THE EFFECT OF COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES ON COLLEGE-LEVEL EFL

STUDENTS' LEARNER AUTONOMY IN THE TURKISH CONTEXT

A MASTER'S THESIS

BY

DEMET TURAN-ÖZTÜRK

THE PROGRAM OF

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

İHSAN DOĞRAMACI BILKENT UNIVERSITY

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JUNE 2016

To my precious family

The Effect of Collaborative Activities on College-Level EFL Students' Learner

Autonomy in the Turkish Context

The Graduate School of Education

of

İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

Demet Turan-Öztürk

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

Asst. Prof. Dr. Julie Mathews-Aydınlı
(Supervisor)

Asst. Prof. Dr. Çağrı Özköse-Bıyık
(Co-supervisor)

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Cem Balçıkanlı
(Examining Committee Member)

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Asst. Prof. Dr. Deniz Ortaçtepe
(Examining Committee Member)

Approval of the Graduate School of Education

Prof. Dr. Margaret Sands (Director)

ABSTRACT

THE EFFECT OF COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES ON COLLEGE-LEVEL EFL STUDENTS' LEARNER AUTONOMY IN THE TURKISH CONTEXT

Demet Turan-Öztürk

M.A. Department of Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Julie Mathews-Aydınlı

Co-supervisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Çağrı Özköse-Bıyık

June, 2016

One of the most fundamental aims of education in EFL context has been fostering learner autonomy. So far, various studies have been conducted and teaching practices have been put to use in order to develop learners' autonomous learning skills. One of these practices could be changing the traditional methods in language teaching in Turkish educational system into student-centered ones. Such a practice could create opportunities for students to study together and allow them to learn from each other by improving their sense of responsibility and take control of their own learning. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of collaborative activities on college-level EFL students' learner autonomy in the Turkish context. It also aims to find out the students' and the instructor's perceptions of collaborative activities on learner autonomy development.

To achieve this aim, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected with the help of a Learner Autonomy questionnaire, index cards filled out by the students, the

instructor's journal, and an interview with the instructor. Two groups of 40 students in total from the preparatory program of Niğde University School of Foreign Languages were appointed as an experimental and a control group. The learner autonomy questionnaire was conducted as both pre-test and post-test in both groups, before and after the collaborative learning treatment in the experimental group, in order to detect any possible change in students' learner autonomy level. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed by using Wilcoxon Matched Groups test and Mann-Whitney U Test. Qualitative data gathered from index cards, the journal and the interview were analyzed with the use of content analysis.

The results of the quantitative data analysis revealed that, after the treatment, there was a statistically significant difference between the groups in terms of their autonomy level; the students in the experimental group scored higher than those in the control group, which implies they showed more autonomous skills than the control group. The results of the qualitative data analysis indicated that participants' perceptions were highly positive about the collaborative activities. They revealed that collaborative activities created a positive environment in the classroom and allowed them to learn from each other and gain a sense of responsibility. The course instructor was also in favor of the collaborative activities as they had various benefits for her teaching. These overall results suggested that collaborative learning practices could be implemented to help the students increase their learner autonomy level in the Turkish EFL context.

Key words: learner autonomy, collaborative learning

ÖZET

İŞBİRLİKLİ ÖĞRENME AKTİVİTELERİNİN TÜRKİYE'DE İNGİLİZCEYİ YABANCI DİL OLARAK ÖĞRENEN ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN ÖĞRENEN ÖZERKLİĞİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ

Demet Turan-Öztürk

Yüksek Lisans, Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce Öğretimi Programı

Tez Yöneticisi: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Julie Mathews-Aydınlı

