EFL learners' views on learner autonomy and foreign language anxiety

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Abstract

This mixed-methods research explores the views of EFL learners about learner autonomy and foreign language classroom anxiety. The participants comprised of 126 EFL learners studying at two state universities in Turkey. In addition to the instruments developed by Chan et al. (2002) and by Horwitz et al. (1986), a semi-structured questionnaire was also employed to gain deeper insights of the participants' understanding of autonomous learning and foreign language anxiety. The findings show that participants believed that they should have the ability to take responsibility for learning on their own. Regarding the question about classroom anxiety, participants accepted the anxiety induced by the fear of speaking, especially in real-life situations in front of people or with native speakers of English. Moreover, the data showed that 13 students felt highly anxious whereas 73 students were moderately anxious in their English classrooms. Thus, the current study has contributed to our understanding about LA and anxiety in terms of foreign language majors' perceptions in the EFL context, roles and responsibilities, motivation and abilities, inside and outside classroom activities and the reasons which cause FLA.

Keywords: *EFL Learners' Views, Foreign Language Anxiety, Learner Autonomy, Mixed Methods Research; Turkish Context*

INTRODUCTION

There is an abundance of research which has scrutinized the individual differences between successful language learners (Benson, 2007; Dörnyei, 2005; Uştuk & Aydın, 2018). It is not uncommon to see wide variations in foreign language (FL) proficiency level of students even in the same class (Gardner, 1997). Over the last decades, various studies have been conducted to determine the underlying factors which can lead to these differences (Benson, 2007; Guo et al., 2018; Kabiri et al., 2018). Learner autonomy (LA) and foreign-language anxiety (FLA) are two different variables which have been the focal point of many previous studies (Benson, 2007; Chan et al., 2002; Spratt et al., 2002; Tomita & Sano, 2016).

It is clear that autonomous language learning has been a topic of interest amongst scholars from all around the world (Balçıkanlı, 2010; Benson, 2007; Lenkaitis, 2020; Tomita & Sano, 2016; Yang et al., 2021). Thus, individual freedom in an educational setting has found its place for

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making students active in the classroom. In language learning, it is worthy to state that students who take charge of their own learning has gained another dimension considering their different educational and sociological backgrounds.

Much has been written about the importance of integrating LA into the classroom in order to promote language learning (Balçıkanlı, 2010; Hawkins, 2018; Ozer & Yukselir, 2021). It can be seen that a growing body of literature has developed regarding successful language learning and motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Gardner, 2001). In autonomous learning, Benson (2007) stated that not only motivation but also identity are crucial factors for making learning autonomous. From this perspective, motivation can be viewed as an important agent for facilitating language growth. It should also be noted that motivation in autonomous learning, in addition to other variables such as aptitude and anxiety, can have an effect on learners' achievement level depending on individual differences. Afshar et al. (2014) found that autonomy and motivation had a considerably high level of positive relationships in FL learning process.

Horwitz (1986) stated that FLA is a distinctive form of anxiety/stress or apprehension experienced in the FL classrooms. Language scholars have investigated the notion of anxiety and its connection with motivation in educational settings (Horwitz et al., 1986). FLA is closely associated with a learner's affective filter (Yashima et al., 2009). Dörnyei (2005) explained that it is acceptable for students to feel some level of anxiety about successfully completing a learning task in a foreign language. Students are able to experience this facilitating effect of anxiety to optimise their performance (Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012; Tran & Moni, 2015). However, higher levels of anxiety have been extensively proven to produce a debilitating effect on foreign language production (Lucas et al., 2011). There are many factors leading to FLA, for example perfectionism (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002), fear of negative evaluation by the teacher and by classmates, communication apprehension and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). For many students, for example, speaking in front of their classmates seems to contribute greatly to their FLA (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 1999).

