

## **Relationship between teacher stories and encouragement of learner autonomy**

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This study aims to find whether there is a relationship between the stories of English language teachers as learners, and their attempts to encourage learner autonomy. A qualitative design was chosen in order to reveal any relationships, with data collected through semi-structured interviews with five teachers of English language, two experienced and three novice teachers, in 2014-2015 spring term. Interview questions were directed towards language learning histories, including learning experiences prior to and during their pre-service teacher education. Furthermore, a checklist form was employed to understand the role of teachers in promoting learner autonomy. The researchers analysed the data by rereading and identifying recurring codes, using interpretative data analysis. The findings show a relationship between English language teacher stories as learners and their attempts to encourage learner autonomy. They mostly relate their attempts to their previous learning experiences as language learners. Despite their willingness to foster autonomy, they mention hindrances such as personalities of the teachers, institutional factors, the academic level of the students, readiness for autonomy, and lack of motivation. Their attempts to encourage learner autonomy seem restricted, as English language teachers in this study claim that they were not given sufficient opportunities to experience autonomy in their own language learning. On the basis of the findings, one could suggest that future language teachers should be given opportunities to experience learner autonomy during their teacher education and language learning process so that they can more readily encourage learner autonomy in their classes.

### **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. As Little (1990, p. 7) discussed, autonomy is not "a single, easily describable behaviour". Due to its complex structure, it is vital that students be involved in making decisions about their own learning in order to contribute to the development of learner autonomy in language classrooms. There is an important role for teachers in this process since autonomous behaviours depend mostly on how teachers create an environment where autonomy is fostered, though it becomes clear that language teachers without any autonomy-oriented training may experience difficulties in creating such a classroom environment. Additionally, research indicates that teachers who themselves are not autonomous language learners may have a negative influence on the development of autonomy in their students (Little, 1995; Tort-Moloney, 1997; McGrath, 2000; Smith, 2000; Aoki & Hamakava, 2003; Huang, 2005; Sert, 2006; Viera, 2007; Smith & Erdoğan, 2007, Burkert & Schwienhorst, 2008).

Thus it is unrealistic to expect teachers to develop a sense of autonomy unless they have themselves experienced teacher training wherein exploratory and evaluative approaches to learning and teaching have been key elements (Little, 1995; Castle, 2006; Marcos & Tilema, 2006; Dam, 2007; Burkert & Schwienhorst, 2008). On this basis, teachers need to experience autonomous skills in their initial teacher training, so they will be better 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. Using the stories of five English language teachers as learners, the researchers in this study tried to find out whether this kind of relationship exists in their attempts to encourage learner autonomy in their classes.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Learner/teacher autonomy**

Hein (1991) defined constructivism as “a philosophy of learning that refers to the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves”. Learners construct their own knowledge based on their existing schemata and beliefs (Airasian & Walsh, 1997). The key idea that autonomy in language learning has borrowed from constructivism is the idea that effective learning is active learning. According to Wang and Peeverly (1986), effective learners are seen as being capable of learning independently and deliberately through identification, formulation and restructuring of goals; use of strategy planning; development and execution of plans; and engagement of self-monitoring. By taking advantage of personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955), the learners will be able to become more aware of their assumptions about learning and assume control of their own learning processes. Little (1991) argued that personal construct provides the learners with the ability to take control of their own learning in two ways. First, it provides a justification for the promotion of autonomy in terms of the operation of normal psychological processes. Second, it highlights the difficulties involved in the process of fostering autonomy. Apparently, constructivism supports, and extends to cover, psychological versions of autonomy that appertain to learners' behaviours, attitudes, motivation, and self-concept (Benson & Voller, 1997). As a result, constructivist approaches encourage and promote self-directed learning as a necessary condition for learner autonomy. In the process of promoting learner autonomy, teachers should take into consideration their learners' personal constructs or beliefs and values which are greatly affected by their classroom behaviours.

Little (1995) emphasised the dependence of learner autonomy on teacher autonomy from two aspects. First, he stated that the teachers need to be autonomous learners themselves in order to become autonomous teachers who can promote learner autonomy in their own students. Second, “in determining the initiatives they take in the classroom, teachers must be able to exploit their professional skills autonomously, applying to their teaching those same reflective and self-managing processes that they apply to their learning” (Little, 2007, p. 27). Little (2007) added a third dimension to teacher autonomy which is about the support of the system to develop learner autonomy: “to learn how to produce and manage the many varieties of target language discourse required by the autonomous classroom”

(p. 27). De Vries and Kohlberg (1987, p. 380) gave 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).

