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## **Learner Autonomy In Language Learning: Student Teachers' Beliefs**

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*Abstract: This paper aims to investigate student teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy in the Turkish educational context. In a study in the ELT Department, Gazi University, a questionnaire developed by Camilleri (1997) was administered to 112 student teachers. Twenty volunteer student teachers were interviewed in groups to identify their further general attitudes towards learner autonomy. The overall study findings indicate that student teachers are positive towards the adoption of learner autonomy principles. Most student teachers, however, do not want their future students to take part in the decision making process concerning the time and place of the course and the textbooks to be followed. In light of the findings, teacher educators are recommended to encourage their student teachers to engage in out-of-class tasks; to involve them in decision-making on the learning/teaching processes and to employ portfolios and teacher logs for the development of practical knowledge and thinking operations.*

### **Introduction**

Learner autonomy through a focus on learner reflection and taking responsibility for one's own learning processes has become a central concern in the recent history of language teaching (Holec, 1981; Dickinson, 1987; Holec, 1988; Little, 1991; Dam, 1995; Smith, 2000; Benson, 2001; Palfreyman and Smith, 2003; Lamb and Reinders, 2006; Benson, 2007; Little, 2007; Lamb and Reinders, 2007; Barfield and Brown, 2007; Murphy, 2008; Burkert and Schwienhorst, 2008; Little, 2009). However, in-service language teachers struggle with the ways to promote learner autonomy or at least to encourage the idea of autonomy in language classrooms (Dickinson, 1992; Nunan, 1997; Littlewood, 1997; Brajcich, 2000; Hurd, Beaven and Ortega, 2001). Promoting learner autonomy refers to encouraging students "to determine the 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" (Holec, 1981, p. 3). Through this process, eventually, the autonomous learner establishes "a personal agenda for learning" (Little, 1994; Chan, 2003) by setting up directions in the planning, pacing, monitoring and evaluating the learning process.

Learner autonomy is based on the idea that if students are involved in decision making processes regarding their own language competence, "they are likely to be more enthusiastic about learning" (Littlejohn, 1985, p. 258) and learning can be more focused and purposeful for them (Little, 1991; Dam, 1995; Camilleri, 1997; Chan,

2001; 2003). Additionally, the notion that “learners have the power and right to learn for themselves” (Smith, 2008, p. 2) is seen as an essential aspect for learner autonomy. There is evidence in research studies to support the claim that “increasing the level of learner control will increase the level of self-determination, thereby increasing overall motivation in the development of learner autonomy” (Chan 2001, p. 506). Thus, in order to contribute to the development of learner autonomy in language classrooms, it is vital that students be involved in making decision about their own learning. There is an important role for teachers in this process since ‘the ability to behave autonomously for students is dependent upon their teacher creating a classroom culture where autonomy is accepted’ (Barfield et al. 2001, p. 3)

It is unrealistic to expect teachers to develop a sense of autonomy unless they have themselves experienced teacher training, where an exploratory and evaluative approach to learning and teaching have been key elements (Little 1995; Castle 2006; Marcosa and Tilemab 2006; Dam 2007; Burkert and Schwienhorst 2008). De Vries and Kohlberg (1987, p. 380) give a picture of what an autonomous teacher looks like.

The autonomous constructivist teacher knows not only what to do, but why. She has a solid network of convictions that are both practical and theoretical. The autonomous teacher can think about how children are thinking and at the same time think about how to intervene to promote the constructive culture. Autonomous teachers do not just accept uncritically what curriculum specialists give them. They think about whether they agree with what is suggested. They take responsibility for the education they are offering children (p. 380).

