is determined by the Higher Education Council is mainly based on what Lortie (1975, p.61) calls "apprenticeship of observation" leaving student-teachers a little space, if any, to take initiative for their decisions about learning and teaching as they are taught in "a teacher-led transmission style" (Sert, 2006, p. 187).

However, with the curriculum reform introduced in 2006, the Ministry of National Education revised the English curriculum, integrating encouragement of learner autonomy as one of the fundamental goals of teaching. To promote learner autonomy in their classrooms, English teachers are recommended to employ activities such as projects which focus more on independent learning than dependence on teachers - to raise students' awareness of their learning styles and strategies, to give students initiative to design materials for classroom use, to ensure the development of students' skills, and to encourage collective work with peers beside independent work (MoNE, 2006). It goes without saying that language teachers without any previous autonomy-oriented training may experience difficulties in creating a classroom culture that fosters autonomy (Cakir & Balcikanli, 2012, p. 4). The point is also emphasized by van Esch, Schalkwijk, Elsen, & Setz (1999, p.18) who argue that "radically or gradually, foreign language teachers are increasingly challenged to put the principles of autonomous learning into practice and the challenge will be part of student-teachers' future careers. This is why initial teacher training should address the principles of autonomous learning, the changing roles and tasks of the teacher, and the ways in which they can be put into practice during training." Yet, there is no obvious reference to teacher autonomy either in the new English curriculum or in the handbook documenting English language teachers competence (MoNE, 2006; 2008). Therefore, it is necessary that teacher autonomy should be seen as "a legitimate goal of teacher education programmes" (Smith, 2003, p. 7) in order for teachers to develop a sense of autonomy at as early a stage as possible. Drawing on this discussion, this study aims to explore the potential effect of using portfolios on enhancing ELT major student-teachers' autonomy. The study investigates answers to the following questions:

- 1) Does the use of portfolios have any impact on enhancing ELT student-teachers' autonomy?
- 2) If so, in what ways does the use of portfolios help student-teachers in becoming autonomous in regard to their personal and professional development?
- 3) How do student-teachers perceive the portfolio process they have experienced in terms of its contribution to enhancing autonomy?

## **Method**

### **Portfolio Process**

This research was carried out for 14 weeks with twenty-one 3rd grade student-teachers in the English Language Teaching Department of Cukurova University, Adana, Turkey.

The study was conducted in a course named Language Teaching Skills II. The content of this course included approaches, methods, and techniques on how to teach four skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. In terms of assessment, students are normally required to prepare and present a micro-teaching session as a mid-term examination, and then take a traditional pen-and-paper examination at the end of a term as a final assessment item.

In parallel with what learner autonomy entails and with a view to enabling learners to take more responsibility for the planning, monitoring and evaluation of their own learning, the above mentioned product-based assessment was substituted with portfolio assessment.

There are many kinds of portfolios used in pre-service teacher education (Constantino, 2006). The use of portfolios in teacher education usually takes two major forms focusing on either the process or the product. Although different terms have been used to name process portfolios (Bullock & Hawk, 2005) e.g. developmental portfolios (Wyatt & Looper, 2004) and working portfolios (Constantino, 2006) their purpose is to document teacher candidates' professional growth and learning. Following Bullock and Hawk (2005, p. 14), the type of portfolio used in this study is a process portfolio which "shows a person's performance over a period of time. Its purpose isn't to prove something but rather to improve something." More specifically, portfolios in this context serve to document and assess student-teachers' progress in the course and foster reflection on self, others and the course itself - hence, to contribute to the enhancement of their autonomy both as learners and prospective teachers. The main components with which the notion of learner autonomy is associated in this study are "awareness" (Nunan, 1997, p.195) of their own learning and teaching as their future profession, "responsibility" (Holec, 1981, p.3; Cotterall, 2000, p.110) for aspects of language-learning and the teaching process, and "ability" (Holec, 1981, p.3) to think, feel, make decisions and act independently within this process (Russell & Bakken, 2002). This perspective largely informs the interpretation of data in this study. Drawing from the above discussion on enhancing student-teachers' autonomy, the portfolio process employed in the study is illustrated in Table 1 below:

<b>Steps of the portfolio process</b>	<b>Evidence which went into the portfolio</b>
<b><i>Identifying strengths and weaknesses</i></b>	
- Defining goals for the course.	Student-teachers' goal sheets.
<b><i>Planning an action</i></b>	
- Finding, reading, and reflecting on the sources to reach the goals set.	Sources and reflection reports.
- Finding, reading, and reflecting on the sources to reach the goals related to the course content.	Sources and reflection reports.
- Designing language practice activities related to skills covered in class.	Draft and revised version of activities.
- Attending tutorials.	Reflection reports focusing on the designing process of activities.
- Planning a micro-teaching session.	Reflection reports and lesson plans.
<b><i>Acting</i></b>	
- Presenting micro-teaching.	Reflection reports.
- Evaluating self and peers' micro-teachings.	Evaluation sheets.
<b><i>Evaluation</i></b>	
- Reflecting on the whole process.	Cover letters and graded goal sheets.

**Table 1: The portfolio process**

Encouraging student-teachers to move towards autonomy through portfolios started with asking "learners to set up their own goals and plans for self-directed learning" (Nunan, 1997, p.195). The student-teachers were asked to identify their strengths and weaknesses and set goals accordingly. They were informed that they could determine the number of goals to be set and could consider themselves both as learners and prospective teachers while setting these goals. Later, at the end of the term, they were invited to evaluate the extent to which the goals were achieved.

Depending on the course content and the goals set, the student-teachers were led to

plan their own learning process by finding relevant sources, reading and reflecting on them (Cotterall, 2000). The planning stage also included student-teachers' working either in groups or pairs to draft and revise activities for teaching the four language skills before they made their individual lesson plans for their micro-teachings. Acting on the idea that "autonomy is not (emphasis in the original) a synonym for self-instruction; in other words, autonomy is not (emphasis in the original) limited to learning without a teacher (Little, 1990, p. 7), the researcher/lecturer, held tutorial sessions with student-teachers during which she acted as a facilitator, a counselor, and a resource (Voller, 1997).

The next phase consisted of micro-teaching presentations in class. The presentations, which lasted approximately 20-30 minutes each, served to provide the student-teachers with the chance for "involvement" (Nunan, 1997, p.195) in "guided experimentation" which is considered to be one of the most "productive ways to develop the students' ability to manage their own learning" (Vieira, 1999, p. 154).

Following the micro-teaching sessions was the assessment of the performances. In this phase, student-teachers were asked to evaluate themselves individually since it is essential for a learner preparing for autonomy "to be able to make some kind of judgment about the accuracy and appropriacy of her performance" (Dickinson, 1993, p. 151). This was followed by the lecturer's and peers' assessment. The motivation for employing multiple voices in the evaluation process stemmed from the social aspect of learner autonomy which involves cooperation between learners, teachers, and peers (Smith, 2003). The portfolio process ended with the student-teachers evaluating and reflecting on the whole process.

In line with the portfolio framework suggested by Bullock and Hawk (2005, p.16), the "evidences" which went into the portfolios were graded goal sheets; sources such as articles and chapters from books; draft and revised versions of language learning activities designed; lesson plans; micro-teaching self and peer assessment sheets; a cover letter evaluating the whole portfolio process; and reflection reports submitted at each stage of the process. Reflection on one's learning is an important component in portfolio development since "the absence of a written reflection results in a portfolio becoming a scrapbook" (Bullock and Hawk, 2005, p. 37). The student-teachers' reflections in this study ranged from a paragraph to several pages in length per entry in which they were engaged "in sustained self-reflection, self-evaluation, and growth" (Tucker, Stronge, & Gareis, 2002, p. 83) to increase their potential for learner autonomy (Cotterall, 2000).

### **Data Collection Tools and Analysis**

For reliability and validity purposes, the data for the study were collected by a triangulation of instruments. To investigate student-teachers' readiness for autonomy, the Autonomy Questionnaire adapted from Chan, Spratt and Humphreys (2002) was administered to student-teachers before and after the portfolio process. The quantitative data acquired were analysed by utilising SPSS 11. Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine frequencies and percentages for all items in the questionnaire.

The quantitative data were supported by qualitative data obtained from the interviews with the student-teachers and three portfolio evidences: graded goal sheets, reflection reports, and cover letters. A semi-structured interview was held with all student-teachers within which there exists "a sequence of themes to be covered, as well as suggested questions...an openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up answers given and the stories told by the subjects" (Kvale, 1996, p. 124). The evaluation of the portfolio process constituted the major theme of the interviews, guided by prompts and questions asked to elicit the student-teachers' perceptions of the process they had gone through. The interviews conducted were audio-recorded and transcribed.