FLA is considered to have a profoundly negative impact on FL learning (Horwitz et al., 2017; Tran & Moni, 2015). Learners can show a variety of reactions to FLA, such as a reluctance to speak in class and putting off completing assignments (Horwitz et al., 1986). Several factors have reportedly been in aid of reducing anxiety in FL classrooms. Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu (2013) investigated possible sources of language anxiety and found that students' proficiency and sense of perfectionism negatively affected their FLA in speaking classrooms. Kabiri et al. (2018) studied the relationship between foreign language learners' autonomy and anxiety and found a significant and negative relationship between LA and FLA. Liu (2012) investigated EFL anxiety in relation to autonomy and language proficiency and concluded that language proficiency and LA had a high and negative correlation with FLA. The relationship between LA and anxiety has not been extensively studied. In addition, it seems that effect of FLA on gender is context-specific (Guo et al., 2018), so it is particularly noteworthy to investigate how

Turkish EFL learners' scores on the FLA vary by gender in different contexts. Understanding how FLA is influenced according to year of study and gender can offer critical insight into sources of anxiety in diverse educational settings and into the ways of reducing FLA.

In the light of the discussion so far, the rationale for carrying out this current quasi-experimental study is to try to bridge this gap in the related literature and raise greater awareness of LA and FLA in the EFL classrooms in the Turkish context. To this aim, the purpose of this current study is to investigate the views of English language majors about LA and anxiety through an analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The central research question for this mixed methods study is: "How do English language majors experience LA and FLA in the Turkish context?" Four additional research questions were formulated to investigate the central question in the light of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination:

(1) To what extent do English-language majors' perceptions of abilities and responsibilities of learners and teachers in learning English differ?
(2) How do English-language majors' FLA levels differ?
(3) Does FLA vary according to gender and year of study?
(4) What are the views of English-language majors about learner autonomy and foreign-language classroom anxiety?

METHODS

The current mixed methods study adopts a convergent design by using a combination of the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data for deeper insights into the problem under investigation (Creswell, 2015).

Participants

The sample group in the present study included 126 EFL learners at two state universities located in southern Turkey. The participants were EFL learners in their first/preparatory year of study. The students (74 females and 52 males) who participated in this research were studying in English language teaching or in English translation and interpreting departments. Considering the ethical issues related to both quantitative and qualitative research, the researchers obtained informed consent of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research context

The data were gathered from the English language teaching and translation and interpreting departments. In each fall term, the freshmen in the target departments are first required to take an eligible score in the English language proficiency test. If they are unable to get an eligible score, they are obliged to take a full year preparatory education and to complete it successfully. The researchers had almost 17 years of teaching experience and had some opinions about the

syllabuses and the contents of the courses, specifically in the context of this study that autonomous learning practices in and out of the classroom are not much available in language teaching courses, and it was this fact that formed the basis of the current study.

Instruments

To ensure the reliability and validity of the data, three instruments were used to ensure triangulation (Yin, 2018) and to analyze the data comparatively from three resources: a learner-autonomy questionnaire, a foreign-language classroom-anxiety scale and open-ended questions. Also, the description of the research, participants and contexts added on the validity of the study.

First instrument by Chan et al. (2002) was employed to obtain the views of EFL learners regarding the responsibilities, decision-making abilities, motivation level and activities in and out of the classrooms in relation to autonomous learning. This instrument comprised four sections: responsibilities, abilities, motivation, and inside and outside activities, and there were 52 items in total. Also, to collect the data about the respondents' gender and year of study, some demographic questions were included at the beginning of the questionnaire. In four sections, there were items which measure both learners' and teachers' roles, responsibilities, decision-making abilities, the way in which they chose materials, motivation, and activities inside and outside class with a 5-point Likert scale, apart from the section three, motivation.

Another instrument used to measure learner anxiety was Horwitz' et al. (1986) Foreign-Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). It comprises 33 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging between 'strongly agree' and 'strongly disagree'. The Cronbach's alpha was found to be .93.

As stated before, multiple sources of evidence were utilized in this study. In the last phase, to gain extensive views of the respondents about LA and classroom anxiety, open-ended questions were prepared and used to collect qualitative data. Five questions were asked to the participants: (1) 'What is learner autonomy from your perspective?', (2) 'What kind of activities do learners have in autonomous learning in and out the classroom?', (3) 'What do you think about the learners' role and responsibility in language teaching?', (4) 'Do you believe the curriculum fosters the learner autonomy? Why or why not?' and (5) 'What kinds of situation cause anxiety for you in language-learning settings?'