Language teachers without any autonomy-oriented training may experience difficulties in creating such a classroom culture. Hence, the earlier language teachers who are in support of the principles of autonomous learning are made aware of the importance and necessity of learner autonomy in their initial teacher training, the more easily they will be able to implement this approach in their own future classrooms. Likewise, Little (1995), Tort-Moloney (1997), McGrath (2000), Smith (2000), Aoki and Hamakava (2003), Huang (2005), Sert (2006), Viera (2007), Smith and Erdoğan (2007) and Burkert and Schwienhorst (2008) provide evidence that teachers who themselves are not autonomous language learners may have a negative influence on the development of autonomy in their students. According to Little (1995, p. 175), learner autonomy depends on teacher autonomy in two senses:

it is unreasonable to expect teachers to foster the growth of autonomy in their learners if they themselves do not know what it is to be an autonomous learner.

In determining the initiatives they take in their classrooms, teachers must be able to apply to their teaching those same reflective and self-managing processes that they apply to their learning (p. 175).

On this basis, teachers need to experience autonomous skills in their initial teacher training, so they will be able to take a positive stance towards the development of learner autonomy in their own teaching and their students can take charge of their own learning following the models of their teachers. Work on learner autonomy in language learning focuses not only on out-of-class learning (Holec, 1981; Benson; 2001), but also classroom practice (Little, 1991; Dam, 1995). As mentioned above, language teachers have a crucial role to play in fostering learner autonomy by taking both out-of-class and classroom perspectives. Thus, if our target is to lead our student teachers to become autonomous teachers, an understanding of

student teachers' perspectives on learner autonomy while they are being trained to be teachers would provide valuable information for teacher educators.

### **Research Questions**

- 1- How do English language student teachers view learner autonomy in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts in Turkey?
- 2- What learner autonomy principles do they consider more important than others?

### **Methodology**

This paper reports on a survey on learner autonomy conducted with a group of student-teachers at Gazi University, Turkey, in 2009. The objectives were to assess student-teachers' perspectives on learner autonomy, the areas of learner autonomy student-teachers consider important, and the constraints they view as obstacles to deployment of learner autonomy. The findings may help develop guidelines for teacher educators regarding how to overcome barriers in students' minds towards learner autonomy.

The study used a questionnaire survey, which was designed to gather the student teachers' perspectives in such areas as the involvement of students in classroom management, homework tasks, selecting materials and so on. It involved a survey of 112 undergraduates (75 females and 37 males) at Gazi University in the ELT Department, where they were senior students when the questionnaire was administered. The English Language Teaching Department offers the students a four-year program on teaching English as a foreign language. The first year of the program mainly focuses on teaching language skills and grammar to students, while the second year of the program includes methodology classes based on how to teach the English language like Approaches in ELT, Methodology in the Area of Specialization I, Methodology in the Area of Specialization II, Teaching Foreign Language to Children, Testing and Evaluation in English. Further, students in this program are required to take applied courses such as School Experience and Teaching Practice and students have the chance to put their theoretical knowledge into practice in the School Experience and Teaching Practice courses.

The questionnaire developed by Camilleri (1997) consists of 14 questions such as "How much should learners be involved in decisions on classroom management?" It was first used in a study to investigate the language teachers' attitudes towards learner autonomy in a variety of countries including Malta, Slovenia, and Lithuania. Each question in the questionnaire has also sub-categories. In the case of classroom management, there are three sub-categories such as position of desks, seating of students, and discipline matters. This questionnaire has been widely addressed in a lot of research studies on learner autonomy to date (Camilleri, 1997; Özdere, 2005; Balçıkanlı, 2007). The questions are about learner autonomy principles which can be followed in foreign language classrooms and are about possible considerations concerning the implementation of these principles. Nunan (1996, p. 21) presents a picture of what an autonomous classroom looks like. He claims that, generally, in a non-autonomous classroom, the teacher or the institution makes all the decisions about what and when it will be taught. In contrast, in an autonomous classroom,

decisions regarding the content and classroom norms will be made with much reference to the students. In an autonomy-focused classroom, the teacher introduces a range of learning activities and tasks by taking the students' needs and interests into consideration as opposed to a non-autonomous classroom where students are exposed to the activities they are expected to perform. As for evaluation and assessment, classrooms which prioritize the development of autonomy allow the students to reflect on, assess and evaluate their own learning processes. Conversely, in non-autonomous classrooms, the assessment and evaluation part are structured in a traditional manner in a way that tests and exams are carried out. The questions of the survey aim to find out student-teachers' ideas as to what extent students should be involved in decision making processes concerning the general aspects of their own learning as mentioned by Nunan (1996). All descriptive statistics (the percentages of responses) and the results of the statistical analysis were generated using SPSS 15 for Windows.

