# EFL Teachers' Autonomy Supportive Practices for Out-of-Class Language Learning

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## Abstract

Autonomy support is a recently defined role for teachers, and they are expected to help learners engage in autonomous out-of-class learning. With a focus on English language learning outside the classroom, this study intended to uncover English as a foreign language teachers' practices related to autonomy support and to discuss the challenges faced by the teachers in this process. Eleven teachers working at the tertiary level at a state university in Turkey were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in three sessions to find out the extent to which the teachers help their learners become autonomous. The findings revealed that the teachers perform many autonomy-supportive behaviors which are feasible in language classrooms such as motivating students, giving language advice and promoting peer collaboration. In doing this, the teachers utilize five different support mechanisms: affective, resource, capacity, technology, and social support. On the other hand, the findings uncovered such constraints as crowded classes, overloaded curriculum, and low learner motivation. These challenges were perceived as barriers hampering teachers' efforts for autonomy support. This study highlights the feasibility of creating an autonomy-supportive language learning environment and provides implications for teachers of English as a Foreign Language.


*Keywords*: autonomy support, learner autonomy, learning, out-of-class language, teacher, technology

## Introduction

Recent research has stressed the interconnectedness of technology use and out-of-class autonomous language learning and shed light on various qualifications required for autonomous language learning with technology (Lai, 2017; Reinders & Hubbard, 2013; Reinders & White, 2016; Richards, 2015). With reference to these qualifications, a vast amount of research has investigated the nature of learners' out-of-class learning experiences and their readiness for autonomous language learning with technology (for example Gonulal, 2019; Lai & Gu, 2011). The literature concluded that most language learners lack the required qualifications, which are found to be best acquired with teacher support (Lai, 2015a, 2015b; Lai, Yeung, & Hu, 2016). However, despite the importance of the teachers' role in autonomy support, to date relatively little work has focused on teachers' practices supporting autonomous learning out-of-the class. Previous research has provided invaluable insights about teacher perceptions of and attitudes toward autonomy support, and about the challenges faced by language teachers (e.g., Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Nakata, 2011). One common conclusion from this prior research is that a wide gap exists between the desirability and feasibility of autonomy support in language classrooms. However, the literature lacks focus on the feasibility of autonomy support and is limited to provide a detailed account of teacher' related practices. To this end, the current study aimed to explore teachers' autonomy-supportive practices at the tertiary level, and investigated the feasibility of autonomy support in language classrooms.

## Literature Review

Learner autonomy refers to the learners' capacity to take control of their learning (Benson, 2011). According to Holec (1988, as cited in Huang & Benson, 2013), learners need to have the ability, willingness, and freedom to be autonomous in their learning. Firstly, the ability refers to metacognitive (learning management skills) and metalinguistic skills (the knowledge of the target language to control the learning). Thus, autonomous learners create a personal agenda "which sets up directions in the planning, pacing, monitoring, and evaluating the learning process" (Chan, 2000, p.75). Secondly, autonomous learners should be motivated intrinsically or instrumentally to take responsibility for their learning (Breen & Mann, 1997). Lastly, they need to be permitted to act independently by the significant agents in this process as teachers, and to have convenient learning situations in which learners have a degree of independence to control their learning (Huang & Benson, 2013).

Out-of-class language learning is defined as an engagement in various language learning activities undertaken beyond the confines of formal learning institutions (Benson, 2011; Richards, 2015). This form of language learning is assumed to create a convenient learning situation for language learners without teacher interference. Out-of-class learning environments may have a potential for providing situational freedom in which willing language learners can practice and develop their metacognitive abilities. Thus, it has often been related to the development of learner autonomy and argued to be closely intertwined with autonomous language learning (Benson & Reinders, 2011). In other words, out-of-class learning may serve as a platform by which learners can take full control of their learning in a teacher-independent environment, and thus be an autonomous language learner.