All the qualitative data were analysed in the same manner; through a process of qualitative thematic analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Newby, 2010). To address the research questions, this process involved clumping together like statements about the impact of portfolios on enhancing student-teachers' autonomy, the nature of such an impact, student-teachers' perceptions of the portfolio process in relation to autonomy enhancement and the goals set by the student-teachers. The data were revisited as many times as necessary to verify the emerging key issues. Then, the frequency of acknowledgement of key issues led to themes which were organised into a set of broad and more specific categories.

## **Findings**

The results obtained from the questionnaires are presented below. Based on the components of the view of learner autonomy in this study, the presentation here covers only the data drawn from the two sections of the questionnaire which focus on "responsibilities" and "abilities." Table 2 indicates the findings related to responsibilities:

		BEFORE					AFTER				
		Not at all	A little	Some	Mainly	Completely	Not at all	A little	Some	Mainly	Completely
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1. Make sure you make progress during lessons.	S	0.0	21.1	73.6	5.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	26.3	63.2	10.5
	T	0.0	0.0	0.0	68.4	31.6	0.0	5.2	21.1	47.4	26.3
2. Make sure you make progress outside class.	S	10.5	15.8	26.3	15.8	31.6	0.0	10.5	21.1	57.9	10.5
	T	0.0	26.3	26.3	31.6	15.8	26.3	36.8	31.6	5.3	0.0
3. Stimulate your learning in English.	S	15.8	31.6	42.1	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	31.6	47.4	21.0
	T	0.0	0.0	0.0	57.9	42.1	0.0	10.5	68.4	21.1	0.0
4. Identify your weaknesses in English.	S	10.5	26.3	52.7	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.2	63.2	31.6
	T	0.0	0.0	0.0	63.2	36.8	10.5	36.8	21.1	31.6	0.0
5. Make you work harder.	S	15.8	15.8	57.9	10.5	0.0	0.0	5.2	15.8	57.9	21.1
	T	0.0	0.0	26.3	47.4	26.3	0.0	5.2	47.4	26.3	21.1
6. Decide the objectives of your English classes	S	0.0	42.1	52.6	5.3	0.0	0.0	5.3	47.4	42.0	5.3
	T	0.0	0.0	21.1	52.6	26.3	5.2	15.8	47.4	10.5	21.1
7. Decide what you should learn next in your English class.	S	10.5	26.3	63.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.5	47.4	36.8	5.3
	T	0.0	5.3	5.3	63.2	26.2	0.0	15.7	36.8	36.8	10.5
8. Choose what activities to use to learn English in your English lesson.	S	5.3	21.1	73.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.3	42.1	42.1	10.5
	T	0.0	0.0	0.0	47.4	52.6	0.0	5.3	57.8	31.6	5.3
9. Decide how long to spend on each activity.	S	21.1	15.8	42.0	21.1	0.0	0.0	15.8	26.3	47.4	10.5
	T	0.0	5.3	5.3	42.0	47.4	5.2	10.5	47.4	21.1	15.8
10. Choose what materials to use to learn English in your English lesson.	S	5.3	26.2	63.2	5.3	0.0	0.0	15.8	10.5	57.9	15.8
	T	0.0	0.0	5.2	47.4	47.4	0.0	26.3	36.8	31.6	5.3
11. Evaluate your learning.	S	10.5	21.1	52.6	15.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	36.8	42.1	21.1
	T	0.0	0.0	5.3	31.5	63.2	0.0	0.0	73.5	26.5	0.0
12. Evaluate your course.	S	15.8	10.5	57.9	15.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.1	57.8	21.1
	T	0.0	0.0	0.0	52.6	47.4	0.0	10.5	31.6	31.6	26.3
13. Decide what you learn outside class.	S	0.0	10.5	15.8	42.1	31.6	0.0	0.0	10.5	57.9	31.6
	T	0.0	0.0	36.8	21.1	42.1	5.2	21.1	52.6	21.1	0.0

Table 2: Views about “Whose responsibility is it to...”