Data Analysis Procedure

The questionnaires described above were distributed to undergraduate students at the two universities several weeks following the beginning of the fall term of 2021-2022. The participants of the study were volunteers and each of them took approximately 25 minutes to fill out the surveys. To analyze the data obtained from the LA survey, percentages are provided for each section. Cross-tabulations were conducted, and chi-square tests were conducted to

examine the relationships between the corresponding items in LA questionnaire. Statistical means and standard deviations were also used to show on which statements the learners experienced the most and the least anxiety. The results of the FLCAS were calculated in line with Aida's (1994) study. A participant's anxiety score was calculated by adding up her/his ratings on all of the statements. The possible range of the scale was from 33 to 165. Negatively worded items on the FLCAS (statements 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28 and 32) were recoded.

In addition, content analysis, systematic coding and categorizing approach to analyze the text (Krippendorff, 2018) were used to make inferences from the data for the purpose of obtaining more comprehensive insights about research topic. First, each researcher read and coded the data on his own and then reread the answers given to the questions. Later, researchers came together four times within four months for the purpose of determining the contents and showing the remarks' interconnectedness to each another. They then tried to understand the sense of whole text and the perceptions of the participants about LA and FLA and sought to find interesting and concrete contents.

RESULTS

Perceptions of Autonomous Roles
To answer the first research question, the learners' perceptions of responsibilities were examined. All the statements under this theme were given in the first main section of the survey. For a reader-friendly presentation of the results, the two categories 'not at all' and 'a little' were merged and the same was done with the categories 'mainly' and 'completely'. The descriptive results for students' perceptions of responsibilities are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of Their Teachers' and Their Own Responsibilities.

	Students' perceptions of their own responsibilities (%)			Students' perceptions of teachers' responsibilities (%)					
	Not at all / a little	Some	Mainly / Completely	Not at all / a little	Some	Mainly / Completely	chi sq	df	p.
1. Make sure you make progress during lessons	5.6	25.4	68.3	7.9	24.6	65.1	6.927	4	.140
2. Make sure you make progress outside class	8.7	14.3	73.8	34.9	24.6	27	14.245	4	.007*
3. Stimulate your interest in learning English	7.1	17.5	71.4	9.5	23	61.9	17.203	4	.002*

4. Identify your weaknesses in English	13.5	19	63.5	23	15.9	55.6	13.863	4	.008*
5. Make you work harder	11.1	27	60.3	15.1	22.2	58.7	5.034	4	.284
6. Decide the objectives of your English course	15.1	27	52.4	7.9	10.3	76.2	5.573	4	.233
7. Decide what you should learn next in your English lessons	28.6	30.2	38.9	5.6	7.9	83.3	17.087	4	.002*
8. Choose what activities to use to learn English in your English lessons	23	39.7	34.1	5.6	8.7	82.5	6.680	4	.154
9. Decide how long to spend on each activity	34.1	25.4	38.1	7.1	16.7	72.2	3.355	4	.500
10. Choose what materials to use to learn English in your English lessons	28.6	31.7	37.3	7.1	12.7	77	12.996	4	.011*
11. Evaluate your learning	5.6	24.6	65.9	4.8	22.2	67.5	10.510	4	.033*
12. Evaluate your course	10.3	27.8	60.3	4	11.9	79.4	7.552	4	.109
13. Decide what you learn outside class	6.3	8.7	83.3	41.3	15.9	34.9	9.184	4	.057

*p value is significant at 0.05 level.
Note: Cells representing significant differences between the groups are noted with an asterisk.

As can be seen in Table 1, in six of 13 situations, a significant difference was found. In three of these six situations, the students placed more responsibilities on themselves than on their teachers. The cases in which the students placed greater responsibility to their teachers were items 7, 10 and 11.

To study how learners viewed their abilities to manage the aspects, the items under the second section were analyzed. In Table 2, to facilitate the interpretation of the results, the categories 'very poor' and 'poor' were merged as were the categories of 'very good' and 'good.

Table 2. Students' Perceptions of Their Abilities.