I also conducted interviews with twenty volunteer student teachers in five focus groups and asked open-ended additional questions in order to collect data on their general understanding towards learner autonomy. The researcher had an appointment with the students in groups of five in his office at different times.

**Findings and Discussion**

| ITEM NO | ITEM NAME            | SUBTITLE                    | Not at all % | Little % | Partly % | Much % | Very Much % | $\bar{x}$ | SD    |
|---------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|----------|----------|--------|-------------|-----------|-------|
| 1       | Objectives           | a) short-term               | 4.3          | 13       | 35       | 38     | 9.7         | 3.59      | .958  |
|         |                      | b) long-term                | 3.2          | 9.8      | 23.9     | 43.5   | 19.6        | 3.67      | 1.017 |
| 2       | Course Content       | a) topics                   | 4.3          | 12       | 33.7     | 32.6   | 17.4        | 3.41      | 1.111 |
|         |                      | b) tasks                    | 5.4          | 10.9     | 40.2     | 29.3   | 14.2        | 3.35      | 1.046 |
| 3       | Selecting Materials  | a) textbooks                | 17.4         | 26.1     | 30.4     | 17.4   | 8.7         | 2.70      | 1.214 |
|         |                      | b) AVA                      | 1.1          | 9.8      | 31.5     | 35.9   | 21.7        | 3.67      | .953  |
|         |                      | c) realia                   | 6.5          | 18.5     | 29.3     | 35.9   | 9.8         | 3.80      | .966  |
| 4       | Time Place Pace      | a) time                     | 6.5          | 16.3     | 43.5     | 23.9   | 9.8         | 3.09      | 1.070 |
|         |                      | b) place                    | 6.5          | 14.1     | 39.1     | 31.5   | 8.8         | 3.20      | 1.047 |
|         |                      | c) pace                     | 6.5          | 18.5     | 29.3     | 35.9   | 9.8         | 3.52      | 1.105 |
| 5       | Methodology          | a) ind./pair/group work     | 2.2          | 13       | 26.1     | 39.1   | 19.6        | 3.61      | 1.025 |
|         |                      | b) use of materials         | 2.2          | 12       | 30.4     | 34.7   | 20.7        | 3.56      | 1.038 |
|         |                      | c) type of class activities | 2.2          | 10.9     | 34.8     | 34.7   | 17.4        | 3.66      | .994  |
|         |                      | d) type of homework act.    | 4.3          | 15.2     | 24.8     | 41.6   | 14.1        | 3.68      | 1.054 |
| 6       | Classroom Management | a) position of desks        | 5.4          | 10.9     | 15.2     | 38     | 30.5        | 3.73      | 1.193 |
|         |                      | b) seating of students      | 3.3          | 14.1     | 20.7     | 40.2   | 21.7        | 3.58      | 1.079 |
|         |                      | c) discipline matters       | 8.7          | 7.4      | 19.9     | 32.4   | 35.2        | 3.67      | 1.169 |
| 7       | Homework Tasks       | a) quantity                 | 5.4          | 17.4     | 45.7     | 19.5   | 12          | 3.14      | 1.003 |
|         |                      | b) type                     | 6.5          | 23.9     | 31.5     | 34.3   | 29.8        | 3.09      | 1.070 |
|         |                      | c) frequency                | 7.6          | 19.6     | 31.7     | 33.9   | 25.2        | 3.14      | 1.130 |
| 8       | Assessment           | a) weekly                   | 2.2          | 6.5      | 19.6     | 42.4   | 29.6        | 3.95      | .938  |
|         |                      | b) monthly                  | 3.3          | 6.9      | 21.7     | 46.7   | 21.7        | 3.79      | .931  |
|         |                      | c) annually                 | 5.4          | 17.4     | 25       | 28.3   | 23.9        | 3.48      | 1.169 |
| 9       | What to focus on     | a) texts                    | 7.6          | 22.8     | 39.1     | 22.8   | 7.7         | 2.96      | 1.069 |
|         |                      | b) AVA                      | 2.2          | 10.9     | 33.7     | 37     | 16.2        | 3.48      | .995  |
|         |                      | c) realia                   | 1.1          | 7.6      | 26.1     | 48.9   | 16.3        | 3.70      | .868  |
| 10      | Learning tasks       |                             | 4.3          | 6.5      | 32.4     | 47     | 9.8         | 3.40      | .934  |
| 11      | Explanations         |                             | 1.1          | 2.2      | 12       | 43.5   | 41.2        | 4.22      | .846  |
| 12      | Learning strategies  |                             |              | 5.4      | 18.5     | 35.9   | 40.2        | 4.11      | .884  |
| 13      | Journals             |                             | 1.1          | 1.1      | 13       | 42.4   | 42.4        | 4.25      | .777  |
| 14      | Learner training     |                             |              | 1.1      | 4.3      | 25     | 69.3        | 4.63      | .631  |