There are numerous concurrent debates about the concept of teacher autonomy and its dimensions. Basically, there are psychological and institutional dimensions of teacher autonomy. The focus of this study will be on psychological aspects of teacher autonomy, leaving aside the institutional dimension because teacher autonomy is an elusive concept, due the internal and external factors it includes. It would also seem awkward to attribute teacher autonomy only to a teacher's professional identity. Teacher autonomy holds a different position regarding developing learner autonomy. Studies indicate that there is a relationship between teacher and learner autonomy in language teaching and learning processes (Cotterall & Crabbe, 2008; Shaw, 2002; Usma & Frodden, 2003). In other words, teachers who were not autonomous learners in their language learning process may not attain good encouragement of autonomy in their learners, as indicated by Aoki (2002), Nakata (2011) and Little (1995; 2007). Taking all these into consideration, teacher autonomy is seen as a prior condition for learner autonomy (Aoki, 2002; Benson, 2001; Erdoğan, 2003; Little, 1995, 2007; McGrath, 2000; Nakata, 2009, 2011; Usma & Frodden, 2003; Thanasoulas, 2000; Tort-Moloney, 1997). It is suggested that teachers need to be autonomous learners so as to become autonomous teachers. Thus, if our target is to lead our student teachers to become autonomous teachers, we need an understanding of language teachers' stories and perspectives on learner autonomy while they were being trained to be teachers, and their attempts to promote learner autonomy in their current practices.

### **Teacher stories**

Teacher stories play a key role in understanding the knowledge, ideas, perspectives, issues and experiences that guide their work. Their stories describe the complexities of their practice, trace professional development over time and reveal the ways in which they make sense and configure their work (Johnson & Golombek, 2002). Additionally, teacher stories are considered to make curricular content more real, more immediate and, more importantly, more personal. Sharing stories and lessons among teachers is likely to build a sense of community, reduce the isolation so endemic to teaching and finally encourage teachers to see themselves as intentional practitioners integrating skill and art into their practice.

Narrative practices are defined as “intentional, reflective human actions, socially and contextually situated, in which teachers with their students, other colleagues, or researchers, interrogate their teaching practices to construct the meaning and

interpretation of some compelling or puzzling aspect of teaching and learning through the production of narratives that lead to understanding, changed practices, and new hypotheses” (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002, p. 21). In a similar vein, teachers can revisit the stories and more importantly can be given opportunities for reflection and information gathering. According to Gomez and Tabachnick (1992), teacher stories may provide a compelling means for engaging others to share and to better understand their own experiences. More specifically, teacher stories are believed to provide teachers and pre-service teachers with several ways to reflect on and learn from their beliefs, values and instructional practices (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Rushton, 2004). The use of stories in exploring teachers has been highly popular (Alsup, 2006; Ayers, 2001; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Craig, 2003; Danielewicz, 2001). Li (2005) clarified that teacher story in narrative inquiry has several definitions and a teacher story may be about “a narrative inquirer’s unforgettable teacher or teachers” or “a narrative inquirer’s own teaching” (p. 339). In this particular study, the focus will be on the narrator’s past experiences in his/her own learning, both formally and informally. Zeek, Foote and Walker (2001) expressed the importance of “the concepts of ‘personal practical knowledge’ (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) and ‘professional knowledge landscape’ (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995)” in narratives. These concepts represent the notion that past experiences, future plans, and the contexts in which teachers work have an effect on their classroom instruction (Zeek et al., 2001).

## **Research design**

In this ethnographic study the narratives are written in a literary, almost a story telling approach, which may limit the audience for the work, and may be challenging for authors accustomed to traditional approaches to scientific writing (Creswell & Poth, 2017). However, narrative inquiry brings storytelling and research together, by using stories as research data, or by using storytelling as a tool for data analysis (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014, p. 3). On the basis of this perspective upon narrative analysis, the researchers decided to use a qualitative research methodology that is increasingly common in contemporary research and can be best described as oral history by narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is concerned with the stories teachers and learners tell about their lived and imagined experiences (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014, p. 450). It seems crucial to have knowledge of the teacher’s stories in order to have a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. As stated by Barkhuizen et al. (2014), “the main strength of narrative inquiry lies in its focus on how people use stories to make sense of their experiences in areas of inquiry where it is important to understand phenomena from the perspectives of those who experience them” (p. 2). This method enabled us to capture each teacher’s own experiences, with her describing, narrating and analysing what she lived through in the recent past in the context of her educational journey.

Therefore, the research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What are the stories of teachers of English language?
2. Is there a relationship between teacher stories and their attempts to encourage learner autonomy?

