Self-Regulated Learning Perceptions of Foreign Language Learners: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract: This study investigated the self-regulated learning (SRL) perceptions of foreign language learners at a public university in Turkey. A quantitative cross-sectional model was chosen as the framework. Data were collected by means of a scale originally developed by Hirata (2010). The study was conducted with 230 voluntary participants selected purposefully from the same university. The collected data were analyzed through a computer program in terms of numbers (n), percentages (%), means ($\bar{X}$), standard deviations (Sd.), Shapiro-Wilk, One-Way ANOVA, and Independent-Samples T-Test. The results suggested that the participants had problems recalling their foreign language knowledge regularly, controlling their stress levels, keeping records of their learning, relating new knowledge to their existing knowledge, and scheduling their learning time. However, they did not have problems following specific strategies, continuing to study in cases of failure, trying new ways of learning and sparing enough time for learning. The study also found that variables such as sex, grade, and preparatory class education did not contribute to the SRL perceptions of the participants. Based on these results, it can be suggested that activities promoting SRL may enhance the efficiency of language education contexts.

Yabancı Dil Öğrenenlerin Öz-Düzenlemeli Öğrenme Algıları: Kesitsel Bir Çalışma
Öz: Bu çalışma Türkiye'deki bir devlet üniversitesinde yabancı dil öğrenenlerin öz-düzenlemeli öğrenme algılarını araştırmıştır. Çerçeve olarak bir nicel kesitsel model seçilmiştir. Veri aslı Hirata (2010) tarafından geliştirilen bir ölçek aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Çalışma aynı üniversiteden amaçlı olarak seçilmiş 230 katılımcıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Toplanan veri bir bilgisayar programı yoluyla, sayı (n), yüzde (%), ortalama değer ($\bar{X}$), standart sapma (Ss), Shapiro-Wilk, Tek Yönlü Varyans Analizi ve Bağımsız Örnekler T-Testi bakımından analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, katılımcıların yabancı dil bilgilerini düzenli kontrol etmede, stres seviyelerini kontrol etmede, öğrenmelerinin kaydını tutmada, yeni öğrendikleri bilgileri var olan bilgileriyle ilişkilendirmede ve öğrenme zamanlarını programlamada problemlerinin olmadığını göstermiştir. Bununla birlikte, sonuçlar katılımcıların özel strateji takip etmede, başarısızlık durumlarında çalışmaya devam etmede, yeni öğrenme yolları denemede ve öğrenme için vakit ayırmada problemlerinin olmadığını göstermiştir. Çalışma ayrıca, cinsiyet, sınıf ve hazırlık eğitimi alıp almama gibi değişkenlerin katılımcıların öz-düzenlemeli öğrenme algılarında bir değişikliğe yol açmadığını göstermiştir. Bu sonuçlardan hareketle, öz-düzenlemeli öğrenmeyi teşvik edici aktivitelerin dil öğrenme ortamlarının etkililiğini arttırabileceği önerilebilir.

1. Introduction

Self-regulation (SR), as a borrowed term from educational psychology, has become a topic of investigation in foreign and second language teaching and learning research. Becoming an autonomous learner via planning learning processes is now regarded as a crucial turning point in education because it disregards conventional teacher-based language classrooms. The function of language learning strategies was investigated in several studies (Banisaeid & Huang, 2015; Brown, 2007; Dörnyei, 2005; Goh, 2002; Oxford, 1990), and, as a result, SR has become a preferred term in the area, and it indicates the importance of autonomous learning (Banisaeid & Huang, 2015; Dörnyei, 2005; Tseng, Dönyei & Schmitt, 2006). As a term, SR refers to organizing actions and thoughts by employing metacognitive, affective and behavioral processes to reach a desired learning goal (Zimmerman, 2008; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). Self-awareness, competency, and determination are among the striking features of self-regulated learners as not only do they monitor themselves in accomplishing tasks, but they also try to find useful information by acting deliberately (Ellis & Zimmerman, 2002).