In this respect Benson's autonomy definition (2011) focuses on capacity, and argues that autonomy is not a personal attribute of a learner but rather a feature that can be developed in the learning process. For the development of this capacity, there are several other features that language learners also need to have. First and foremost, learners should be willing to take

responsibility for their learning (Chan et al., 2002; Lai & Gu, 2011). Secondly, they should have independence and metacognitive skills to manage learning procedures (Lai, 2017). Additionally, when learners use technology for their out-of-class language learning, they also need to be aware of the potential of technology and know to how to locate, select, and use appropriate technological resources (Castellano et al., 2011; Lai et al., 2016). Similarly, Bailly (2011) also proposes three conditions for language learners to display autonomous skills: motivation (willingness), learning resources (appropriate language learning tools), and learning skills (capacity for learning management).

Researchers have paid growing attention to the interconnectedness of learner autonomy and out-of-class language learning (Benson & Reinders, 2011). The research shows that technology use is a significant predictor of autonomous out-of-class language learning (Reinders & White, 2016; Richards, 2015). In an influential work, Lai and Gu (2011) investigated 279 language learners' out-of-class language learning practices with technology. They found that out-of-class language learning is much more complicated than expected. For example, while language learners actively use technology for language learning, their technology use shows variations. In other words, learners use technology selectively due to such reasons as language proficiency, lack of knowledge about potential technological resources, and limited knowledge about how to access technological learning materials. This study by Lai and Gu showed the significance of the skills needed for autonomous language learning with technology such as making informed learning decisions according to their learning styles, preferences, needs and goals (Chik, 2014), or knowing how to control "the time, the pace, the path to the goal, and the measurement of success" (Healey, 1999, p.400). Reinders and Hubbard (2013) argued that learners need some skills to cope with the constraints of technology in the language learning process. Autonomous language learners need to choose appropriate language learning materials in accordance with their levels and learning goals. In the same vein, they are supposed to make informed decisions among a vast number of choices. Moreover, learners need to distinguish the most useful forms of interaction on platforms that involve social interaction. Lastly, learners are also supposed to have a critical capacity to identify what information is relevant or not for their learning.

The work by Lai and Gu (2011) has led to further research intended to uncover the complex nature of learners' out-of-class language learning with technology (for example Çelik et al., 2012; Dincer, 2020; Şahin Kızıl & Savran, 2018; Trinder, 2017). One common conclusion of these studies is that most language learners are far from being autonomous since they lack the required skills. Moreover, learners have a high expectancy of their teachers to guide them on how to locate, select, and use technological resources for language learning purposes. Thus, these learners need to be supported to manage their out-of-class language learning with technology (Lai et al., 2016). Importantly, teachers have been found to be a vital stakeholder to provide this support, and a new role has consequently been assigned to the teachers: "autonomy-supportive teacher" (Lai et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2015; Reinders & Hubbard, 2013).

Given the research evidence about the importance of the teachers' autonomy-supportive role, concerns have been raised about whether teachers can handle this prominent workload, and a growing body of research has provided insights into teachers' related perceptions and practices for autonomy support (for example Alhaysony, 2016; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Nakata, 2011; Wichayathian & Reinders, 2018). The most consistent finding from this research is that teachers have indicated a strong preference for autonomous language learning and for involving the learners in the decision-making process in their teaching since it is believed to be conducive to their students' language learning (Al Asmari, 2013; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012;

Wichayathian & Reinders, 2018). However, the teachers questioned the feasibility of autonomy-support in their current teaching environments due to reasons such as learners' lack of motivation, their dependence on teachers, their unwillingness to take responsibility, lack of class time and curriculum restrictions. These studies collectively indicated that there is a wide gap between the desirability and feasibility of autonomy support even though teachers expressed their desires for it and listed some autonomy-supportive practices in their classes such as raising students' awareness about the importance of autonomous out-of-class language learning and encouraging independent work in and out-of-class (Haji-Othman & Wood, 2016; Nakata, 2011; Yunus & Arshad, 2014). Some research studies also raised concerns about teachers' readiness for their recently defined autonomy-supportive role. They argued that teachers should be autonomous first and understand the pertaining pedagogy and skills before autonomous learning initiatives are initiated in the classroom (for example Al Asmari, 2013; Reinders & Balcikanli, 2011).