## Participants

In Turkey, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) controls the assignment of teachers who can work at state schools after satisfying a central examination system. Private schools have their own examination system, but they are still under the supervision of MoNE. MoNE decides the curriculum, syllabus, and the books that will be used in the lessons. As autonomy has been widely discussed in language education and improving learner autonomy in language classes is gaining more and more attention nowadays, this study was carried out with English teachers. The five participants were working at state and private schools in 2014-2015 spring term. Two of them are experienced English teachers while three are novice English teachers in Turkey (Table 1; pseudonyms are used). They were chosen by purposive sampling since “in almost all qualitative research, the sample is a purposive sample. Random sampling ordinarily is not feasible, since the researcher wants to ensure that he or she obtains a sample that is uniquely suited to the intent of the study” (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2011, p. 430).

Table 1: Profiles of the participants

| Name (pseudonym) | Age | Years of teaching experience | Gender | School          | Profile of the students              |
|------------------|-----|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Buse             | 23  | 1                            | Female | Private college | Young learners                       |
| Ceren            | 22  | 1                            | Female | Private college | Young learners                       |
| Oya              | 24  | 1                            | Female | State school    | High school (9th grade)              |
| Simge            | 40  | 16                           | Female | State school    | High school (9th - 10th grade)       |
| Fulya            | 49  | 20                           | Female | State school    | High school (foreign language class) |

## Data collection

The data were collected via semi-structured interviews in the native language of the participants in order to obtain more detailed information. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent for the interview was requested. Expert judgment was taken for the comprehensibility of the interview questions and a pilot study was conducted in order to make sure that the sentences are clear to the participant. There were questions under three categories:

- a. Language learning histories;
- b. Learner stories prior to formal teacher education;
- c. Learner stories about pre-service education (see Appendix).

Furthermore, a checklist form was used to ascertain whether teachers promoted learner autonomy (Sert, 2006). These are the example in-class and out of class activities (see Appendix). The participants were asked each statement one by one by giving them the checklist and they were requested to give details about the practices they perform. For example, when the participant is asked whether she/he give choices to the learners, she/he is prompted to justify the answer by directing such questions as “why do I think

this way (I am giving choices a lot or little e.g.), whether it is your perspective or your students' readiness level, learner motivation or learner needs, e.g.". This process was required from the participants on purpose since it is vital to see the link between teachers' stories and their attempts to encourage learner autonomy.

### **Data analysis**

Interpretative data analysis was used in order to analyse the data, which is suitable for the nature of the qualitative research. Barkhuizen et al. (2014, p. 73) emphasised "... findings only emerge as a result of hard, and often creative, interpretive work by the researchers" and "narrative analysis refers to research in which stories are used as data and presenting findings". In this particular study, the narrative data were composed of interviews up to one hour in duration for each participant, that were conducted to get a language learning history. Thematic analysis was preferred for the analysis of the narratives because it "... it involves repeated reading of the data, coding and categorization of data extracts, and their reorganization under thematic headings" (Barkhuizen et al., 2014, p. 75). The researchers examined the interview transcripts and reread the data several times. The data were presented in three main ways. In the first place, the background profile of each participant was obtained before seeking information about whether teachers encouraged learner autonomy inside or outside their classrooms.

Subsequently, the relationship between teachers' stories as learners and their attempts to encourage learner autonomy was formed with quotations from each interview. Finally, the factors hindering the promotion of learner autonomy were provided under three themes, namely personal preferences, interdependence and negotiation, and restrictions on autonomy. Miles and Huberman (1994) emphasised the importance of check coding by expressing that "check-coding not only aids definitional clarity but also is a good reliability check" (p. 64). The themes and codes were presented to an expert in the field to minimise researcher bias and guarantee check coding. The expert went over all transcribed notes and carefully checked each code and theme. When disagreements occurred, consensus was accomplished through discussions on differences and flaws. The trustworthiness of the data was built up through this process (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). Inter-rater reliability of the data was calculated as 85% satisfying the standard suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), who stated that 80% coder agreement should be accomplished in order to ensure reliability.

### **Findings and discussion**

Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 11) pointed out that "in the demonstrative mode, data tend not to speak for themselves but instead are used in exemplary ways to illustrate the thoughts of the narrative writer. In an inductive mode, data more clearly tell their own story". On the basis of the demonstrative mode of the narrative, this part indicates the language learning histories of five teachers, their attempts to encourage learner autonomy, and discusses accordingly.