2. Tez Yöneticisi: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Çağrı Özköse-Bıyık

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İngilizcenin yabancı dil olarak öğrenildiği bağlamlardaki eğitimin temel amaçlarından biri öğrenen özerkliğini geliştirmek olmuştur. Şimdiye kadar, öğrencilerinin özerkliğini geliştirmek amacıyla birçok çalışma yürütülmüş ve öğretim uygulamaları kullanılmıştır. Bu uygulamalardan biri de Türk eğitim sistemindeki geleneksel dil eğitimini öğrenci merkezli uygulamalara dönüştürmek olabilir. Böyle bir uygulama, öğrencilerin sorumluluk duygularını geliştirerek ve kendi öğrenmelerinin kontrolünü alarak, birlikte çalışıp birbirlerinden öğrenmelerini sağlayacak fırsatlar yaratabilir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmanın amacı işbirlikli öğrenme etkinliklerinin Türkiye'de İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen üniversite öğrencilerinin öğrenen özerkliği seviyesi üzerindeki etkisini incelemektir. Bu çalışma ayrıca öğrenci ve öğretmenlerin işbirlikli öğrenme etkinliklerinin öğrenme özerkliğinin gelişimine etkisine dair algılarını belirlemeyi amaçlamıştır.

Bu amacı gerçekleştirmek için, Öğrenci Özerkliği anketi, öğrencilerin doldurduğu içerik kartları, okutmanın günlüğü ve okutmanla yapılan görüşme yardımıyla nicel ve nitel veriler toplanmıştır. Niğde Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu hazırlık sınıfı öğrencilerinden iki grupta toplam 40 öğrenci deney ve kontrol grubu olarak belirlenmiştir. Öğrenen Özerkliği anketi, öğrenen özerkliği seviyesindeki muhtemel değişikliği tespit etmek amacıyla, deney grubundaki işbirlikli öğrenme uygulamasından önce ve sonra, her iki grupta öntest ve sontest olarak uygulanmıştır. Anketlerden elde edilen veri frekans, yüzde, Wilcoxon Eşlemeli Grup testi ve Mann-Whitney U testi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. İçerik kartları, günlük ve görüşmeden elde edilen veriler ise içerik analizi yöntemi ile analiz edilmiştir.

Nicel veri analizinin sonucu gruplar arasında özerklik seviyesi bakımından istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir fark olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır; deney grubu kontrol grubundan daha yüksek bir puan almıştır, bu durum deney grubunun kontrol grubundan daha fazla özerk öğrenme becerileri gösterdiği anlamına gelmektedir. Nitel veri analizinin sonucu, öğrencilerin işbirlikli öğrenme aktivitelerine dair algılarının oldukça olumlu olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu aktiviteler, sınıfta olumlu bir atmosfer oluşturmuş, öğrencilerin birbirlerinden öğrenmelerini ve sorumluluk bilinci kazanmalarını sağlamıştır. Öğretim açısından birçok yararı olduğu için, öğretmen de işbirlikli etkinliklerden kullanılmasından yanadır. Tüm bu sonuçlar işbirlikli öğrenme uygulamalarının, Türkiye'de İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenme bağlamında öğrencilerin özerk öğrenme seviyelerini yükseltmelerine yardımcı olmak için kullanılabileceğini önermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Öğrenen özerkliği, işbirlikli öğrenme

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

"Give a man a fish, he eats for a day; teach him how to fish and he will never go hungry." This famous saying emphasizes the importance of taking responsibility for one's own learning. In the rapidly developing field of language teaching, helping students understand and apply self-learning has been the aim of various studies to suggest independent learning approaches or methods as an alternative to traditional teacher-led learning. Similarly, there has been an increasing interest and necessity to foster learner autonomy in English teaching and learning. The notion is usually referred to as "learner autonomy" in educational contexts and is defined as a concept in which learners take the responsibility for their own learning (Little, 1999). Autonomous learners are active in the learning process, as they develop a sense of interdependence in collaboration with the other learners, which leads them to achieve the learning goals successfully (Benson, 2011).

Collaborative learning is a "pedagogical tool which is used to encourage learners to achieve common learning goals by working together rather than being wholly dependent on the teacher, and demonstrating that they value and respect each other's input" (Macaro, 1997, p. 134). As a result of learners' sharing learning, it is claimed that they will recognize and value their own knowledge, competence and talent in their English learning process. The use of collaborative learning as a tool may help teachers boost students' development towards higher autonomy and self-reflective capabilities with the help of participants' interaction (Iborra, García, Margalef & Perez, 2010).