Previous work surveying teachers' related perceptions and practices found that teachers are aware of the significance of learner autonomy and desire to promote it among their students; however, they are skeptical about its feasibility in practice due to a range of challenges. With reference to the gap between the desirability and feasibility of learner autonomy support, it is clear that despite significant progress in uncovering teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy and these challenges, the literature is still too limited to provide a clear picture of how feasible teachers' autonomy-support actually is. It is a fact that out-of-class language learning is complex in nature, and a bulk of research has been conducted to uncover the learners' practices so far. However, the investigation of teachers' practices to support autonomous language learning out-of-the class still lacks focus in research. Thus, it merits further investigation to enhance our understanding of the complex nature of autonomy support with technology, and this current study has been designed to provide insights into the feasibility of autonomy support and show how teachers support their students' autonomous out-of-class language learning. To this end, this study seeks to uncover English language teachers' current practices pertinent to autonomy support and the challenges perceived by the teachers in this procedure.

## Method

### Research Setting and Participants

The research setting of the study is a foreign languages school of a state university in Turkey. The foreign languages school provides foundational English courses to English-based departments such as civil aviation, engineering, and pharmacy. The classes are conducted either face-to-face or online. It is also of importance for this study that the university has a small library in which there is a limited number of language learning materials and has no self-access center. Thus, the language teachers serve as the only means of providing support for learners' out-of-class autonomous language learning.

Eleven EFL instructors (four females, seven males) participated in this study. While the least experienced instructor worked for four years, the two most experienced instructors had 30-years-experience in the field. Moreover, most of the participants continued their post-graduate education in different departments related to English language such as English language teaching (ELT), English language and literature, and translation and interpretation. Table 1 presents the details of the participants' demographic information and interview durations.

Table 1: Participant demographic details and interview durations

| Participant | Gender | Age | Years of Experience | Graduation (Department) | The Highest degree | Interview Duration (In minutes) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P1 | M | 35 | 12 | ELT | MA | 43,12’ |
| P2 | F | 32 | 7 | ELT | Ph.D. (Student) | 57,61’ |
| P3 | F | 29 | 6 | ELT | MA (Student) | 53,03’ |
| P4 | M | 32 | 8 | ELL | Ph.D. (Student) | 40,42’ |
| P5 | M | 56 | 30 | ELT | Bachelor | 80,04’ |
| P6 | M | 32 | 8 | ELT | MA (Student) | 46,58 |
| P7 | F | 28 | 4 | T&I | MA | 58,47’ |
| P8 | F | 30 | 6 | ELT | Ph.D. (Student) | 52,23’ |
| P9 | M | 32 | 8 | ELT | MA (Student) | 46,58 |
| P10 | M | 31 | 6 | ELL | MA | 50,00’ |
| P11 | M | 54 | 30 | ELT | MA | 26,37’ |

Note: F=Female; M=Male; T&I=Translation and Interpretation; ELL=English Language and Literature; ELT=English Language and Teaching; MA=Master’s degree; PhD=Doctor of Philosophy, LTC=Language Teaching Certificate.
*He was a visiting teacher from a foreign country.

## Data Collection and Analysis

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection instrument in this study. An interview guide was created based on the existing literature (Lai, 2015a; Lai et al., 2016; Nakata, 2011) to examine teachers’ autonomy-supportive practices. To ensure the credibility of the guide, two experts in the field reviewed it. Then, the study was piloted with one instructor, and later the guide was revised accordingly. The interviews were conducted in either Turkish or English, depending on the participants’ preference. Signed informed consent forms protected the rights of the participants. The interview sessions were organized in line with the design of Dolbeare and Schuman’s three series of interviews (Schuman, 1982, as cited in Seidman, 2006). In the first session, the researchers aimed to become familiar with the context of the study and the participants, and to build a knowledge base for the following interview sessions. In the next session, the questions elicited the participants’ practices for promoting learner autonomy. In the last session, the researchers intended to establish a link between technology and learner autonomy and to induce the participants’ related experiences and reflections on them. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed after each session to prepare additional follow-up questions for the following session. Thus, the researchers got the chance to elicit more in-depth elaborations on the practices mentioned previously.