The present study can be regarded as an important one in terms of its scope and context. Previous studies investigated the relationships between self-regulated learning (SRL) and other parameters concerning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Turkey, such as language learning strategies, critical thinking (Altay & Saracaloğlu, 2017), questionnaire adaptation and validation (Yeşilbursa & Bilican, 2013), scale development (Köksal & Dündar, 2018), and teachers' views on SRL (Seker & Dincer, 2016). This study investigated Turkish EFL students' perceptions on SRL in a cross-sectional way at a public university, which is a different context to the aforementioned ones. The influence of grade, preparatory class education (PCE), and sex on SRL in terms of foreign language learning was investigated in this study. In this respect, the study seeks to address the following four research questions:
1. What are the SRL perceptions of Turkish EFL learners?
2. Is grade (1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades) a significant contributor to SRL perceptions of the participants?
3. Is PCE a significant contributor to SRL perceptions of the participants?
4. Is sex a significant contributor to SRL perceptions of the participants?

2. Literature Review

Particularly in the last decade, SRL in language learning has been the subject of numerous studies on a wide variety of research topics (Ranalli, 2012; Chamot, 2014; Collett, 2014; Cheyney, Wang, & Bettini, 2013; Basso & Abrahão, 2018; Mahadi & Subramaniam, 2013; Yeşilbursa & Bilican, 2013; Köksal & Dündar, 2018; Singer & Bashir, 1999; Seker & Dincer, 2016; Mezei, 2008). In this respect, a number of recent research studies in the literature are discussed in the following paragraphs within the scope of this study.

At present, many studies have sought to delineate affective, cognitive and metacognitive aspects of SRL from the perspectives of learners and teachers with an eye to improving students' learning processes. Su, Zheng, Liang and Tsai's (2018) study revealed a connection between self-efficacy and online SR in EFL learners in China. Similarly, Bown and White (2010) investigated the influence of SR in second language acquisition on choices and experiences in three case studies with Russian language learners. This study emphasized the influence of integral regulation on learning experiences and preferences, and it highlighted the importance of learners' emotional experiences in language learning. Practically, Mahadi and Subramanian's (2013) study suggests understanding previous language learning experiences can pave the way for teachers to help their learners in planning their language learning. Wandler and Imbriale (2017) offer further insight in their presentation of online instructors'

strategies for promoting learners' application of SR strategies by discussing guidelines for implementation and possible drawbacks. Likewise, Rose and Harbon (2013) investigated SR in Kanji learning. The study presented difficulties experienced by language learners and offered some real-world implications to language instructors.

Another area of interest is motivation and autonomous learning which came to fore as research interests and connections with SRL were extensively investigated through different inquiries. For example, Banisaeid and Huang (2015) investigated a Chinese EFL context and found correlation between motivation and SR. Moreover, in a study with Japanese high school students, Tsuda and Nakata (2013) identified types of self-regulated learners and factors of SRL. The results showed that Japanese EFL learners had intricate internal factors such as beliefs, motivation, readiness, and background in language learning. The results also emphasized the roles of language teachers in facilitating learners to become autonomous. Furthermore, in a study on SR in vocabulary learning and age-based differences in young learners, Hardi (2017) found that the younger students were more motivated and applied more strategies in learning vocabulary than their older peers. With an eye to the future, after a theoretical analysis of the relationship between SRL and motivation, Nakata (2010) proposed a framework based on three stages to encourage SRL and suggested the importance of needs analysis as a process of inquiry to define learners' previous experiences and their readiness in SR in language learning.

There have also been many studies which have focused specifically on how SRL influences certain language skills. In terms of writing skills in a target language, Göy (2017) found that strategy training can be an effective method of improvement. In a similar vein, Abadikhah, Aliyan and Talebi (2018) investigated SRL attitudes of EFL learners in writing scientific papers through a questionnaire in an Iranian context. Results showed that learners underestimated several writing strategies, and learners needed to use more strategies for writing.   In terms of reading comprehension, a study by Morshedian, Sotoudehnama, Hemmati and Soleimani (2016) on the effects of SRL, both literally and critically, suggested the implementation of SRL strategies in tasks and activities for language learning. Finally, in terms of listening skills, Lastochkina and Smirnova (2017) investigated the impact of SR in English for Specific Purposes in Russia. According to the results, the learners who employed SR strategies in developing listening skills performed better than the others.

3. Methodology
3.1. Research Design
The current study is a descriptive cross-sectional study conducted at a public university in Nevşehir, Turkey. SRL perceptions of foreign language learners were investigated in this study. The data were collected in the 2017-2018 academic year.

3.2. Participants
Foreign language learners studying at a public university were the population of this study. The place was chosen due to the availability of the participants for the study.   Samples were selected purposefully from 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades, and only volunteer participants were included in the study without any randomization. The study comprised 230 participants, 147 of whom were females and 83 of whom were males.