Implementing collaborative learning in the class and having students learn from each other might help them be aware of their responsibilities and raise their autonomy level in language learning. Little (1991) regards language learning as a social activity which necessitates interaction with other learners, and autonomous learning requires interdependence rather than learning in isolation. According to Benson (2011), learners need to have opportunities to control their own learning in a collaborative learning environment in order to develop learner autonomy. In addition, Law (2011) asserts that autonomy might be achieved with the help of a collaborative learning environment in which learners interact with each other and construct their knowledge together. In this sense, the aim of this study is to explore the effect of collaborative learning on learner autonomy in the Turkish EFL context.

Background of the Study

Autonomy is "the ability to take charge of one's own language learning" (Holec, 1981, p. 3) and the ability to take responsibility for one's own learning objectives, progress, method and techniques of learning. It is also "the ability to be responsible for the pace and rhythm of one's learning and self-evaluation of the learning process" (Macaro, 1997, p. 168).

Autonomy involves an individual struggle, self-instruction and self-access to develop awareness for learning and be more successful. To be an autonomous learner requires "insight, a positive attitude, a capacity for reflection, and a readiness to be proactive in self-management and in interaction with others" (Jingnan, 2011, p. 28). Nearly all of the definitions of autonomy include capacity and willingness of the learner to learn both independently and interpersonally. According to Murphey and Jacobs (2000), being autonomous is not exactly learning alone, but being able to make

decisions critically and metacognitively to develop one's own learning. Lee (2008) suggests that autonomy has to be "a learning-related lifestyle" that emerges from an awareness of learning (p. 106). Furthermore, he states that empowering students by making them the agents of their own learning can be accomplished through interaction among learners.

As the language teaching field grows rapidly, the importance of helping students gain a sense of responsibility and take control of their learning has become one of the most noteworthy themes and a large number of justifications for promoting learner autonomy in language learning have been proposed (Dafei, 2007). Today, one of the expectations in language teaching and learning environments is that teachers need to be interested not only in teaching well, but also in teaching students how to learn well. Collaborative learning is one of the methods that may help teachers and students do this, by providing learners with an environment in which they can learn from each other and helping them gain a sense of responsibility, and therefore, raising levels of learner autonomy.

Collaborative learning aims to help learners succeed in learning goals by working together rather than being completely dependent on the teacher, and supports students to indicate that they value and respect each other (Macaro, 1997). Oxford (1997) says that collaborative learning has a "social constructivist" duty which involves learning as a part of a community by constructing the knowledge with other learners.

The concept of collaborative learning can be associated with Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory, which views learning as the result of the dynamism between teacher's guidance and students' efforts for achievement. According to Zhang (2012), collaborative learning settings "enable learners to have the opportunity to converse with peers, present and defend ideas and exchange diverse beliefs" (p. 108). Collaborative

learning can allow learners to gain a sense of responsibility, which is among the characteristics of a good language learner (Nguyen, 2010). Taking control of the learning process, obtaining and using the right resources and learning the language effectively cannot be succeeded by each learner's acting alone with her own preferences; on the contrary, individuals need to take decisions as a group (Ma & Gao, 2010).

Taking decisions as a group signals to collaborative autonomy, which is the type of interaction in which learners learn by giving cooperative decisions for learning better and constructing knowledge altogether (Khabiri & Lavasani, 2012; Murphey & Jacobs, 2000). Learners are willing to participate in social interaction, and perform the tasks collaboratively in an environment in which they have collaborative autonomy. Kojima (2008) states that collaboration is a social strategy used to develop autonomy, which includes various sub-strategies such as positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction and group processing.

It is suggested that collaborative learning provides participants with the opportunity to discuss, share, develop critical thinking and, therefore, take responsibility for their own learning (Totten, Sills, Digby, & Russ, 1991). Learning does not take place in an isolated environment and self-instruction does not necessarily mean learning on one's own; conversely, interaction, negotiation and collaboration are important factors in promoting learner autonomy (Lee, 1998; Pemberton, 1996). Garrison and Archer (2000) note that cognitive autonomy might be gained with the help of collaboration with the other learners and teachers. According to Macaro (1997), collaborative learning provides the means for learners to be empowered, by taking control of their learning and gaining more responsibility and awareness of the learning process. In addition, Gokhale (1995) points out that the students are responsible for one

another's learning as well as their own.