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and then analyzed according to the steps of theoretical thematical analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). After iterative readings of the data, the researchers listed the initial codes. In the first phase, they divided the codes into two categories: autonomy-supportive and non-autonomy supportive teacher behaviors. Then, they focused on autonomy-supportive codes including motivation, language advising, learner involvement, promoting cooperation, language learning strategies. Finally, they sorted these codes into five themes: affective, resource, capacity, technology, and social. While constructing the themes, the existing literature was used to name the themes (Bailly, 2011;

Dörnyei, 2001; Lai et al., 2016). Later, two experts in the field coded 25% of the data to enhance the dependability and conformability of the study (Miles et al., 2014). Lastly, the coding results of all the coders were compared and discussed. After the intercoder discussion, the researchers revised the codes and finalized the themes. In the presentation of the analysis, the themes and their contents were illustrated in tables. Sample excerpts were also provided to support the research findings. Each participant was distinguished with a number (for example, P1=Participant 1) to protect their anonymity.

## Findings

### EFL Teachers' Autonomy-Supportive Practices

Thematic analysis of interviews reveals that the participants perform a variety of autonomy-supportive practices. Five themes related to teachers' autonomy-supportive practices emerged as a result of the data analysis. Table 2 illustrates the themes and summarizes the content of each theme.

Table 2: Description of the teachers' autonomy-supportive practices

| Themes | Content |
|---|---|
| Affective support | *Increase language learning motivation and lower affective barriers for language learning* |
| Resource support | *Help learners find appropriate learning resources and suggesting language materials* |
| Capacity support | *Help learners to manage and take the responsibility for their learning* |
| Technology support | *Guide learners about how to use technology for language learning* |
| Social support | *Promote cooperation among the language learners* |

**Affective support.** All the participants consider learner motivation one of the primary conditions for learner autonomy. Accordingly, they give affective support to the learners using different strategies parallel with Dörnyei's (2001) suggestions to generate, maintain and protect motivation in language classrooms. They attempt to increase the learners' goal-orientedness (establishing learning goals) by verbal encouragement, use of interesting technological language learning tools, and try to increase learners' self-confidence.

In terms of motivation, almost all the participants claim that they try to increase the learners' goal-orientedness by introducing study-abroad chances. For instance, P8 said that she introduces mobility/study abroad programs at the beginning of each year. *"Students realize how important English learning is to be accepted for Erasmus Program".* P2 also uses study abroad programs for the same purpose, and she claimed that *"students set their learning goals in this way".* Moreover, the participants not only motivate their students by verbal encouragement, but also use technological tools to make language learning more attractive. They believe technology encourages students to learn English and engages all the students in the class. They usually make use of educational tools and games to enhance their instruction. For example, many participants make use of *Kahoot* (a free game-based digital learning platform) to liven up their classes.

Many participants also underscore the importance of self-confidence in foreign language learning. Because the learners perceive English as too challenging to learn and get demotivated by this case, the teachers attempt to boost their self-esteem using many strategies. For instance,

P1 uses *Simple Wikipedia* on which the sentences are so simple that the learners think they can understand English very well and get motivated. In P1's own words, *"I just copy a text from there and give it to students as translation homework. Because it is simple English, they think they can do it. It keeps them motivated".*

**Resource support.** The participants provide the learners with language resources and guidance about how to use those materials. However, the willingness of learners qualifies how effectively they use those resources. Almost all the participants were aware of this factor and stated that the learners' willingness to learn English motivates them to put much more effort into helping them. For instance, P3 indicated, *"I do my best to help demanding learners, but I can't say I spend much time on those not interested in learning".*

Most of the participants take the role of a language advisor and provide learners with language learning resources in line with their goals. Underlining the importance of the learners' needs and interests, P4 said, *"If a student wants some techniques for getting a high score from an exam, I lead him to study on those techniques by recommending some resources".* P4 also added that *"But the others just want to learn spoken English, and I also lead them to speaking clubs which are available at the university".*

**Capacity support.** Compared to the other two teacher autonomy-supportive practices, teachers' efforts to help learners to manage their learning (for example identifying needs, planning, monitoring, and evaluating the learning process) is more limited. Many participants fall short of promoting learners' capacity to maintain and sustain their learning. However, a few participants perform some practices which can be considered potential feasible steps for capacity support. For example, the teachers share learning strategies based on their own learning experiences and pedagogical knowledge. P9 observes his role as a guide in the class. He spends time on how to learn a foreign language, how to improve language learning skills and how to speak English fluently. He thinks explaining all the alternatives to learn a language helps learners become more independent in their learning.