## Fulya

I graduated from the college and did not start studying English until I got to college at the age of 11. I was not that much conscious at those times and just assumed English as a lesson. I was fond of literature and chose the department of American Language and Literature at Hacettepe University. I had no extra study to develop English. In the first place, I did not want to be an English teacher. Now, I have been teaching foreign language class in the Anatolian High School.

| Learning opportunities   | Fulya  |
|--|--|
| Giving choices   | I sometimes ask how we should do something.                                  |
| Encouraging group work   | I have my students make group in the class and help each other.              |
| Encouraging learners to predict how well they did on tests             | I ask at the breaks did you study, how is it going?                          |
| Encouraging learners to set some learning goals                        | I determine, that is, I have to determine based on the needs.                |
| Encouraging learners to use authentic materials outside the classroom  | I suggest them reading books, and using some websites                        |
| Encouraging learners to keep learner diaries                           | They even do not have the capability to write in Turkish.                    |
| Encouraging learners to build reflection and extension into activities | -  |
| Encouraging self and peer editing                                      | Peer editing sometimes happens around these times                            |
| Creating a self-access facility in the classroom                       | I have designed a library but I cannot say that they have benefited from it. |
| Encouraging self-assessment  | We just talk about it orally but his is not something scientific.            |

There seems a parallelism between Fulya's story as a learner and the way she encourages group work and the use of authentic materials.

I used to design my own dialogues with the help of my friends and do this for each lesson.

I have my students make group in the class and help each other.

I also encourage them to go to concerts and I give examples from myself.

From another point, the way Fulya was trained was not focusing on developing learner autonomy and Fulya's stories seem to correspond to her practices in the classes.

My practicum teacher was holding a teacher-centred view.

## Oya

My secondary school teacher was like a leader to us and led us to make more sentences and produce something. I had preparatory class at the high school and had main course lessons, studying all the skills one by one. However, after the preparatory, there was no emphasis on the listening and speaking skills but on tests. I also did some extra activities

on my own like translating the song lyrics and poems, checking the translation of the lyrics in free time, trying to do listening, watching TV series with subtitles on TV when available.

| Learning opportunities   | Oya  |
|--|--|
| Giving choices   | -  |
| Encouraging group work   | I did not like group work because I was the one who did the work.  |
| Encouraging learners to predict how well they did on tests             | I sometimes encourage them to predict but there is a big gap between what they expect and reality                    |
| Encouraging learners to set some learning goals                        | Of course, I want them to set their own goals but they are in such a mood as what will happen when we learn English  |
| Encouraging learners to use authentic materials outside the classroom  | I tell them to watch TV series, some of them are watching with Turkish subtitles but they are few                    |
| Encouraging learners to keep learner diaries                           | -  |
| Encouraging learners to build reflection and extension into activities | I had them do writing exercises to a great extent this year  |
| Encouraging self and peer editing                                      | I had to give it up because a negative competition occurred among the students                                       |
| Creating a self-access facility in the classroom                       | We tried to build one but it failed  |
| Encouraging self-assessment  | Especially during chat, I ask these kinds of questions like what we did in the lesson, what you learnt in the lesson |

Oya says that she does not encourage group work due to the fact that she does not like it from her own experience as a learner:

I did not like group work because I was the one who did the work. Owing to this, I do not encourage it.

This supports the idea that teachers shape the classroom environment from their own experiences as a learner and they teach the way they were taught (Lortie, 1975). Especially, it can be seen that how Oya tried to improve English on her own and her suggestions towards their learners to improve their English match each other:

I also did some extra activities on my own like watching TV series.  
I tell them to watch TV series.

### Simge

I graduated from the college and liked English very much. My teacher was very sincere and serious towards us. We never spoke Turkish and when we did, we used to give money. I also did not need to do anything extra but I did my homework properly. The books directly coming from the England enchanted me. I did lots of activities related to listening, reading, speaking and writing. The focus in the first place was not on grammar and I learned the headings of the grammar topics at the university.



| Learning opportunities   | Simge   |
|--|---|
| Giving choices   | There is no such a thing as doing activity A or B in the class because our design is not like that.                                     |
| Encouraging group work   | I want them to produce something together.  |
| Encouraging learners to predict how well they did on tests             | I do this one. What do you expect, how many questions did you do? I do it.  |
| Encouraging learners to set some learning goals                        | I want them to have a goal but I am giving them owing to the fact that I think they cannot find one.                                    |
| Encouraging learners to use authentic materials outside the classroom  | I strongly recommend them to watch TV series.   |
| Encouraging learners to keep learner diaries                           | I never do this.  |
| Encouraging learners to build reflection and extension into activities | Of course we always want them to transfer what they have learnt through the activities at the end of the unit and workbook.             |
| Encouraging self and peer editing                                      | When you do something wrong, firstly try to correct it yourself. When you cannot correct it, go to your friends and ask for their help. |
| Creating a self-access facility in the classroom                       | -   |
| Encouraging self-assessment  | You will evaluate yourself. I cannot evaluate you all.  |

Due to the fact that Simge was trained in a traditional classroom, the techniques Simge uses do not seem to encourage learner autonomy.