	Poor / Very poor (%)	OK (%)	Good / Very good (%)
14. Choosing learning activities in class	19.8	36.5	42.9
15. Choosing learning activities outside class	19.8	29.4	50.8
16. Choosing learning objectives in class	17.5	46.8	35.7
17. Choosing learning objectives outside class	17.5	38.9	41.3
18. Choosing learning materials in class	20.6	39.7	38.9
19. Choosing learning materials outside class	19.8	31.0	49.2
20. Evaluate your learning	9.5	31.0	50.8
21. Evaluate your course	16.7	31.7	50.0
22. Identifying your weaknesses in English	15.1	24.6	60.3
23. Deciding what you should learn next in your English lessons	23.0	34.1	40.5
24. Deciding how long to spend on each activity	21.4	42.1	35.7

The students' responses were densely clustered in the 'good / very good' category. More responses fell into the 'OK' category than the 'poor / very poor' category. Clearly students had a positive attitude towards their abilities. Item 22 "identifying your weaknesses in English" was reported to be the statement for which students felt the most confident. Table 3 shows how they perceived their responsibilities as opposed to their abilities in FL learning.

Table 3. Students' Perceptions of Their Responsibilities and Their Corresponding Abilities.

Section 1 items (Responsibilities)	Section 2 items (Abilities)	chi sq	df	p.
4. Identify your weaknesses in English	22. Identifying your weaknesses in English	14.884	4	.005*
6. Decide the objectives of your English course	16. Choosing learning objectives in class	.368	4	.985
7. Decide what you should learn next in your English lessons	23. Deciding what you should learn next in your English lessons	3.234	4	.519
8. Choose what activities to use to learn English in your English lessons	14. Choosing learning activities in class	6.378	4	.173
9. Decide how long to spend on each activity	24. Deciding how long to spend on each activity	3.016	4	.555
10. Choose what materials to use to learn English in your English lessons	18. Choosing learning materials in class	6.150	4	.188
11. Evaluate your learning	20. Evaluate your learning	15.652	4	.004*
12. Evaluate your course	21. Evaluate your course	14.289	4	.006*
13. Decide what you learn outside class	17. Choosing learning objectives outside class	6.700	4	.153

*p value is significant at 0.05 level.
Note: Cells representing significant differences between the groups are noted with an asterisk.

As can be seen in Table 3, in three of the nine cases, a significant difference exists between learners' abilities and their perceived responsibilities in FL learning. These statements were related to identifying weaknesses, evaluating learning and course evaluation.

In the third section of the questionnaire, students were asked to self-report their level of motivation towards learning English. The results are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Students' Level of Motivation.

Level	Percentage
Highly motivated to learn English	17.5
Well-motivated to learn English	34.9
Motivated to learn English	31.7
Slightly motivated to learn English	9.5
Not at all motivated to learn English	1.6

The students' responses were concentrated in the 'well motivated and motivated' categories. There were six missing responses (4.8 %) for this item.

In the fourth section of the questionnaire, there were statements designed to measure the learners' engagement in some activities in and out of the classroom.

Table 5. Students' Engagement in Outside-the-Class Activities (%).

Statement: Have you …	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
26. Read grammar books on your own?	7.1	39.7	30.2	21.4
27. Done assignments which are not compulsory?	12.7	42.1	28.6	12.7
28. Noted down new words and their meanings?	40.5	34.4	19.2	5.6
29. Written English letters to pen-pals?	13.4	14.3	29.4	42.9
30. Read English notices around you?	55.6*	29.4	7.1	4.8
31. Read newspapers in English?	20.6	32.5	28.6	16.7
32. Sent e-mails in English?	19.0	23.8	31.0	22.2
33. Read books or magazines in English?	44.4	31.7	18.3	4.0
34. Watched English TV programs?	73.0*	17.5	4.8	1.6
35. Listened to English radio?	31.7	23.0	17.5	24.6
36. Listened to English songs?	89.7*	4.0	2.4	1.6
37. Talked to foreigners in English?	33.3	34.1	23.8	6.3
38. Practiced using English with friends?	30.2	38.1	25.4	4.0
39. Done English self-study in a group?	24.6	31.7	26.2	12.7
40. Done grammar exercises?	19.0	31.7	34.1	12.7
41. Watched English movies?	78.6*	12.7	1.6	4.8
42. Written a diary in English?	11.9	9.5	19.8	54.8*
43. Used the internet in English?	71.4*	17.5	3.2	4.0
44. Done revision not required by the teacher?	12.7	34.1	37.3	12.7
45. Attended a self-study center (e.g. CILL)?	5.6	18.3	27.0	47.6
46. Collected texts in English (e.g. articles, brochures, labels, etc.)?	23.8	25.4	27.8	19.8
47. Gone to see your teacher about your work?	13.5	38.1	23.8	23.0

Note: The categories noted by the majority of students are noted with an asterisk to ease data interpretation.