Statement of the Problem

A large and growing body of literature has emphasized the importance of autonomy in language learning, and suggested strategies to help teachers provide opportunities for learners to become more autonomous (Asmari, 2013; Balçıkanlı, 2008; Benson, 2012; Dam, 2011; Kohonen, 2012; Little, 1999; Oxford, 1997; Trebbi, 2008). However, a limited number of studies have examined the effect of collaborative activities on learner autonomy. For instance, Garrison and Archer (2000) note that "cognitive autonomy may best be achieved through collaboration and meaningful interaction with other learners and teachers". Also, Macaro (1997) states that collaborative learning enables learners to take control of their learning and gain more responsibility and awareness of their learning process. Although a few works have suggested that collaborative learning has an effect on learner autonomy (Clifford, 1999; Garrison & Archer, 2000; Gokhale, 1995; Iborra et al., 2010; Law, 2011; Macaro, 1997; Ma & Gao, 2010; Thanasoulas, 2000), this claim has not been investigated empirically. Therefore, this study aims to explore the effect of collaborative learning on learner autonomy.

At Niğde University, the lack of autonomous learning skills of the students, one being their not having the responsibility to control their own learning, is often discussed as a problem at the School of Foreign Languages. It is a common opinion among instructors that the students seem unable to take control of their own learning. The reasons for such low learner autonomy might be the lack of opportunity of interacting and peer-teaching enough. As Johnson and Johnson (2009) suggest, student-student interaction brings about higher learner achievement and productivity. Leading students

to understand each other's approaches to language learning by collaborating and reinforcing interaction among students through various activities and tasks might be a solution to low level of learner autonomy. Similarly, Nguyen (2010) mentions that the key point of collaborative learning is to create a learning environment in which students can gain a sense of real responsibility. Collaborative learning may provide this sense of responsibility for students to be more autonomous language learners. Hence, the purpose of this study is to examine whether collaborative activities affect college-level EFL students' learner autonomy in the Turkish context.

Although various studies have suggested that collaborative learning has an effect on learner autonomy (Benson, 2012; Clifford, 1999; Garrison & Archer, 2000; Gokhale, 1995; Iborra et al., 2010; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Laal & Ghodsi, 2012; Law, 2011; Ma & Gao, 2010; Macaro, 1997; Nguyen, 2010; Thanasoulas, 2000), there are no empirical studies directly investigating the extent to which collaborative learning might promote learner autonomy. In this sense, the present study aims to fill the gap in the literature as to the effect of collaborative learning on college-level EFL students' learner autonomy in the Turkish context.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the effect of collaborative activities on college-level EFL students' learner autonomy in the Turkish context?
2. What are the students' perceptions of collaborative activities on learner autonomy development?
3. What are the instructor's perceptions of collaborative activities on learner autonomy development?

Significance of the Study

Learner autonomy and the ways to promote it have been a widely studied area in the field of foreign language teaching. Although there are a few studies which suggest the promoting effect of collaborative learning on learner autonomy (e.g., Gokhale, 1995; Law, 2011; Lee, 1998; Macaro, 1997; Pemberton, 1996; Totten et al., 1991), this effect has not been investigated empirically. Therefore, the results of this study may contribute to the literature by providing evidence as to the role that collaborative learning might be able to play in raising EFL learners' learner autonomy level. Furthermore, course book authors and curriculum developers might benefit from the results of this study by gaining a deeper understanding of collaborative learning, which could inform their decisions about including particular activities and techniques into their works.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview on learner autonomy, collaborative learning and the effect of collaborative learning on learner autonomy in the literature. The background of the present study, the statement of the problem, the research question, and the significance of the study are presented in this chapter. In the next chapter, the review of the literature on learner autonomy, collaborative learning, the effect of collaborative activities on learner autonomy, some examples of collaborative activities, and the students' and the instructor's perceptions of the collaborative activities on learner autonomy development will be introduced. In the third chapter, the methodology of the study will be described. In the fourth chapter, data analysis and results will be presented. Finally, the results and conclusions which are drawn from the data will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study explores the possible effects of collaborative activities on learner autonomy. First of all, the definitions and different interpretations about learner autonomy will be presented. In the following section, the characteristics of autonomous learners in the literature will be described. Next, the approaches and methods employed to foster learner autonomy will be examined. Subsequently, the concept of collaborative learning and effects of collaborative learning on learning outcomes in language learning environments will be covered. Finally, collaborative learning as a factor that influences learner autonomy, and students' and the instructor's perceptions of the collaborative activities on learner autonomy development will be discussed.