The participants also expressed that setting goals is crucial for learners to be autonomous language learners. They help their students to set their goals. Also, in some instances, they try to persuade them English is vital. For example, P8 said that their students come to class without any learning goals because they always fail through their language education. She noted, "*I show something valuable to learn a foreign language in the first session of the semester and try to persuade them to set learning goals accordingly*".

A few participants pointed out the importance of giving the syllabus beforehand to raise learners' awareness of monitoring and evaluating their learning. They expressed that the learners know what they will learn and see throughout the semester. On this issue, P2 stated, "*I believe whatever we [teachers] teach, we should tell them [students] 'at the end of this lesson, you can gain these skills to help them monitor their learning*". P2 further noted the importance of sharing responsibilities with the students. She let her students be responsible for their learning with the flipped classroom method and helped students think, "*I should study this on my own rather than waiting for the teacher to expose these*".

**Technology support.** The findings showed that most participants support autonomous language learning with technology in several ways. For this purpose, they use the technology itself in class, teach how to use technology for language learning and verbally recommend educational technology tools. The findings also suggest that teachers' technology use in class

affects learners' out-of-class technology use.

Most of the teachers expressed the importance of technology for language learning and listed how they use different strategies to promote independent learning with technology. For instance, P5 suggested some websites and mobile phone applications for self-study. Suggesting some websites as well, P10 demonstrated how he uses websites (e.g., https://busyteacher.org/) while preparing his lessons. Thus, he intends to raise the learners' awareness about how to select and use technological resources. Some participants also noted that they suggest some language learning websites and mobile phone applications for specific language learning skills such as *Busuu* and *Duolingo*. Another participant, P9, underlined the importance of need-oriented guidance and said, "*If a student's pronunciation is not very good, I offer them to listen to voice records or the TV or radio channels broadcasting in English*".

The participants also underscored the practicality of technology for language learning. They emphasized how easy to learn with technology in today's technological conditions. "*Everybody now has smartphones in their pockets so they can easily download and install language learning applications on their mobile phones and use them whenever and wherever they want*". Furthermore, P6 highlighted the new role of a language teacher in this technology-rich environment and stated, "*I always encourage [my students] that we [as teachers] are not needed anymore, because we have plenty of teachers on YouTube*". Therefore, he leads the learners to technological tools, applications and websites, and transmits the responsibility of learning to the learners themselves.

Many participants also claimed that their courses affect the learners' digital literacy and their technology use habits in a way. They gave several examples of their practices and how they affect the learners' technology use. P2 said that even though her class was not a technology teaching class, her tasks helped her students to learn a lot about computers and other digital devices. Similarly, P3 shared her related experiences and stated that she was using a TV series in her classes and said, "*My students really liked to learn English from a TV series, and many of them continued to English series and movies to learn English*". Thus, what she did in class affected the learners' out-of-class learning. P8 also added how the learners were affected by way of her teaching. "*Some students didn't know what Blog is. Today they follow blogs in English*".

**Social support.** Most of the participants promote cooperation among learners, both inside and outside the class. They believe in the usefulness of peer/group learning and take advantage of peer feedback in class. For instance, P8 recounted that she makes use of peer feedback in the writing sessions and indicated its effectiveness. "*They may not be able to find their mistakes but when they see the same mistake in their peers' paper, they can easily see and correct it*". While many participants claimed to support peer feedback/learning for in-class activities, some of them asserted their preference for out-of-class collaboration. They explained the effectiveness of peer learning outside the class and why they make use of expert-novice matching. P4 reported that low-achieving students getting help from high-achievers could get higher scores because they learn different things from each friend before the exams. P10 also further added that "*I cannot help outside the classroom all the time and I match academically weak and successful students to complete out-of-school activities and assignments together*". Besides this, he transfers the responsibility of the learning to the learners and encourages them to learn cooperatively.

**Perceived Constraints Faced by Autonomy-Supportive Teachers**

The participants focused on a lot of constraints while describing how they support learners' out-of-class autonomous language learning. The responses showed that the constraints are based on two factors: institution and learner. Under the constraints theme, two sub-themes emerged and Table 3 presents the sub-themes and summarizes their content.