In this section of the questionnaire, 13 items were asked to student-teachers in order to see how they perceived responsibilities concerning managing one's own learning (Item 1,2,3,4,5,7,11, and13) and responsibilities regarding different aspects of the teaching process (Item 6,8,9,10, and 12) from both students' and teachers' perspective. Table 2 clearly indicates that there were changes with regard to student-teachers' perceptions of responsibilities in all items after the portfolio process.

As to managing one's own learning, one of the remarkable changes concerns Item 1. It is seen that before the portfolio process, student-teachers gave the "main" (68.4%) and "complete" (31.6%) responsibility to their teachers and took only "some" (73.6%) responsibility as students in monitoring their progress in learning. However, after the portfolio process, the student-teachers as opposed to taking "some" responsibility started to take the "main" (63.2%) and "complete" (10.5%) responsibility while at the same time sharing their responsibility with the teachers (mainly – 47.4%; completely – 26.3%).

Item 4 shows another notable change. It is clearly seen that student-teachers gave the most responsibility to their teachers (mainly – 63.2%; completely – 36.8%) and took "some" (52.7%) responsibility themselves in identifying their weaknesses in learning English. After the portfolio process they started to take the most responsibility (mainly – 63.2%; completely - 31,6%), decreasing the degree of responsibility of their teachers to "a little" 36.8% and "not at all" (10.5%).

Similarly, Item 11 shows that before student-teachers' experience with the portfolio process they appointed "main" (31.5%) and "complete" (63.2%) responsibility to their teachers while giving "some" (52.6%) responsibility to themselves in evaluating their learning. Following their experience with the portfolio process, they gave "main" (42.1%) and "complete" (21.1%) responsibility to themselves and "some" (73.5%) responsibility to their teachers.

With regard to the aspects of the teaching process, an item which shows salient change is Item 8. It can be observed from the findings that at the beginning of their exposure to the portfolio process, student-teachers gave "main" (47.4%) and "complete" (52.6) responsibility to their teachers while giving "a little" (21,1%) and "some" (73,7%) responsibility to themselves in choosing activities to use in English lessons. However, later it is observed that they started to share "some" (42.1% and 57.8% respectively) responsibility with their teachers. Furthermore, they increased the degree of their responsibility to "mainly" (42.1%) and "completely" (10.5%) regarding this aspect of teaching

A further noticeable change as to these aspects is observed in Item 10. It is seen that before the portfolio process, student-teachers assigned the responsibility for choosing the materials to use in English lessons "mainly" (47.4%) and "completely" (47.4%) to their teachers while giving "a little" (26.2%) and "some" (63.2%) responsibility to themselves. However, after the portfolio process, they seem to feel "mainly" (57.9%) responsible for this aspect while decreasing the degree of their teachers' responsibility to "a little" (26.3%) and "some" (36.8%).

. The second section of the questionnaires was related to student-teachers abilities. The results for this section are presented below in Table 3:

	BEFORE					AFTER				
	Very Poor	Poor	OK	Good	Very Good	Very Poor	Poor	OK	Good	Very Good
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1. Choosing learning activities in class?	0.0	0.0	31.6	42.1	26.3	0.0	0.0	15.8	73.7	10.5
2. Choosing learning activities outside class?	0.0	0.0	36.8	21.1	42.1	0.0	0.0	36.8	36.8	26.4
3. Choosing learning objectives in class?	0.0	0.0	36.8	42.1	21.1	0.0	5.3	36.8	52.6	5.3
4. Choosing learning objectives outside class?	0.0	0.0	26.3	42.1	31.6	0.0	0.0	47.4	47.4	5.2
5. Choosing learning materials in class?	0.0	5.2	21.1	42.1	31.6	0.0	0.0	5.3	57.9	36.8
6. Choosing learning materials outside class?	0.0	0.0	21.1	31.6	47.3	0.0	0.0	5.2	63.2	31.6
7. Evaluating your learning?	0.0	10.5	10.5	47.4	31.6	0.0	5.3	26.3	26.3	42.1
8. Evaluating your course?	0.0	5.2	15.8	57.9	21.1	0.0	5.2	31.6	31.6	31.6
9. Identifying your weaknesses in English?	0.0	0.0	15.8	31.6	52.6	0.0	0.0	21.1	10.5	68.4
10. Deciding what you should learn next in your English lessons?	0.0	5.3	36.8	31.6	26.3	0.0	15.8	21.1	26.3	36.8
11. Deciding how long to spend on each activity?	0.0	0.0	42.1	26.3	31.6	0.0	5.2	26.3	47.4	21.1