**Table 1: Student teachers' perspectives on learner autonomy**

Note: Not at all (1.00-1.80), Little (1.80-2.60). Partly (2.60-3.40). Much (3.40-4.20), Very Much (4.20-5.00)

The data in table 1 show that the majority of the student teachers view learner autonomy as essential for nearly all of the areas, particularly methodology of the course, and classroom management. In a general sense, they were very positive about the involvement of the students in both selecting materials and making decisions on the methodology of the course, on classroom management, learner training and learner strategies. I shall limit my discussion to the salient findings of the current study.

The student teachers were asked to state their opinions about short-term and long-term objectives. For both, they strongly believe that students should be given a chance to participate in the decision-making process while setting objectives in collaboration with their teachers (Nunan, 1997; Cotterall, 1999; Benson, 2001). In other words, in order for effective learning to occur, it is crucial that students be involved in formulating the objectives since it will make the learning process more meaningful. The student teachers are of the opinion that learner involvement in the planning of both the short and long term objectives of the course is essential to learner autonomy. As Fenner and Newby (2000) argue, in an autonomous learning

environment, students must have freedom of choice of materials that they employ in the classrooms. Through this, students are encouraged “to access and use resources in their contexts, to carry their learning and to develop strategies for taking greater responsibility for their learning” (White, 2003, p. 34). Nevertheless, the student teachers did not display any eagerness to involve their students in selecting textbooks, possibly because textbook selection is viewed as a professional teachers’ task. As for the student teachers’ perspectives about the use of audio visual materials and realia, they were not as negative as their views about textbooks (AVA: 3, 67; Realia; 3, 80). This area concerns motivation for students and it might well be difficult for teachers to meet students’ needs. Thus, students can have a greater sense of ownership and control over their learning by being encouraged to bring their own authentic materials into the classroom (Dam, 1995; Nunan, 1999; Benson, 2001).