Table 3: Description of the constraints perceived by teachers

| Sub-themes | Content |
|---|---|
| Institution-based constraints | *crowded classes, poor technological infrastructure, overloaded curriculum and limited class time* |
| Learner-based constraints | *low motivation and teacher-directed learning culture* |

**Institution-based constraints.** The most oft-repeated institutional problem was crowded classes. The teachers stated that they fall short of providing enough support for identifying learners' strengths and weaknesses, promoting cooperation among learners, and involving them in decision-making in crowded classes. For example, P7, who used to give attention to each student in small classes, stated that she does not have enough time and energy to pay attention to every learner anymore. "*I do not have time to observe and help all my students now*". Instead, she supports the enthusiastic students who demand help to continue study English out-of-the class.

The findings, in general, suggest that the language teachers do integrate technology into their classes and support learners with technological tools for their out-of-class language learning. However, the teachers have problems with the poor technological infrastructure of the classrooms. P9 stated, "*there is only one computer, and only the teacher can use it*". While this problem hampers technology integration to support learning in class, it also leads to a teacher-directed classroom atmosphere where all the responsibility of teaching is on teachers. Thus, students become passive information receivers.

Another major issue was the challenge of getting the objectives of the curriculum done in time, which is the workload of the teachers in a limited period. Three participants expressed that they had so many other things to do in the class apart from helping students to be autonomous language learners. Therefore, there should be another department, a language advising center, to help learners for their out-of-class language learning. P1 recounted that "*because our job is to teach a foreign language, we need to do it. But I think there must be another department at the university*". It seems evident from the responses that a fixed curriculum poses a problem for the participants; either they mention it or not. The participants spend time helping learners in their free time, but in class, they need to manage their time to complete the curriculum requirements.

**Learner-based constraints.** The participants reported that few students wish to learn English, and the rest only complete course requirements. For instance, P11 stated that "*My students tell me they just want to pass the class, it doesn't matter to learn English or not*". Some participants also face some discouraging students' behaviors or statements, as can be seen in P4's experience: "*The majority of students want me to add extra 5 points to their grades instead of advising about how to learn English better*".

The learners' learning culture also affects their language learning habits, beliefs, dispositions,

and values. Learners bring their past learning habits to the current system, and it becomes a challenge to change them. Even if the teachers try to establish a totally new language learning environment, they have difficulty to adapt to the recent changes. For instance, P2 changed her teaching method by using a different approach, flipped learning. However, it was challenging for her to make students motivated. "*The students are used to teacher-directed and spoon-fed way of learning and studying for only the exams not for their development since the very early stages of their education*". So that she described her experience as a challenge and used the word "force" to define her efforts to make them study in a new way. She also expressed that even if her students continuously complain about the conventional language teaching methods, when they face some difficulties in the new way of learning, they want to go back to the past system.

## Discussion

This study investigated English language teachers' autonomy-supportive practices and revealed constraints underlying the barriers to autonomy-support. The data were collected qualitatively with semi-structured interviews. The findings showed that the teachers utilized a variety of support mechanisms. Even though their individual practices look small steps, their current practices create a promising picture for the feasibility of autonomy support in foreign language classes.

In line with Bailly's (2011) proposal for autonomous language learning with technology (i.e., willingness, learning resources, and learning skills), the teachers utilize affective, resource and capacity support. Teachers attempt to increase their students' language learning motivation; help learners find appropriate learning resources and suggest language materials; help learners manage and take the responsibility of their learning. The thematic analysis further revealed two other autonomy-supportive practices, namely technology and social support, which are also pivotal for learners' autonomous language learning. In other words, teachers guide their students about how to use technology for language learning and promote cooperation among learners. However, teachers face institutional and learner-based constraints hampering their efforts for autonomy support.