Definitions of Learner Autonomy

It is possible to see a wide range of definitions for learner autonomy in the literature. One of the most cited definition, however, is that it is "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec, 1981, p. 3). This definition is important in the sense that it emphasizes the overall responsibility the learners are supposed to hold for their own learning. Littlewood (1996) states language learning necessitates the "active involvement" (p. 427) and participation of learners; helps learners to be independent from their teachers in their language learning process and enables teachers to employ learner-centered methods. Similar to what Holec (1981) proposed almost three decades ago, Chan (2001) claims that autonomy is the learner's acceptance of his or her own responsibility for learning; and *choice* and *responsibility* are the two key features of

learner autonomy (as cited in van Lier, 2008).

Autonomy has gained various meanings and interpretations through years; however, it is not regarded as a concept that isolates the students from their social interactive environment while learning. According to Esch (1997), autonomy does not mean learning in isolation. Autonomy can be regarded as a social process, which requires work distribution of the learners for the development of language learning (Thanasoulas, 2000). To exemplify, autonomous learners tend to interact with each other, collaborate on tasks and share their knowledge and experiences about learning. In addition, autonomous learning is described "as a process of learners taking the initiative, in collaboration with others, in order to increase self and social awareness; diagnose their own learning needs; identify resources for learning; choose and implement appropriate learning strategies; and reflect upon, and evaluate their learning" (Hammond & Collins, 1991, as cited in Clifford, 1999, p. 115).

From a teacher's perspective, learner autonomy is not necessarily allowing learners to do what they want and when they want. Autonomous learning is not considered a totally free and uncontrolled learning process. Autonomous learners know their own needs and interests in the learning process and accordingly control and evaluate the learning by themselves. Knowles (1987) argues that the instruction which is imposed by the teacher is not acceptable for the adult learners; they need to know clearly why they are learning a specific item, which is a motive leading them to take the control of and responsibility for their own learning. These type of learners are also intrinsically motivated to learn especially for their personal needs and interests, and they prefer the learner-directed teaching style, rather than a teacher-directed one. Dam (2011) views the development of learner autonomy as a teaching style which changes from a teacher-directed one to a learner-directed one as shown in Figure.1 below.
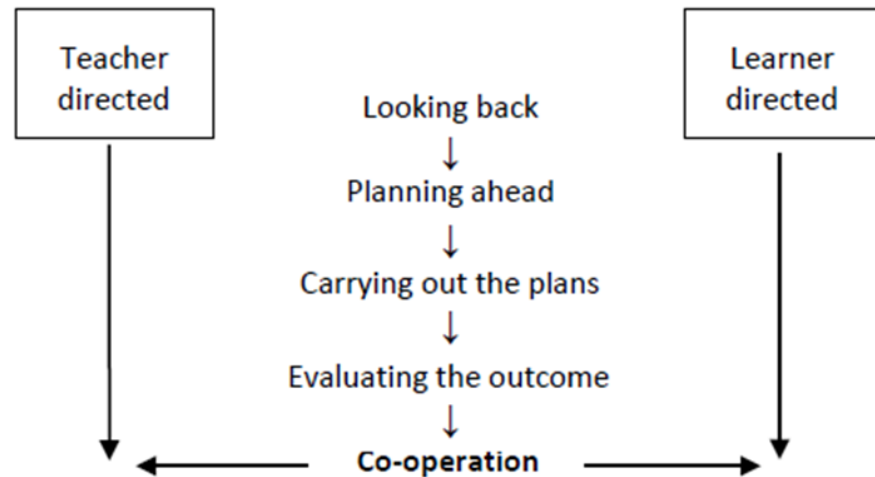
Figure 1. Developing learner autonomy - a simplified model (Dam, 2011, p. 41)