I want them to have a goal but I am giving them owing to the fact that I think they cannot find one.

There is no such a thing as doing activity A or B in the class because our design is not like that.

### Ceren

I started to learn English at the 4th grade. I had this weird, old English teacher as did everyone. I had another teacher at the 7th grade and she was younger and more idealistic compared to that old one. She also focused on grammar however she had a different approach and we had lots of exercises. She used to speak English in the class, no Turkish. I never remember I had reading or writing exercises. I learnt the rules with her and my vocabulary developed to a great extent. Then, I got to high school and chose foreign language department with the guidance of my teachers. With the help of the teachers, I developed my English. I liked studying English so much and I do not forget what I have learnt. I did no extra activities to develop English consciously however it is a necessity to mention that my mother used to watch lots of foreign TV series at home and my elder sister used to listen to foreign songs. I was in such an environment and it resulted in my tendency to English.

| Learning opportunities   | Ceren   |
|--|---|
| Giving choices   | The lesson goes on however they want.   |
| Encouraging group work   | Everyone wants to be the first one due to their egocentric nature at those ages.  |
| Encouraging learners to predict how well they did on tests             | They are very young and they do not have this kind of examination.  |
| Encouraging learners to set some learning goals                        | They are very young. Their only goal is to communicate and play games. I do not have much chance here.  |
| Encouraging learners to use authentic materials outside the classroom  | I also advise their parents to expose their children at home and watch something in English. I tell them if their children watch cartoons in English, their English develops.   |
| Encouraging learners to keep learner diaries                           | This is the first time I have ever seen such a thing. I do not know this.   |
| Encouraging learners to build reflection and extension into activities | When I start the activity, the aim of the activity is different like matching or something else, the child does not understand the real aim of the activity and develops another connection by himself and carries out that like if I find the differences, the child finds similarities. |
| Encouraging self and peer editing                                      | I always want to give chance for self-editing. They all correct as a group.   |
| Creating a self-access facility in the classroom                       | They have this chance not in the class but at home.   |
| Encouraging self-assessment  | They are very young again but sometimes I hear them talking today we learnt cats, dogs.   |

Due to the fact that Ceren was trained in a traditional classroom (“My teacher was the authority in the class”), the techniques Ceren uses do not seem to encourage learner autonomy.

This is the first time I have ever seen such a thing (referring to encouraging learners to keep learner diaries).

I do not have much chance here (referring to encouraging learners to set some learning goals).

### **Buse**

I started to learn English at the 4th grade at the age of 10. A religion teacher was giving the course. At the 7th and 8th grade, I had an English teacher I liked very much and English got my attention, which happened via my secondary school teacher. I still remember joyfully how he played English games with us. Then, I chose foreign language department at the high school. I developed my grammar at the high school (mostly due to the examination system) very much, however there was lack of speaking and writing. I had some extra study to develop especially my listening skills by listening to music, watching foreign TV series, and doing some translation of the songs. I believe that I studied hard at the high school. Then, I had access to English Language Department at the university, which I believe that I developed my speaking skills in order to be able to communicate in English in the lessons.

| Learning opportunities   | Buse   |
|--|--|
| Giving choices   | I do this a lot in writing activities. I do not tell them to write about a specific topic. I give them 3-4 options.  |
| Encouraging group work   | I also give this chance to them.   |
| Encouraging learners to predict how well they did on tests             | I do not support in this respect. I do not do.   |
| Encouraging learners to set some learning goals                        | I put the target.  |
| Encouraging learners to use authentic materials outside the classroom  | I suggest them watching movies, listening to music, or reading newspaper.  |
| Encouraging learners to keep learner diaries                           | I have always wanted them to do this. I have talked to students to do something like this. I checked once or twice. However, I could not take any feedback.              |
| Encouraging learners to build reflection and extension into activities | One of our teachers at the university used to have us make one sentence about what we have learnt in that lesson before we left the class. I do this also in my classes. |
| Encouraging self and peer editing                                      | They are making fun of themselves too much. They have a very competitive spirit.   |
| Creating a self-access facility in the classroom                       | There is no such a thing in the school.  |
| Encouraging self-assessment  | On every Friday, we always discuss what we have learnt to wrap-up the week like we have learnt that in that unit, any question?  |

Buse's teacher being authority in the class ("She was the authority in the class and her attitudes towards the students were not nice") may have affected her autonomy as a learner and teacher. Buse uses the technique she saw from her practicum teacher at the school. "After we have learnt a new word, I want everyone to make a sentence from that word". Buse also adds that it is working:

They learn the word but they do not know how to use it. They use it inappropriately or think the word as its Turkish version. I have a chance to correct when I hear their sentence and it is wrong.