**Table 3: Views about “How good are you at...”**

As Table 3 shows, there was some change observed in all items. This change manifests itself in two directions: first, from “very good” to “very poor” (in seven out of 11 items) and second, from “very poor” to “very good” (in four out of eleven items). As for the former, one obvious change, for instance, was in Item 4: choosing learning activities outside class. Before their experience with the portfolio process, while 31.6% of the student-teachers believed that they were “very good” at this aspect, this percentage later decreased to 5.2%. Another interesting change was observed in Item 2: identifying learning objectives outside the classroom. While before the portfolio process, 42.1% of the student-teachers believed to be “very good” at this aspect, this percentage decreased to 26.4% after their exposure to the portfolio process. Regarding the latter, a further change, for example, was recorded in Item 6: choosing learning materials outside class. Before, 31.6% of the student-teachers stated to be “good” at this ability, but later this percentage increased to 63.2%.

The findings acquired from the qualitative tools utilized in this study are summarized below. The results which were gathered from interviews, reflection reports and cover letters were followed in the presentation by the findings obtained from graded goal sheets.

As seen in Table 4 below - regarding the ways the use of portfolios help student-teachers in becoming autonomous - three major themes emerged from the participating student-teachers’ reflection reports, interviews and cover letters. Of the total 100 citations constituting 18 sub-themes, 68 citations are about self-awareness, 20 are about subject-matter awareness, and 12 are about teaching-process awareness.

	THEMES	<i>f</i>	%	TOTAL
<i>Self Awareness</i>	1. Raising awareness of strengths and weaknesses	30	30.0	68
	2. Raising awareness of responsibilities	15	15.0	
	3. Developing metacognitive strategies (e.g. critical thinking, reflecting, judging)	7	7.0	
	4. Developing one-self as a future teacher	5	5.0	
	5. Enhancing creativity	4	4.0	
	6. Improving self confidence	2	2.0	
	7. Enhancing motivation	1	1.0	
	8. Taking active roles in the assessment of peers	1	1.0	
	9. Enhancing objectivity in self-assessment	1	1.0	
	10. Developing a sense of respect to others	1	1.0	
	11. Developing ownership of learning	1	1.0	
<i>Subject Matter Awareness</i>	12. Raising awareness of the theory of how to teach language skills	11	11.0	20
	13. Connecting theory with practice	6	6.0	
	14. Connecting previous knowledge to new knowledge	2	2.0	
	15. Developing content knowledge in preparing activities	1	1.0	
<i>Teaching Process Awareness</i>	16. Becoming familiar with the teaching process	9	9.0	12
	17. Raising awareness of teacher roles and behaviours	2	2.0	
	18. Developing one’s approach to teaching	1	1.0	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

**Table 4: Ways the use of portfolios help student-teachers in becoming autonomous.**

With regard to Theme 1 - Raising awareness of strengths and weaknesses (30 citations), two student-teachers claimed the following:

*Excerpt 1*

*I became aware of what I can do and what I can't do.*

*Excerpt 2*

*....This process helped me find the areas which I am strong and weak in.*

Another student-teacher, concerning Theme 2 - Raising awareness of responsibilities (15 citations) stated the following:

*Excerpt 3*

*Another reason why I like portfolios is to know what to do from the beginning to the end of the course. So students know their duties and take responsibilities for their learning and assignments given in the lesson. During the academic term I felt I had to be regular and punctual for the classes and tutorials.*

For Theme 4 - Developing oneself as a future teacher (5 citations), a student-teacher shared the following sentiment:

*Excerpt 4*

*I think that portfolio is a map. By looking at this map, we see what we must do to improve ourselves and find some methods to cope with our problems....Beside my portfolio, tutorials provided great help to find my way. I feel one step (at least) further on the way of being a teacher.*

A clear illustration of Theme 8 - Taking active roles in the assessment of peers (1 citation), is the following:

*Excerpt 5*

*By assessing my friends, I find the chance to also develop myself. From their performance in micro-teachings I have learned what I must and mustn't do in order to be a good teacher.*

Theme 9 - Enhancing objectivity in self-assessment (1 citation), is supported by the following remark:

*Excerpt 6*

*When I set my goals for a lesson on my own I try to reach them more eagerly than when my teacher sets them for me. So, in this process, I could evaluate my progress more objectively as I have something tangible in my hand.*