Of the 22 items in section 3 of the questionnaire, in six of the statements, the majority of the students' responses were clustered in either 'often' or 'never'. In five cases, most of the learners stated that they 'often' engaged in the given activity. In the other case, most of the learners reported that they 'never' engaged in the given activity ('Written a diary in English'). Out of 22, 15 activities seem to have been either 'often' or 'sometimes' practiced.

The final section of the questionnaire also contained five statements for inside-the-class learning activities. Table 6 shows how the participants engaged in the given activities.

Table 6. Students' Engagement in Inside-the-Class Activities (%).

Statement	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
48. Asked the teacher questions when you don't understand?	32.5	38.9	21.4	5.6
49. Noted down new information?	59.5*	27.8	8.7	2.4
50. Made suggestions to the teacher?	16.7	27.8	38.1	14.3
51. Taken opportunities to speak in English?	31.0	47.6	15.1	4.8
52. Discussed learning problems with classmates?	32.5	33.3	21.4	8.7

Note: The categories noted by the majority of students are noted with an asterisk to ease data interpretation.

The detailed analysis of the students' responses presented in this section provided some interesting findings. The majority of students stated they 'often' noted down new information. In four of the five activities, they stated that they 'often' or 'sometimes' engaged in the given activity. Thus, the results presented in Tables 5 and 6 show that the respondents seemed to promote their autonomous roles through activities in and out of the classrooms.

Students' Foreign Language Anxiety

The questionnaires described above were distributed to undergraduate students at the two universities

To answer the second research question, the means and standard deviations were tabulated for each item. Considering the possible range of the FLCAS, a score of 99 or above was selected as the cut-off point (Lee, 2014). Participants who had total scores of 99 or above were considered to be suffering some anxiety level. The mean for all the students' scores on the FLCAS was 107.06 (M = 3.28; SD = 18.40), which is higher than the theoretical cut-off score of 99. Of the 126 students, 86 had scores of 99 or higher. A score greater than 132 signified high anxiety in the FL classroom, and a total score of 99 to 132 signified moderate anxiety. The FLCAS data showed that 13 students felt highly anxious whereas 73 students were moderately anxious in their English classrooms. The top three highest mean scores are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Summary of Students' Anxiety Scores.

Statement	M	SD
Item 14	3.91	1.13
Item 31	3.80	1.16
Item 21	3.57	1.22

These top three items were 'I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers' (statement 14), 'I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language' (statement 31) and 'The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get' (statement 21). On the contrary, statement 10, which reads 'I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class' (M = 2.71, SD = 1.28), received the lowest mean.

Gender and Year of Study

To examine whether there were any significant differences according to gender and year of study in the risk of FLA, independent samples t-test analyses were carried out. Means differences of groups together with the results of statistical tests are given in Table 8.

Table 8. FLCAS Mean Differences of Groups.

	N	Mean	SD	p.
Female	74	3.16	.53	.874

Male	52	3.45	.55	
PYP	51	3.29	.53	.414
1st year	74	3.27	.58	

p value is significant at 0.05 level.

No significant differences in the scores for females (M = 3.16) and males (M = 3.45) were observed t (124) = 2.964, p = .883. Similarly, the year of study variable was run through independent-samples t-tests to determine if it correlated to a measure change. The results for year of study showed no significant group differences in the participants' FLCAS scores.

Students' Perceptions of Autonomous Learning and FLA
In relation to the fourth research question, the findings about qualitative data are presented next on the basis of the open-ended questions. As described before, content analysis was employed to the acquired data. Each researcher followed the data analysis procedure on his own to get reliable results. First, they read and coded the data in person and reread the data several times and then came together to analyze the data. Finally, they wrote up the findings drawn from the data. The findings of the qualitative data suggest that LA is a prerequisite for the learning process and an inevitable part of creating a productive learning atmosphere.