There have been several studies focusing on the assumption that students should be considered equal partners and given an opportunity to determine the time, place and pace of the course (Little, 1991; Dam, 1995; Nunan, 1997; Benson, 2001). It is accepted that such an opportunity will provide students with a sense of self-confidence because they are given room to decide on these issues, which will guide them to increase their sense of responsibility for the learning process. However, when it comes to making a decision on time and place of the course, the Turkish educational system does not allow this to occur for several reasons. Most of the student teachers are recruited in the schools of the Ministry of Education where there is a centralized administration. Teachers themselves do not have a say over these issues. Likewise, it might not be easy to find an available classroom every time a teacher wishes. What is more, the time and place of classes were considered as administrative issues by most of the student teachers. Many student teachers did not appear to welcome learner involvement in decisions related to time by answering “partly” perhaps because students will have different expectations on when and where to learn. This might make it much more challenging to accommodate their needs/expectations. Nonetheless, taking into account the learning styles and understanding capacities of students, the student teachers seem to agree that the pace of the course should be determined by students (3, 52).

There is a great deal of research suggesting that involving students in the decisions such as individual/pair group work, use of materials, type of class activities and type of homework activities provides them with choice of different approaches and understandings to foster learner autonomy (Ryan, 1997; Nunan, 1999; Fenner & Newby, 2000; Benson, 2001). That is, it is viewed as a virtual requirement that students be given sufficient opportunities and control over the classroom activities and materials. Regarding the four sub-sections on methodology, it needs to be explained that the majority of the student teachers (individual/pair/group work: 3, 61; use of materials: 3, 56; type of classroom activities: 3, 66; type of homework activities: 3, 68) favor the involvement of the students in those decisions as much as possible. They state that original ideas may come from students and that learning styles should match the activities. On the other hand, it would be better to ask for the opinions of students in case some materials teachers prepare may not be suitable. In the Turkish educational system, students are rarely allowed to rearrange the position of the desks which are organized in such a way that the teacher is regarded as the main authority. Notwithstanding this, when asked to state their opinions concerning classroom management, surprisingly, student teachers seemed reasonably positive about the expectation that students be involved in deciding on classroom management, such as arranging the position of the desks and seating of students (the

position of the desks: 3, 73; seating of students: 3, 58). Generally, students should make decisions on where they sit to get the ultimate benefit from the course. As for disciplinary matters, the picture is more or less the same. That is to say, student teachers (3, 67) think that students ought to have a say over classroom discipline. If students are actively involved in determining the classroom and group norms, they naturally tend to abide by these rules without teachers' having to exercise their authority (Brown, 2001; Dörnyei, 2001; Benson, 2001). In other words, they feel a part of the community in which learning takes place if students are involved in formulating classroom rules. This will eventually give them encouragement for taking greater responsibility for their own learning.

In conjunction with recent theoretical approaches to language teaching/learning, self-assessment, without question, requires that students develop their own ability to assess how much they have learned, and how much more they need in learning environments (Nunan, 1999; Benson, 2001; Egel, 2003). That is, students should be encouraged to keep track of their own progress to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. Benson (2001) attaches a lot of importance to the role of self-assessment since the process raises students' awareness and encourages them to think critically and reflect on their own competence (Oskarson, 1996). As Dam (1995) points out, self-assessment concerning time requirement, reflection and honesty for both students and teachers might create an atmosphere of trust and respect in the classroom, the student teachers' perspectives on self-assessment are in accordance with the issues raised in the relevant literature (weekly: 3, 95; monthly: 3, 79; annually: 3, 48). Learning tasks urge students regularly to step back from the process of learning and reflect on how well they did as a group or as an individual (Wenden, 1991; Dam, 1995; Scharle & Szabo, 2000; Brown, 2001; Benson, 2001). It seems clear that such tasks play a key role in promoting learner autonomy, for students should use the target language in extended periods of time on their own (Little, 1994; Dam, 1995). In this respect, a great many of the student teachers support the idea that students should be involved in decisions on the choice of learning tasks (3, 40). This response supports the notion that learning tasks must be related to their needs and interests so that they would become more deeply engaged in their learning processes. Learner strategies may help students in organizing the content of their own learning, in determining the methods and techniques to be used and in self-evaluating the learning process and learning experiences (Wenden, 1987; Cohen, 1998). In other words, students need to be encouraged to develop their own strategies in learning a foreign language. This will lead them to be more aware of what kind of progress they have made and what else they need to improve next. This way, student teachers support the view that (4, 11) learner strategies should be given a lot of attention in foreign language classrooms for the purpose of making their students aware of their own learning processes. "Without developing such strategies, students will remain trapped in their old patterns of beliefs and behaviors and never be fully autonomous" (Wenden 1998, p. 90). Learner training, which "aims to help students consider the factors that affect their learning and discover the strategies that suit them best and which are appropriate to their learning context" (Sinclair 2000, p. 66) is one of the issues student teachers were asked about. In order for students to acquire effective language skills, there is no doubt that they need learner training (Chamot, 1993; Dickinson, 1994; Sinclair, 2000). The student teachers were aware of the importance of knowing how to learn a foreign language best. Then, they took into consideration that learner training is a precondition for language learning. They also stated that