One other interesting remark related to Theme 11 - Developing ownership of learning (1 citation), is as follows:

*Excerpt 7*

*I tried to do my best while preparing this portfolio. I like all of my works, because they belong to me. They are my own productions and creations. I was very proud of myself.*

The evidence related to Theme 12 - Raising awareness of the theory of how to teach language skills (11 citations), has been supported by the following excerpt:

*Excerpt 8*

*I have always thought about how I could teach the four language skills until understanding the rationale behind pre-, while and post- activities thanks to my reading and observing my friends teach.*

In regard to Theme 13 - Connecting theory with practice (6 citations), another student-teacher stated the following:

*Excerpt 9*

*While I was observing and assessing my friends, I realized better than before how they use the things we have learnt in class.*

One other remark stated by a student-teacher is related to Theme 15 - Developing content knowledge in preparing activities (1 citation):

*Excerpt 10*

*Reading, evaluating, and storing sources in my portfolio helped me a lot. I am now much better at preparing activities for teaching reading.*

As for Theme 16 - Becoming familiar with the teaching process (9 citations), the following is what two student-teachers claimed:

*Excerpt 11*

*Putting yourself in someone else's shoes while watching micro-teachings...I now know how a teacher feels and what kinds of situations s/he may come across in the classroom....I also got prepared for the real classroom in which I will be during the practicum next year.*

*Excerpt 12*

*This process is so useful in terms of showing us what, when, and how to teach together with the materials to use.*

Finally, about Theme 17 - Raising awareness of teacher roles and behaviours (2 citations), another student-teacher articulated the following:

*Excerpt 13*

*By reflecting on what my friends and I did, I became aware of what a good teacher needs to do.*

The analysis of the graded goal sheets of student-teachers shed more light into the contribution of the portfolio process to student-teachers' enhancing autonomy. Table 5 below presents the results obtained from the student-teachers' goal evaluation sheets regarding the goals they had set before their exposure to the portfolio process and the extent to which these goals were perceived to have been achieved after the process.

THEMES	Achieved		Almost Achieved		Working Towards		TOTAL	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
1. Teach language skills	29	63.0	11	24.0	6	13.0	46	100.0
2. Choose and use appropriate materials	9	81.8	1	9.1	1	9.1	11	100.0
3. Learn a variety of techniques and methods	4	50.0	2	25.0	2	25.0	8	100.0
4. Become a better teacher	4	57.1	3	42.9	-	0.0	7	100.0
5. Learn how to evaluate himself/herself	5	83.3	1	16.7	-	0.0	6	100.0
6. Increase self- confidence	3	60.0	2	40.0	-	0.0	5	100.0
7. Learn how to design activities	5	100	-	-	-	0.0	5	100.0
8. Learn how to improve student capability in language learning	-	0.0	3	100.0	-	0.0	3	100.0
9. Strengthen own communication skills in English	1	50.0	-	0.0	1	50.0	2	100.0
10. Learn how to plan a lesson	2	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	2	100.0
11. Improve pronunciation in English	2	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	2	100.0
12. Learn how to give instructions	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	1	100.0
13. Learn how to change students' negative attitudes to language learning	-	0.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	1	100.0
14. Become a better observer	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	1	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>66.0</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 5: Student-teachers' evaluation of the goals set.**

As it is clearly visible from Table 5 above, from the goals set by the student-teachers (a total of 100), 14 themes emerged related to the areas of both learning and teaching. More than half of these goals (66.0%) were stated to have been “achieved”. Out of the remaining goals, 24.0% were claimed to be “almost achieved” while 10.0% were stated as still being “worked towards.”

Furthermore, student remarks both from the interviews, reflection reports, and cover letters revealed the evidence that different aspects of the portfolio experience contributed to the achievement of these goals. Below are some excerpts which support this:

*Excerpt 14*

*It is my first experience to set goals for my learning. I can't wait to see if I can reach them.*

*Excerpt 15*

*I can see my goals and I see how I can achieve these goals by observing my friends and listening to the discussion on micro-teaching....It is easier to reach my goals once I see them.*

*Excerpt 16*

*My positive approach to portfolios motivated me to reach my goals.*

*Excerpt 17*

*It is very useful to determine your goals. Once you determine them, you have the chance to work on them within the process without getting frustrated.*