Buse also applies some activities working in her practicum class in her own class now.

I saw that warm-up working in the practicum class and I got the attention of the students. I saw it was working. So, I apply them now due to the fact that it worked in my practicum.

Buse also uses that technique she observed from her teacher at the university about reflection. The direct effect of this can be seen in her encouragement to build reflection in the activities. There is also great parallelism what Buse did outside the class while she was learning English and what she suggests her students to do (listening to music, watching foreign TV series and movies). Due to the fact that Buse does not work at a state school, she is flexible in terms of syllabus.

I never make the students do those traditional activities. In the first place, it was bad because it was against to my planned and programmed personality. It was like a threat. On the other side, it set me free and I brought extra activities.

Buse's high school teacher used to text and see them outside the class:

Our high school English teacher used to meet us outside the class and send us messages in English. I liked that so much. Now, I have a *whatsapp* group and sometimes send them messages like study your lesson or I am writing lyrics. What is more, I am meeting some of my 7th grade students outside the class.

It seems that Buse uses the technique from high school for her current class.

One of our teachers at the university used to have us make one sentence about what we have learnt in that lesson before we left the class. I do this also in my classes.

It can be said that there is a parallelism between her language learning history and the way she encourages learners to use English outside the class.

We have also a *whatsapp* group with students and chat there in English. I used to have this kind of group at the university to practice English and I am still using it.

All in all, it can be seen that there seems to be a relationship between their language learning histories – teacher stories as learners and attempts to encourage learner autonomy. The results indicate that the teachers in this study do not seem to have much chance to promote autonomy in their classes, as they were not trained as an autonomous learner and prospective teacher.

Though Fulya attempts to promote learner autonomy, there are some hindering factors like time limits and low proficiency of the learners. When looking at the relationship between Oya's story and her encouraging learner autonomy, there are some common points emerging. The relationship between the stories of Simge and Ceren as learners and their attempts to encourage learner autonomy also shows similarities.

As it can be understood from the findings that the teachers in this study do not have much chance to promote learner autonomy, possibly due to the fact that they were not autonomous learners during their own language learning process. The findings are in accord with what Little (1995; 2007) suggested about the dependence of learner autonomy on teacher autonomy. However, it must be pointed out that there is another side of the coin: inner and outer factors hindering the development of learner autonomy, which are discussed below.

## **Factors hindering the promotion of learner autonomy**

### **Personal preferences**

Buse likes giving choices and she always does this, which can be related to her personality because Simge does not give any choice, because she wants to have the control of the

class. This shows us the great impact of personalities of teachers on teaching styles, as the individuals bring their own selves to the environment and this affects their learning and teaching, as indicated by Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory. It can be seen that Simge's personality affects the way she teaches in the class:

While I am teaching in the class, there cannot be any noise. I have to have the control, I like to have control. The students are younger than me. I have to identify the rules and you should show the students the boundaries, the students cannot choose beyond those boundaries. I do not like chaos. This is something I have been implementing since I was eleven.

Therefore, this matches with the idea that teachers have both their school knowledge and their personality in the class. Every teacher has unique self, and teachers are inescapably autonomous in the way they teach and take actions in the class. However, this does not always match with the tendency to support learner autonomy (Aoki, 2002). Ceren can be said to show a high level autonomy in giving choices to the learners due to their being young. It also should be stated that Ceren seems to be aware of her learners' needs:

The more I observe the learners, the more I become aware of their development process. I have some ideas in my mind like this age group carries out this and that age group carries out that.

This is also related to the nature of the children. The children are naturally autonomous. And, it can be said that they have now strong version and proactive autonomy. This is also related to the personality of Ceren:

I have never felt myself bigger than them. I think them as friends of mine not as students. We all sit on the ground.

### **Interdependence and negotiation**

Oya complains about how their students are indifferent to English. This may be related to the cultural factors where the school is located:

This place is not giving so much importance to education. The students are rather indifferent to the lesson. They do not listen to me most of the time and they are discouraging me a lot. The children are very agonistic, liars and swearing. The smuggling is very widespread in the suburbs. The children are looking for earning money from the short way.