Lai et al. (2016) revealed that learners need teacher help for selecting appropriate language learning materials for their out-of-class learning. Moreover, many language learners are not aware of the potentials of technology and cannot also use technology for language learning even though they are digital natives (Çelik et al., 2012; Lai & Gu, 2011). Thus, teachers should take the role of an advisor and a guide to help them (Wichayathian & Reinders, 2018). Similarly, the teachers in this study believe they should take the role of a language advisor for learners' out-of-class language learning and a guide for resource selection (Gardner & Miller, 2011; Morrison, 2008). Parallel to this assertion, the teachers in this study expressed their willingness to support learners' autonomous learning and reported their practices for this aim. They use and model various language learning technologies in their classes; give technical training on how to use them for language learning purposes and recommend technological tools for out-of-class language learning. On the other hand, they tend to help willing students in terms of resource support, rather than wasting time and energy for unmotivated students. The teachers' in-class technology use also affects learners' out-of-school technology use. Concurring with various prior research studies (Lai, 2015a, 2015b; Lai & Gu, 2011), the participants' efforts were claimed to enhance the quality of the learners' technology use for language learning and to increase their digital competence. Thus, those practices might have a positive impact on learners' autonomous language learning with technology.

It is widely argued in the literature that learners' willingness to take the responsibility of their learning is of importance for out-of-class language learning and the development of autonomy (Dörnyei, 2001; Huang & Benson, 2013; Reinders, 2010; Zimmerman, 2011). In accordance with this, the teachers in this study consider learner motivation one of the primary conditions for successful language learning and the development of learner autonomy, as well. They provide affective support using different strategies, as proposed by Dörnyei (2001). The teachers attempt to increase learners' goal-orientedness, raise their self-confidence in language learning, and use technology to make language learning more enjoyable. However, the teachers in this study expressed that many students are not entirely motivated to learn English autonomously. This finding reflects various studies which conclude that the learners' unwillingness is one of the challenges in the development of learner autonomy (for example Alhaysony, 2016; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Okay & Balçıkanlı, 2017).

Another major finding of this study was that the teachers face many constraints, as found in various studies from different contexts. The teachers addressed crowded classes (Alibakhshi, 2015), poor technological infrastructure (Park & Son, 2009), and overloaded curriculum (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Wichayathian & Reinders, 2018) as the issues which hamper their autonomy-supportive practices. Furthermore, the teachers identified their students as reluctant to learn English autonomously (Al Asmari, 2013; Chan et al., 2002; Farahani, 2014; Yunus & Arshad, 2014). The teachers further indicated the learners' teacher-centered learning culture, which affects the learners' learning habits, beliefs, dispositions, and values. This issue might be connected to the Turkish education system in which "the authority is not shared; individuality and creativity are less encouraged" (Balcikanli, 2010, p.99). Because of students' limited agency, they are expected to resist changing and taking control of their learning.

## Conclusion

This current study has provided insights into how English language teachers working at the tertiary level in a state university in Turkey support their students' out-of-class autonomous language learning and the challenges in this procedure. The study revealed significant implications for teachers. Given that teachers are supposed to create an autonomy-supportive learning environment in their classes, they could initiate changes in their routines. One of these changes could be to learn more about the learners' autonomy levels and technology competence by conducting simple surveys at the beginning of each semester. Therefore, they can redesign their classes and share their responsibilities based on the learners' readiness for autonomous language learning. Another point is that teachers can inform learners of the procedure of their material preparation and show how they find and prepare teaching materials in line with their objectives in the classroom. In this way, learners could be more aware of how they can select appropriate learning resources and manage their own learning out-of-the class. What is more, the more teachers know about language learning technologies, the more they tune into supporting learners for out-of-class learning. Given that, teachers can participate in in-service teacher training programs to keep up with the new technological advancements and current pedagogical skills needed for teaching language learners of 21st century.

This study is not without limitations. The data were collected with a single data collection instrument, semi-structured interviews, which is based on the participants' self-report. This situation is potentially susceptible to "social desirability bias" (Grimm, 2010). Namely, the participants might have described their practices as better and more socially desirable than their actual state. Observation and documentation would be useful to get a more comprehensible overview of teachers' related practices. Another limitation was that the study included a small

cohort of teachers working at the tertiary level, and the findings may not apply to language teachers in other contexts.

While discussing the findings, the teachers' demographic details were not considered due to the small sample size. However, some differences were observed in the perceptions and practices of the teachers with different educational backgrounds and the lengths of teaching experience. For example, the teachers who were Ph.D. candidates were more autonomy-supportive. Also, the younger teachers were more inclined to integrate technology than the older ones. As such, teachers' demographic variables could be studied in relation to autonomy support to see whether such variables make any significant differences in their pedagogical practices.

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