students should have a right to be given training on the nature of learning itself (Özmen, 2004).

In conclusion, the overall data emerging from the questionnaire simply indicate that the participating English language student teachers showed interest in almost each area of teaching with the exception of decisions on time and place as well as textbooks to be followed. In other words, most student teachers feel their future students should be encouraged to take part in various decisions on teaching/learning so they can take responsibility for their own learning.

## Interview Results

As was mentioned previously, interviews with volunteer student teachers were conducted. Those, by and large, were based on their perceptions on learner autonomy and the results shed light on student teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy. In response to the question 'What is your understanding of learner autonomy?' in the follow-up questionnaire, student teachers had the following opinions.

... Something like being able to work alone, knowing how to study well on your own.

... Being open to change for taking responsibility for one's own learning.

... The awareness of his own strengths/weaknesses and what he needs to improve.

Concerning the question "Do you consider learner autonomy important? Why? Why not?", the following comments are representative of the student teachers' views.

... Of course, it is important because learning is too vast a task to be limited to class hours.

... I think learner autonomy helps students to learn better, for it makes learning easier and funnier.

... Spoon-feeding is not the correct way of teaching a foreign language. Thus, they have to take responsibility for their own learning.

... Learning should continue outside the classroom.

... I am sure it motivates students to study much more than they generally do.

... Learner autonomy should be taught when we are at university.

Regarding the question "What should you do to encourage students to become more autonomous in or outside the classroom?", the following extracts from the student teachers' interviews captured some of the significant responses to this question.

... Portfolio assessment is a great way of keeping track of students' performances.

... Outside tasks should be assigned to students, but their needs and interests are crucial in designing them.

... I may ask them to assess themselves, or self-assess.

... I could take into consideration their needs and interests as much as I can

... Students should be aware of the nature of learning itself.

In relation to the question "How good are students in Turkey at learning English autonomously?", student teachers have the opinions below.

... Not good because there is a traditional learning at the majority of the classrooms still.

... How possibly could anyone expect students to become autonomous where the teacher is the main authority?

... Bad, teachers even don't know what it is, let alone developing it,

Likewise, the following responses to the question “Does the teaching and learning environment in Turkey help or hinder the development of autonomy? In what ways?” are crucial in many respects.

... Unfortunately, it doesn't help the development of learner autonomy because teachers do not know it.

... There are several obstacles to the development of learner autonomy in the learning process, such as crowded classrooms, lack of equipment and etc.

... Autonomy is a neglected part of learning, actually.

In light of the interview data, one can easily argue that student teachers regarded learner autonomy and its classroom applications as favorable by continuing with learner-centered instruction (Nunan, 1995; Dam, 1995; Benson, 2001). To illustrate, they seem to have a very-well constructed notion of learner autonomy including the responsibility, awareness, and self-assessment. In line with the principles underlying learner autonomy, student teachers view learner autonomy as an important prerequisite for language learning along with its focus on the activities outside the classroom (Ryan, 1997). As to student teachers' views about how to encourage learner autonomy, they came up with the portfolio assessment, outside tasks, and journals. Referring to their previous learning experiences, student teachers are of the opinion that Turkish students are not ready to take responsibility for their own learning due to the educational system in which they are involved (Yumuk, 2002; Özdere, 2005; Sert, 2006). Despite the fact that they have not yet started teaching English in real environments, they are more or less aware of the possible hindrances to the development of learner autonomy in language classrooms.