Also, it can be said that the students do not seem to be ready to take responsibility for their own learning. The reason for this seems to be lack of student interest in English and cultural factors, with students even not wanting to try new learning methods. Oya had also some difficulties due to the fact that the students are used to the traditional system and when they encountered something new, they opposed to it.

They were used to classical methods. For example, there were no speakers in the school, and I brought speakers and a laptop from home. They got excited on the first day but on

the second day they got bored and started saying to go back to book and notebooks. This resulted in my burnout. I switched to classical method.

This shows us that willingness seems really crucial in developing learner autonomy (Littlewood, 1996). Also, from another point, in order to develop learner autonomy, teachers need to negotiate and there must be some interdependence between teachers and learners (Benson, 2001; Breen & Candlin, 1980; Brookes & Grundy, 1988; Bruffee, 1993; Little, 1995; Voller, 1997). It can be said that Oya's students do not seem to be very much aware of a target in learning a foreign language, which is "the learner's acceptance of responsibility for his or her learning entails the gradual development of a capacity for independent and flexible use of the target language" (Little, 1995, p. 179). Fulya makes a good group organisation and supports her learners to collaborate with each other.

### **Restrictions on autonomy**

For Simge, a good plan is really important and the students are not capable of doing this.

They want to have anything without any effort. In the new system, I have the role of the facilitator and the learners should take control of their own learning however, there is a dilemma here. While we are raising the kids, we cannot give them those emotions. We are talking about learner autonomy in the class but the student cannot prepare her/his breakfast. The student has not taken any responsibility. Why should the student take the responsibility of his/her own learning?

Therefore, it is about the fact that learners are used to teachers who traditionally are the authority in the class and are not informed about "how to diagnose their own needs for learning, formulate their own learning objectives, identify learning resources and planning strategies for taking the initiative in using those resources, assess their own learning, and have their assessments validated" (Knowles, 1980, p. 44). Furthermore, Fulya thinks that the students' readiness to take control of their learning is really important. Therefore, it can be stated that the children lose proactive autonomy in time, they somehow get used to spoon-feeding. This is also parallel with Smith's (2003) weak version of autonomy that learners lack autonomy currently. This supports the criticism that we are already autonomous when we are born, but the system kills this.

Hence, Simge does not seem to believe and trust in her learners' capacity to act autonomously, which is one of the roles of the teachers seeking to develop autonomy in the class (Breen & Mann, 1997). Simge seems to lack those affective dispositions suggested by Aoki (1999; 2001) to promote learner autonomy: trusting learners, providing choices, and leaving room for negotiation with learners. However, it can be seen clearly that Simge helps learners evaluate themselves, which is related to technical support provided by the teachers (Boud, 1988). Also, Simge does not want to get involved in chaos. However, those who handle this chaos can be successful in fostering autonomy (Breen & Mann, 1997). Also, the teachers' readiness is important in developing learner autonomy (Little, 1995). Fulya encourages learners to set some goals but it does not work with her students, due to their low proficiency and lack of autonomy.

Besides, Simge clarified that she remembers her English teachers the most.

They are the ones remaining in my mind the most. Owing to the fact that they provide a much more independent atmosphere, it is a flexible environment. There is pair work and group work. There has to be some noise.

It can be said that Simge may have been influenced by her teachers to be supportive towards also encouraging group work. However, Simge admits that group work is practical in her case, due to her large class size. In that case, the effect of the system also should not be denied because teachers are also affected by institutional constraints (Benson, 2001). In line with this, Fulya cannot give so many opportunities to the students like choosing or writing, due to their low proficiency. Therefore, it can be said that the level of the students affects the development of learner autonomy. Fulya also admits that she has skipped some activities due to time limitations, which is a problem for many teachers.

Although Ceren seems to be eager to encourage learners for independent learning in issues such as setting their own goals, Ceren cannot give this opportunity due to their being young learners. Therefore, the age of the learners may hinder the development of autonomy.

All in all, it can be said that the teachers in this study are unable to strongly encourage learner autonomy. This may be related also to the Turkish educational system, which is considered to be teacher-centred, and teachers use traditional teaching methods extensively. Let alone the learners, the teachers also have a passive role in taking part in decision-making about education and there seems to be only modest decentralisation in the Turkish educational system.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to find out whether there is a relationship between the stories of teachers as learners and their attempts to encourage learner autonomy. It can be observed that this study provided rich information about the role of teacher autonomy in promoting learner autonomy. The teachers in this study may have tried to develop learner autonomy, but without achieving extensive development, partly because it is likely that they were not trained in environments supporting autonomy. However, some inner and outer factors like personality, lack of interdependence, age and level of the learners may also hinder the development of learner autonomy.