In addition to the responses to the first question which investigated the participants' perceptions of LA roles, answers to the open-ended questions provided more in-depth understanding. Most of the participants thought that LA is a means of learning on one's own or taking responsibility for one's learning process. One participant commented:

"It is a kind of self-studying (sic) without being [in] a school." (Participant 9)
Similarly, some of the participants also stated that autonomy refers to explaining one's individual states and learning process. For example, some participants made the following remarks:
"Learning with our own effort." (Participant 45)
"Self-learner. Without any directions, students must work and make him/her self-obliged to it". (Participant 49)
"Actually, it is self-learning." (Participant 61)
"Learning by yourself with knowing your weaknesses and strengths." (Participant 74)

The second open-ended question asked about the activities which autonomous learners had in and out of the classroom. The participants' responses included how they used listening and speaking skills in FL classrooms, the importance of taking notes, watching movies and writing emails. The following excerpts show some of their comments:

"Searching about things which we don't know is [an] effective way and presentation in the class can help us take some responsibility." (Participant 5)
"Watching movies or series, taking notes." (Participant 6)
"Listening to music, watching TV series, speaking with foreign people." (Participant 9)

The third question investigated learners' role and responsibility in language teaching. Most of the participants stated that learners are in charge of their own FL learning by making the following remarks:

"Learners' role and responsibility is to be active in language learning and the learner should always be aware, and search for information." (Participant 2)

"Learners should be responsible for their lessons so they should work hard." (Participant 36)

"I think students have [a] huge role and responsibility in language teaching because language teaching depends on [the] student's activity." (Participant 53)

However, quite a few participants stated that the teachers' role and way of teaching are important in FL learning process and that teachers are responsible for everything in the class. For example, two participants commented that:

"Teachers can change the way which they use for teaching (sic) if learners don't give positive feedback about what they learn." (Participant 4)

"Obviously, students have to study, but teachers should help them or don't give learners too much responsibility." (Participant 9)

The fourth open-ended question asked whether the curriculum fosters LA or not. From the responses, it can be said that most of the participants thought that the curriculum does not help or foster LA. For example, some participants stated:

"I think the curriculum makes (sic) limitation over the students." (Participant 11)

"No, curriculum is not a big part of learning. I think personal eagerness is more important." (Participant 34).

"I think [the] curriculum doesn't foster learner's autonomy because it doesn't cover all the things." (Participant 41)

"I don't believe the curriculum is beneficial for learner autonomy." (Participant 53)

A few participants, however, thought that the curriculum does foster LA as the following statements show:

"I believe that [the] curriculum helps the learner autonomy because when [the] teacher teach[es] something according to [the] curriculum, students take responsibility more easily." (Participant 3)

"Yes, I believe [the] curriculum fosters the learner, because the lesson directs the learners." (Participant 6)

The fifth open-ended question asked the participants about situations which cause anxiety in language-learning settings. The participants stated that the learning environment certainly affected their level of learning and motivation. For example, the following excerpts show their views about anxiety situations:

"Speaking in front of the class and presentation cause anxiety." (Participant 2)

"Making mistake[s], couldn't speak or express yourself properly." (Participant 10)

"Being afraid of [being] judged by teachers or classmates." (Participant 24)

The overall findings show that some of the respondents were cognizant of the concepts of LA and anxiety by referring to their definitions. They also gave their opinions about the target topics by guessing in their language learning settings. However, their knowledge and perceptions did not go beyond simple understanding. Based on the participants' remarks, the autonomous learning in and out of the classroom should be geared to improving learners' productive skills such as speaking and writing, in addition to translating, watching films and using the internet. Furthermore, most of the participants thought that the role and responsibility of the learning process are in learners' hands. However, some of the participants also believed that the curriculum does not foster LA. In relation to FLA, the participants referred to their fear of speaking, especially in front of an audience, and this situation made them nervous. This may have been caused by various reasons such as being afraid of making mistakes, peer pressure and not exactly knowing the topic.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study sought to provide a better and comprehensive understanding of EFL learners' autonomous roles and FLA in EFL contexts. As well as studying autonomous behaviors, the effect of motivation was also analyzed as motivation could be a precondition for LA (Spratt et al., 2002). Oxford and Shearin (1994) stated that motivation is a decisive indicator of learners' active engagement in FL learning.