Apart from the graded goal sheets, the student-teachers’ constructs elicited through their reflections recorded in the cover letters seem to illustrate the positive relationship between enhancing autonomy and the use of portfolios. These constructs with their frequency of citations are presented in Table 6 below:

<i>My portfolio is</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
1. A way to be at the centre of the learning process	12	18.0
2. A proof of accomplishments and abilities	4	12.0
3. A tool to foster learner autonomy	4	12.0
4. A tool to foster self-awareness	4	12.0
5. A chance to learn from each other	4	12.0
6. A map	2	6.0
7. A systematic, disciplined and serious process	2	6.0
8. An enjoyable process	2	6.0
9. A friend	2	6.0
10. A chance to follow, monitor and compare yourself with yourself	2	6.0
11. A sign of ownership of learning	2	6.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 6: Student-teachers’ perceptions of the portfolio process.**

As it is seen from Table 6 above, from reflection reports, cover letters and interviews, a total of 11 constructs illustrating the student-teachers’ perceptions concerning the positive relationship between autonomy and the portfolio process appeared. The most frequently cited construct (12 citations) was that portfolios acted as a means to be at the centre of the learning process. This is also clearly supported by this remark from a student-teacher:

*Excerpt 18*

*We can evaluate ourselves; find out our weaknesses and strengths; and we are responsible for our work. Similarly, our portfolio system has given us this opportunity; we have been at the centre of the learning process contrary to the*

*traditional system. We are students but firstly human beings. So we have brains to think, to decide, to judge, and also to reflect our ideas and feelings. But in the traditional system, the teacher is in the centre, s/he decides everything as well as evaluation. I am totally in favour of the portfolio system.*

Based on the frequency of citation, such constructs as the portfolios are a proof of accomplishment (4 citations), a tool to foster autonomy (4 citations), a tool to foster self-awareness (4 citations), and a chance to learn from others (4 citations) respectively. There are also constructs as to the description of portfolios as a map (2 citations), a systematic, disciplined and serious process (2 citations), an enjoyable process (2 citations), a friend (2 citations) a chance to follow, monitor and compare yourself with yourself (2 citations), and a sign of ownership of learning (2 citations) correspondingly.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

To evaluate the use of portfolios in enhancing student-teachers' autonomy, the discussion in this section is organised according to the elements that the notion of autonomy as conceived in the study accommodates, namely, the ELT student-teachers' "awareness," "responsibility," and "ability" to manage their own learning as students and as prospective teachers.

The findings revealed that the use of portfolios helped the student-teachers who participated in this study in becoming autonomous in regard to their personal and professional development. This was evidenced by various positive changes that the student-teachers recorded concerning the aspects of autonomy in question. The results acquired from the questionnaires revealed changes in all items related to taking responsibilities. Comparison between the findings obtained from the questionnaires administered before and after the portfolio implementation clearly showed that the student-teachers seemed to have started taking more responsibility than their course lecturer for many aspects of learning and teaching. This was supported by the findings acquired from the graded goal sheets of the student-teachers. They were observed to assume responsibility for setting goals, planning, managing and monitoring their own learning through the portfolio process. Considering the evidence indicating the student-teachers' attribution of achieving more than half of the goals they had set to a certain degree to the portfolio process, it could be said that they were given ownership of and responsibility for their own learning (Mansvelder-Longayroux, Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2007).

The findings related to abilities illustrated not as many changes as those identified in taking responsibilities. The student-teachers perceived themselves as "Good" and "Very good" at almost all items related to abilities at the beginning. This perception shifted towards "OK" and "Good" later on. More importantly, the number of student-teachers who viewed themselves to be "Very good" at some aspects of learning and teaching decreased. This may be attributed to the fact that they became much more aware of their strengths and weaknesses as a result of different learning experiences during this process. Parallel to these findings, results from a case study conducted in Japan in order to develop autonomy in a portfolio-oriented English class at a senior high school conducted by Nakayama (2010) showed that students also reported change in themselves as knowing what they still need to learn, seeing their progress in learning, and stimulating their participation in learning.