3.3. Instrument
The data collection instrument of the study was a scale developed by Hirata (2010). It included Likert-type items ranging from "not at all true of me = 1" to "very true of me = 6" in

six categories. The scale was comprised of 18 items, including cognitive, metacognitive, affective, behavioral, and environmental components, and it had an acceptable overall reliability (α = .82). SRL perceptions of the participants were reported under four components as behavioral regulation, cognitive regulation, environmental regulation, and metacognitive regulation.

Firstly, the behavioral regulation component was comprised of six items (i.e., controlling, reaching, handling, visualizing, recording, and relating). The first item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on recalling their foreign language knowledge. The second item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they can reach their goals earlier than they expect in foreign language learning. The third item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they know how to control their stress levels when they feel stressed in foreign language learning. The fourth item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they visualize learning processes in foreign language learning. The fifth item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they keep a record of their learning processes in foreign language learning. The sixth item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they relate their previous language knowledge to their new language knowledge in foreign language learning.

Next, the cognitive regulation component was comprised of five items (i.e., regular time, giving up studying, organizing, handling, and studying later). The seventh item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they have a regular time for foreign language learning. The eighth item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they give up studying when learning contexts become inconvenient. The ninth item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they organize learning in terms of semantics in foreign language learning. The tenth item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they know how to cope with boredom in foreign language learning. The eleventh item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they study a language item several times when they do not understand it at first sight in foreign language learning.

Thirdly, the environmental regulation component was comprised of five items (i.e., applying, reaching, studying, scheduling, and comparing). The twelfth item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they follow specific and beneficial strategies in foreign language learning. The thirteenth item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they keep studying until they reach their aims in foreign language learning. The fourteenth item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they keep studying after failure in foreign language learning. The fifteenth item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they have difficulty in following a study program in foreign language learning. The sixteenth item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they compare or contrast confusing language items in foreign language learning.

Finally, metacognitive regulation was comprised of two items (i.e., trying new ways, sparing enough time). The seventeenth item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they try to make language learning enjoyable in new ways. The last item on the scale investigated the participants' perceptions on whether they spare enough time for foreign language learning.

The scale was originally developed for Kanji learning in New Zealand context, so it was necessary to adapt it into foreign language learning context in Turkey. For this reason, translation and back translation processes were carried out by the EFL instructors at the university in order to forestall any semantic loss. First, "Kanji learning" expressions in the original scale were rewritten as "foreign language learning," and Likert-type expressions of "not at all true of me" and "very true of me" were changed from "strongly disagree = 1" and "strongly agree = 6." Next, the scale was sent to three different EFL instructors through e-mails, and they were requested to translate the scale into Turkish. Then, the original scale and Turkish translations of the scale were sent to three other EFL instructors, and they were requested to give synonymity scores from 10 to 1 (10 refers to the highest synonymity, and 1 refers to the lowest synonymity) to prevent semantic loss during the translations. After the processes, the translation which had the highest synonymity score (9.15/10) was chosen for the implementation. Lastly, the scale was implemented with the participants. Though four components were found in the original scale, the factor analysis results of the translated scale showed no clear distinction among these components. For this reason, the scores obtained from the translated scale were evaluated in terms of overall average, and it was found to have an overall reliability of $\alpha =.81$.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

This study focused on grade, PCE, and sex as these variables can contribute to SRL in foreign language learning. The independent variables were participants' sex, grade (1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades), and PCE, while the dependent variable was SRL scale points. Quantitative inquiry was followed in order to analyze the data gathered from the participants. The data were analyzed through an IBM SPSS Statistics 22 program. The descriptive profiles of the participants were presented in numbers (n) and percentages (%). The distributions of quantitative data were presented through a Shapiro-Wilk normality test, and homogeneity of variances were presented through a Levene test. An independent Samples T-Test was implemented to compare the mean scores obtained from the scale items in terms of sex and PCE, and a One-Way ANOVA test was used in a comparison of the grades. The results were presented descriptively at the end.