The findings of this study, which explored LA and FLA among undergraduate student teachers, lead to four conclusions. First, the undergraduate EFL learners placed many roles and responsibilities on themselves in foreign language learning, which shows that they can be seen as autonomous learners. This result is similar to the findings on their inside and outside activities, which can be promoted through activities such as speaking, writing and using social networks; the findings showed that activities such as listening to English songs, watching movies and TV programmes in English and using the Internet were the most popular. The reason for the emphasis on these particular activities may be that they are easily accessible and inexpensive. This finding is in line with that of Bekleyen and Selimoğlu (2016). Gurbanov and Mirzayeva (2018) studied LA and found that both learners and teachers were familiar with the concept of LA and they had positive tendencies to the use of autonomous activities in the classroom, which is in line with the present findings about EFL learners' perceptions of autonomy. Similarly, Tomita and Sano (2016) studied Japanese EFL learners' perceptions of LA from different proficiency levels and found that the students were willing to be involved in decision-making when they were selecting course materials and inside and outside class activities, and this too is in line with the findings of the present study. As for motivation, the students' responses had a peak in 'Well-motivated to learn English'. As Spratt et al. (2002)

concluded, motivation is a strong variable which can affect the extent to which learners are ready to engage in autonomous FL learning. The participants, despite being well-motivated to learn English, seemed to partially fail to exhibit some important autonomy related activities such as 'make sure you make progress outside class'. This finding concurs with that of Farahani (2014).

Second, the great number of the respondents seemingly experienced moderate to high levels of FLA. This finding is consistent with those of several previous studies (Amengual-Pizarro, 2018; Awan et al., 2010; Russell, 2020). The participants also stated that they were aware of the concepts of LA and FLA in their literal forms, but they did not know exactly how to overcome classroom anxiety, for example, not being able to speak in front of their classmates for several reasons such as lack of confidence and proper use of grammar and vocabulary, fear of making mistakes and peer pressure. Liu (2012) explored FLA at tertiary level in relation to motivation, autonomy and proficiency and concluded that FLA was clearly seen among the student participants and that motivation and LA had higher correlations with each other.

Third, no statistically significant differences were found according to gender or year of study. Finally, the current study has produced quantitative and qualitative findings which are in line with each other in terms of LA, the inside and outside activities of autonomous learners and the classroom anxiety which the participants felt, thus the findings obtained from the quantitative and qualitative data complement one another.

Speaking more specifically, this current study has increased our understanding about LA and anxiety in terms of foreign language majors' perceptions in EFL context, roles and responsibilities, motivation and abilities, inside and outside classroom activities and the reasons which cause FLA.

In the light of the results which have been given above, it is worth to state the pedagogical implications for EFL learners about promoting the autonomous learning and lessening anxiety in EFL classrooms. First, integrating collaborative and reflective tasks along with autonomy-related activities might promote the LA and contribute to enabling EFL learners to have positive attitudes towards the notion of learning. As an example, Öztürk (2019) stated that developing course content and activities based on autonomy could enhance the learner and teacher autonomy, which leads to the promoting the EFL learners' views positively. In relation this, there are also some studies showing pre-service teachers' positive attitudes about applying autonomous principles into the course content, thereby facilitating learning (Balçıkanlı, 2010; Fabela-Cárdenas, 2012). Second, being aware of the anxiety among student teachers (Farahani, 2014; Liu, 2012), all stakeholders should be ready to raise learners' motivation and prepare the course materials accordingly. Last but not least, EFL learners should be equipped with the practical information about how to overcome high levels of anxiety especially for speaking ability inside and outside classrooms. This should also be invigorated by syllabus design both in pre-service and in-service teacher education programs.

Further research should also focus on larger samples in different contexts, together with classroom observations and focus interviews with different data collection tools. Moreover, more research is also necessary for obtaining data through learners' and teachers' perspectives in the same setting about LA and FLA. Finally, mixed methods longitudinal studies are needed to get a comprehensive picture of LA and FLA in Turkish EFL contexts.

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