Another set of findings more qualitative in nature revealed that various learning experiences envisaged in the portfolio development contributed to the enhancement of student-teachers' awareness of different aspects of learning and teaching. In this context, the portfolio process student-teachers went through provided them with more insight into the

development of self-awareness than subject matter awareness, and teaching process awareness, which is desirable in an autonomous learning environment. Mansvelder-Longayroux, Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2007) emphasise that the portfolio process helps learners to work on their own learning process and that it is this dynamic side of the portfolio which allows for the interplay between reflection on the learning process and the learning process itself. In this study, reflection was accommodated at almost all stages of the learning process which the student-teachers were involved or, rather, made to be involved in. From their remarks, it seems clear that they developed three types of awareness:

- Self-awareness
- Subject matter awareness, and
- Teaching process awareness.

There is evidence indicating that the following characteristics of the portfolio process helped them in this process: their own initiative to determine the strengths and weaknesses and accordingly plan goals for learning, tutorials with the course lecturer and discussion with peers, and the portfolio artefacts from both the student-teachers themselves (e.g. sources to read, lesson plans and activities, reflection reports) and from others (e.g. self and peer assessment sheets). This finding seems to be in agreement with Nakayama's (2010) findings which showed that the portfolio work conducted led learners to take control over their independent learning through developing their capacity for reflection and self-assessment, thus making them more autonomous.

The results also indicate that student-teachers' perceptions of their experience in the use of portfolios were positive. This was evidenced by their remarks acquired from the qualitative data. Like many others, Richards and Farrell (2005) accentuate the potential role of portfolios in developing learners' awareness of the learning process. One of the remarkable findings related to this is that the portfolios that the student-teachers developed put them in the centre of the learning process in what Richards and Farrell (2005, p.13) call "self-directed learning" whereby responsibility for personal and professional development shifted from the lecturer to the student-teachers themselves, where the lecturer acts as a facilitator.

The present study is not without limitations. Firstly, it is limited to 21 student-teachers. Given this small sample size and context-dependency of the concept of learner autonomy, as argued previously, the researcher is aware that the results might be special to the specific situation and that it is necessary to be careful in drawing our conclusions. Collecting more data from more participants would benefit the inquiry. In addition, since the portfolios were part of the course the student teachers might have had a tendency to report on the process favourably. To minimise such bias, however, the student teachers were informed at the beginning of the course that they would be engaged in self and peer-assessment and that this assessment would be taken into account by their lecturer.

This study does not mean to suggest that "developing an autonomy culture *particularly* (italics added) in contexts previously dominated by traditional pedagogy" (Little, 2004, p.2) is an easy task. Research has shown that once student-teachers leave the teacher education programmes they find it very difficult to put into practice what they have been taught if that practice conflicts with the dominant approach in the classroom (Hascher, Cocard, & Moser, 2004). The student teachers in this study gained in autonomy, yet there is no guarantee that they would be able to maintain this approach in the real world. Drawing on what McKinney (1998, p. 86) convincingly claims that "...students who create their own portfolios in teacher preparation programs may be more receptive to implementing them once they enter the K-12 arena," further study is warranted to follow-up the student teachers participated in this study to find out if this is the case, i.e. if they are explicitly linked to the promotion of a pedagogy for learner autonomy in their classrooms. Future research should



also investigate what sorts of opportunities are provided for these prospective teachers in their schools to realise student ownership in learning.

Yet, some essential implications may still be drawn from this particular set of findings. One of the issues that emerge from these findings is about the education system in the local context of this study. The new English language curriculum in Turkey requires teachers to assess student performance via alternative assessment techniques. Therefore, language teacher education programs should make use of such assessment tools as portfolios both to assess and monitor learning at a much earlier stage in order to provide student-teachers with more insight into the development of self-awareness, subject matter awareness, and teaching process awareness. Then the teachers of English are able to guide their students in the process of assessment more effectively as they have already experienced the process themselves.

Another implication is for the wider world of language teacher education. If strong results such as those presented in this study are linked to national policymakers and curriculum developers of teacher education programmes, a change of disposition will be needed by both groups as to what the whole idea of teaching and learning entails. This requires changes not only in learners, but also in teachers - namely in their awareness, knowledge and skills - in order to provide learners with an awareness of language and language learning through learner-centred tasks (Mariani, 1992). Therefore, pre-service language teacher education programs should incorporate the elements of autonomous learning to avoid “external direction of the learning process, which is receptive, even consumerist in character” in many countries (van Esch, Schalkwijk, Elsen, & Setz, 1999, p.17). This study seems to prove that the use of portfolios can facilitate this process by making provision for the formation of articulate, self-directed and well-prepared student-teachers.

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