This study suggests two main points be taken into consideration in order to be able to encourage autonomous teachers. First, the findings indicate the importance of being an autonomous language learner before being an autonomous teacher. Thus, language learners should be given enough opportunities to become an autonomous language learner in the first place so that they may possibly turn into autonomous teachers in the future. As emphasised throughout this article, teachers have a great responsibility in encouraging the development of learner autonomy in language classrooms, since

autonomous behaviours depend mostly on how teachers provide an environment where autonomy is promoted, and it is obvious that language teachers without any autonomy-oriented training might face difficulties in creating such a classroom environment.

In order to provide such an autonomy-rich environment, teacher education programs should enrich the environments where the student teachers can take active roles in monitoring, evaluating, and reflecting on the objectives of the related course, material selection, classroom management, and homework assignments. The role of teacher educators has a prominent influence on raising autonomous student teachers from the very beginning of their pre-service education, by promoting major issues such as assigning student teachers out-of-class tasks, involvement in decision-making processes, and using some projects like portfolios, wikis, or blogging. Teacher educators should encourage their student teachers to engage in outside the classroom tasks so as to increase their autonomous behaviours. Since learner autonomy generally goes hand in hand with outside the classroom learning, it would be productive to assign some tasks that might appeal to their interests and needs so they can start developing autonomy skills very early.

Teacher educators should involve their student teachers in the decision-making process. As Little (1995, p. 180) pointed 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. 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 reflective insights into the development of practical knowledge, teaching behaviour and thinking processes. Portfolios can serve as a good means for cultivating and eventually benefitting teacher autonomy in many respects.

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## Appendix: Questionnaire

Dear participants,

Below are open-ended questions about your language learning process and the activities you have conducted with your students. Answering the questions sincerely is important for the reliability of working. The information you provide will be kept confidential for the purpose of the study.

Thank you.

Esra Harmandaoğlu Baz  
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Age:

Gender:

Graduation year:

When did you start the profession?

1. How did your English learning process start (and when) and what kind of work did you have?
2. What kind of personality traits do you have? Do you think these features make it easier for you to take responsibility for your own learning? Did you use to do extracurricular

activities while learning English? Did you want to do these things or did your teacher direct you?

3. What kind of internship period did you have? What are the important reminders in your mind about your internship teacher in your internship education? What do you remember?
4. What do you remember about the demo lessons you did in school during your internship? How did you prepare for these classes? Did you follow the book or did you have your own supplementary material?
5. Which following points do you wish to give responsibility to your learners? Why?
  - a. Identifying their own language learning goals
  - b. Creating the content of the course
  - c. Monitoring their own learning processes
  - d. Monitoring their friends' learning processes
  - e. Assessing their learning
6. Have you carried out any of the above options (question 6)? If you did, how did you manage?
7. Do you support your students' activities outside the classroom? How? What kind of materials do you use?
8. Do you endeavor to understand what your students feel and think during the language learning process?
9. Have you ever heard the concept of Learner Autonomy? What do you know about this concept?
10. Below are 10 sentences about in-class and out-of-class activities. Please tick according to your frequency of doing these activities.

|     | Learning opportunities   | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Always |
|-----|--|-------|--------|-----------|-------|--------|
| 1.  | Giving choices (For example: choose activity A or B for homework or choose someone to work with) |       |        |           |       |        |
| 2.  | Encouraging group work   |       |        |           |       |        |
| 3.  | Encouraging learners to predict how well they did on tests                                       |       |        |           |       |        |
| 4.  | Encouraging learners to set some learning goals  |       |        |           |       |        |
| 5.  | Encouraging learners to use authentic materials outside the classroom                            |       |        |           |       |        |
| 6.  | Encouraging learners to keep learner diaries   |       |        |           |       |        |
| 7.  | Encouraging learners to build reflection and extension into activities                           |       |        |           |       |        |
| 8.  | Encouraging self and peer editing  |       |        |           |       |        |
| 9.  | Creating a self-access facility in the classroom   |       |        |           |       |        |
| 10. | Encouraging self-assessment  |       |        |           |       |        |

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**Please cite as:** Harmandaođlu Baz, E., Balçikanlı, C. & Cephe, P. T. (2018). Relationship between teacher stories and encouragement of learner autonomy. *Issues in Educational Research*, 28(3), 613-634. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier28/harmandaoglu-baz.pdf>