4. Results

The study was comprised of 230 participants, 147 (63.9%) of whom were females and 83 (36.1%) of whom were males. There were 6 (2.6%) participants between the ages of 18 - 19, 107 (46.5%) participants between the ages of 20-21, 115 (50%) participants between the ages of 22 - 23, and 2 (0.9 %) participants aged 24 and above. The study included 64 (27.8%) freshmen, 104 (45.2%) sophomores, and 62 (27%) juniors. While most of the participants (n = 168, 73%) attended a one-year PCE, the others (n = 62, 27%) did not attend PCE at the university. Table 1 presents descriptive profiles regarding the participants:

Table 1
Descriptive Profiles of the Participants

Features	Category	n	%
Sex	Female	147	63.9
	Male	83	36.1
Age	18-19	6	2.6
	20-21	107	46.5

	22-23	115	50
	24- above	2	0.9
	1.Grade	64	27.8
Grade	2.Grade	104	45.2
	3.Grade	62	27
PCE	Yes	168	73
	No	62	27

For the first research question, the researcher utilized means ($\bar{X}$) and standard deviations (Sd.) and reported the results. Table 2 summarizes the results obtained from the participants:

Table 2
SRL Means of Turkish EFL Learners

Scale Items	$\bar{X}$	Sd.
1. Recalling knowledge	3.21	1.31
2. Reaching goals	3.44	1.34
3. Handling stress	2.96	1.55
4. Visualizing the process	3.61	1.57
5. Keeping records	3.02	1.65
6. Relating previous knowledge	3.47	1.81
7. Regular time	2.87	1.56
8. Giving up studying	2.92	1.52
9. Organizing learning	3.67	1.40
10. Handling boredom	3.40	1.60
11. Studying later	3.73	1.51
12. Applying specific strategies	3.86	1.60
13. Reaching goals	4.12	1.40
14. Studying after failure	4.21	1.47
15. Scheduling problems	3.90	1.65
16. Comparing lang. items	3.63	1.54
17. Trying new ways	4.05	1.57
18. Sparing enough time	4.08	1.62
Total	3.56	0.75

As indicated in Table 2, the total mean score of the participants was closer to "slightly agree" option ($\bar{X}$ = 3.56; Sd. = 0.75). Also, "studying after failure" (item 14) had the highest mean score ($\bar{X}$ = 4.21; Sd. = 1.47), while "regular time" (item 7) had the lowest score ($\bar{X}$ = 2.87; Sd. = 1.56). Similarly, "reaching goals" (item 13) had a high mean score ($\bar{X}$ = 4.12; Sd. = 1.40), while "giving up studying" (item 8) had a low mean score ($\bar{X}$ = 2.92; Sd. = 1.52).

Table 3 presents the normality test (Shapiro-Wilk) results of the variables in terms of their SRL points as follows:

Table 3
Shapiro-Wilk Results of the Variables

Profiles	Category	Statistic	df	p
Grade	1.Grade	0.971	64	0.133
	2.Grade	0.988	104	0.472
	3.Grade	0.978	62	0.346
PCE	Yes	0.989	168	0.190
	No	0.978	62	0.346
Sex	Female	0.985	147	0.120
	Male	0.985	83	0.456

$p > 0.05$

According to the results in Table 3, grade, PCE, and sex variables were found to be normally distributed with regard to their SRL points ($p > 0.05$). T-test results of the participants related to these variables were presented in line with the research questions in the following parts.

For the second research question, the researcher implemented a One-Way ANOVA test to report the results. The following tables (Table 4, Table 5) report the results:

Table 4
Descriptive Analysis of SRL Scale Points in Terms of Grade

Grade	N	X̄	Sd.
Grade 1	64	3.44	0.78
Grade 2	104	3.55	0.69
Grade 3	62	3.72	0.79
Total	230	3.57	0.75

Table 5
One-Way ANOVA Results of SRL Scale Points in Terms of Grade

Grade	Sum Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	2.447	2	1.224	2.184	0.115 *
Within Groups	127.213	227	0.560		
Total	129.660	229			

*$p > 0.05$

According to the tables (Table 4, Table 5), the results showed that SRL scale point means and standard deviations were 3.44 ± 0.78 for Grade 1, while these values were 3.72 ± 0.75 for Grade 3. There was not a significant difference among the general SRL points of the participants in terms of grade, $F(2, 227) = 2.18$, $p > 0.05$. In other words, the participants' grades did not contribute to their SRL perceptions.