### **Concluding Remarks and Suggestions**

This study has provided a rich source of information on student teachers' perspectives concerning the use of autonomous language learning. It focuses heavily on the beliefs student teachers have on the principles of learner autonomy. It also contributes to the understanding of student teachers' perspectives on learner autonomy, the involvement of students in learning process and of the factors that might be considered as obstacles to develop learner autonomy in EFL settings.

One major finding of this study was that student teachers had a clear view of learner autonomy and the involvement of students in the learning process. On the whole, they agreed with the idea that students should be involved in the decision making process concerning the objectives of the course, classroom management, homework tasks, and the selection of materials. The results indicated a strong preference for a more autonomous learning process. Referring to the humanistic side of learning, the student teachers seemed to share the idea that students should be placed at the centre of learning practices. Unlike other studies carried out on teachers' perspectives on learner autonomy (Chan 2001, 2003; Özdere, 2005), these student teachers felt very comfortable with asking students to make such decisions. The findings of the current study are in line with those of Yıldırım's research (2005). That is, the student teachers would probably feel ready to pass onto the students some responsibilities and choices.

One important conclusion that could be drawn from this study is that there are some constraining factors involved in the formal learning environment that may be viewed as hindrances to the development of learner autonomy. Due to the Turkish educational system, it seems impractical to involve students in decisions on areas such

as the time and place of the course, for they are generally regarded as administrative issues. As Yumuk (2002, p. 143) describes, the Turkish educational system has some points that inhibit autonomous language learning “The majority of learners undergo the process of learning through recitation in which the teacher is the authority rather than the facilitator”. Educational system in Turkey is considered as teacher-centered in which the traditional teaching methods are widely utilized. Additionally, schools are formed in a structure where the authority is not shared, individuality and creativity are less encouraged. As a result of this system, learners tend not to take responsibility for their own learning during their educational process. Because student teachers themselves have not been trained in an autonomous way, they might have some negative attitudes towards the implementation of learner autonomy as Little (1995; 2007) and other scholars pointed out earlier.

Student teachers’ beliefs on learner autonomy are very important components of their future teaching practices. Therefore, teacher educators play a salient role in student teachers’ experience with learner autonomy by allowing more room for greater motivation, negotiation and decision making. On the basis of the findings, it would make sense to offer some suggestions for teacher educators to lift barriers in students’ minds concerning learner autonomy.

First, teacher educators should encourage their student teachers to engage in out-side-the classroom tasks so as to increase their autonomous behaviors. Since learner autonomy generally go hand in hand with out-side-the classroom learning, it would be best to assign some tasks that might appeal to their interests and needs so they can start developing autonomy skills very early. Second, teacher educators should involve their student teachers in the decision making process. As Little (1995, p. 180) points out, “a first-hand experience” for student teachers in their own initial teacher training facilitates their adoption of learner autonomy principles in their future teaching practices. Third, teacher educators should include some strategy training sessions in their syllabuses to encourage student teachers to experience the use of strategies. Also, the student teachers should be equipped with strategy training, which, hopefully, will enable them to understand better the nature of learning. Finally, teacher educators should make use of portfolios in their courses. Thus, the student teachers get more insight into the development of practical knowledge, teaching behavior and thinking processes. Portfolios can serve as a good means of cultivating and exploiting teacher autonomy in many respects.

One dilemma still remains unexplored: Will these student teachers later keep believing in the importance of teacher-learner autonomy and develop it for themselves in collaboration with others despite the system they are part of? Or will they find themselves in a position where they are likely to forget all about the theory and practices of learner autonomy?

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