For the third research question, Independent Samples T-Test was performed, and the results were reported accordingly. The following table (Table 6) shows the results:

Table 6
SRL Perceptions of Turkish EFL Learners in Terms of PCE

PCE	N	X̄	S	sd	t	p
Yes	168	3.31	0.73	228	1.86	.063*
No	62	3.72	0.79			

*p > 0.05

According to Table 6, the PCE prior to faculty education did not significantly affect SRL perceptions of the Turkish EFL learners, t (228) = 1.86, *p > 0.05. The mean score of the participants who had PCE (X̄ = 3.31) was lower than the mean score of the participants who did not have PCE (X̄ = 3.72).

Finally, the fourth research question was analyzed through Independent Samples T-Test by the researcher. The following table (Table 7) reports the results:

Table 7
SRL Perceptions of Turkish EFL Learners in Terms of Sex

Sex	N	X̄	S	Sd	t	p
Female	147	3.52	0.77	228	1.17	.24*
Male	83	3.64	0.70			

*p > 0.05

Sex was not a statistically significant contributor to the SRL perceptions of the participants, t (228) = 1.17, *p > 0.05, as can be seen from Table 6. The mean score of the female participants (X̄ = 3.52) was lower than the mean score of their male counterparts (X̄ = 3.64). The results showed that the sex of the participants did not affect their SRL perceptions in foreign language learning.

5. Conclusion and Discussion
The study primarily helped to identify SRL perceptions of Turkish EFL learners at a university context. Most of the participants had problems with giving up studying when the environment became inconvenient. Likewise, they had problems maintaining regular times for their learning processes. Also, they had issues controlling their stress levels and keeping records of their knowledge regularly in language learning. These findings are in line with, Bown and White (2010) who argued there was a need for attention to learners' affective processes and stress management in second language learning. These findings strengthen Mahadi and Subramanian's (2013) proposal to implement tasks and instructions that facilitate the application of meta-cognitive SRL strategies for learners to become autonomous and successful in learning.

However, in the current study, Turkish EFL learners did not give up studying in the presence of failure, and they reached their objectives. Also, it was found that, though they did not have a regular study program, they allotted enough time for learning a foreign language. According to Zimmerman and Schunk (2008), highly self-regulating students can set their learning goals, apply effective learning strategies, follow and evaluate their learning processes very closely, create better learning contexts for themselves, seek feedback when necessary, and exert themselves; therefore, they are more determined, and they define new objectives once they have reached their pre-determined goals. The results in this study supported the criteria proposed by Zimmerman and Schunk (2008) for highly self-regulated learners. Accordingly, Dörnyei (2005) stated that language learners need support as they encounter problems in taking the responsibility for their actions.

Furthermore, the study showed that sex, PCE, and grade were not contributors to SRL perceptions of Turkish EFL learners. The result was a controversial one in the literature, especially regarding sex. For example, Ömür and Çubukçu (2017) found that female students had higher self-regulated points than male students in terms of the relationship between self-regulation strategies and motivation levels; contrarily, Pajares and Graham (1999) came up with no difference between male and female students in terms of their SRL strategies. The current study supported the results of the latter study, while it contradicted the results of the previous one.

Lastly, it is interesting that 3rd grade students had higher mean scores than 1st grade and 2nd grade students; however, there was not a meaningful difference among the grades in terms of their SRL mean scores. This result may indicate that education levels of students contribute to their SRL skills, and it supports Mezei (2008) who stressed that higher level language learners are more aware of their learning processes, and they know how to regulate their learning behaviors.

6. Limitations
The conclusion and discussion mentioned above also involved several limitations. Firstly, the study was designed in a cross-sectional way which results in a repeatability problem. Secondly, the sub-components of the original scale were not defined in the study though the researcher implemented an adapted scale, and this may hinder applicability of the scale in language education contexts. Lastly, the researcher did not apply a randomization in data collection process. Eliminating these limitations can contribute to forthcoming research studies.

7. Implications
Foreign language learning can be enhanced by designing environments in a way that fosters SRL. Teaching techniques that help language learners to overcome their language learning stress and getting them into the habit of studying regularly may be beneficial for language education contexts. Furthermore, portfolio studies can help language learners to record their learning processes which in turn enhance learner autonomy. Lastly, seminars on effective time management in foreign language learning can be organized for language learners.

This study can be enlarged through new research studies that analyze the relationships between SRL and academic achievements, personality traits, self-perceptions. Also, researchers can design new research studies by developing different scales to evaluate factors that affect SRL in foreign language teaching.

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