Learner autonomy is closely related to learner agency, which is defined by Ahearn (2001, as cited in Özköse-Bıyık, 2010) as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (p. 112). Agency is a way to develop learning by finding different learning environments, and it is associated with some notions such as control, autonomy and motivation. Main features of agency are listed as self-regulation, interdependence, and awareness of responsibility (van Lier, 2008). Self-regulation and learner autonomy are closely associated concepts in EFL studies. Self-regulation is defined by Kormos and Csizer (2014) as the process of using certain practices which learners consciously employ on their own to control their learning. Zimmerman (1990) asserts that self-regulated learners "become masters of their own learning" (p. 4), and they choose, construct and create their learning environments and motivate themselves for their own achievement. Likewise, Ushioda (2006) focuses on the self-regulation by stating that learners who want to regulate their learning efficiently need to take responsibility for their own learning.

Learner agency has been studied from different perspectives and therefore,

categories of learner agency have been developed. For instance, according to Özköse-Bıyık (2010), learner agency is "self-initiated verbal behaviors which lead to the enrichment of classroom interactions in favor of more efficient learning" (p. 58). An indicator of learner agency is the interactions with the other learners in which learners engage themselves in order to mediate their learning (Ozkose-Biyik & Meskill, 2015). Effective interaction in a learning environment might be considered as a way to allow learners to observe and learn from each other, which might lead them to gain some of the autonomous learner features. The categories of learner agency, which are listed below, overlap with the features of learners who have high level of autonomy:

- "Commenting

- Repeating on one's own initiative

- Suggesting

- Giving examples on one's own initiative

- Guessing

- Explaining

- Being persistent

- Translating into English/Turkish

- Telling the meaning of a vocabulary item on the spot

- Negotiating with teacher/peers on shared activity

- Communicating with peers" (Özköse-Bıyık, 2010, p. 58).

All of the definitions of learner autonomy and the terms associated with it point to a concept which is a desired characteristic of an effective teaching-learning environment. Learners who can take the control of their own learning process with a sense of responsibility seem to be the ones who look for the best ways to learn in and out of the classroom and succeed in the learning goals. Therefore, seeking what is

effective to foster learner autonomy has been the concern of the teachers and researchers in the field of foreign language education.

Characteristics of Autonomous Learners

Various characteristics of autonomous learners have been defined in several studies (e.g., Benson, 2012; Chan, 2001; Clifford, 1999; Cotterall 2000; Dickinson, 2004; Little, 2006; Littlewood, 1996). An autonomous learner has intrinsic motivation, and learns both inside and outside the classroom, without needing any support from the teacher (Hafner & Miller, 2011).

Dam (1995) makes a comprehensive definition of an autonomous learner by stating that "a learner qualifies as an autonomous learner when he independently chooses aims and purposes and sets goals; chooses materials, methods and tasks; exercises choice and purpose in organizing and carrying out the chosen tasks; and chooses criteria for evaluation" (p. 45). According to Dam (1995), an autonomous learner must have the ability and ambition to act both freely and in cooperation with the other learners (p. 1). In the social-constructivist tradition, participants have the opportunity of negotiating and improving critical thinking and by this way, become aware of their responsibility of learning by themselves. This opportunity allows them to take part in classroom interactions, become critical thinkers and know their responsibility to learn better (Totten et al., 1991). For instance, Feryok (2013) revealed in her study that learners adopted some elements of language learning such as using language samples, expressing their purposes and learning techniques, as a result of studying collaboratively with the teacher and the other students.

In the autonomous learning environment, teachers have a role which supports and facilitates learning by encouraging students and providing them guidance to actively

take part in tasks such as problem solving and decision-making (Lee, 2011). As Reinders and White (2011) state, learner autonomy is mostly about interdependence, not independence. In the autonomous learning environments resulting in independent action, it is significant that learners learn how to learn by taking part in collaborative tasks (Collentine, 2011).

As it is understood from the literature about the features of autonomous learners, an autonomous learner is an ideal learner in an EFL environment at the same time. All of the characteristics of autonomous learners point to the kind of student who is a motivated and willing learner, and a role model for other students. Therefore, it has been one of the main aims of researchers to develop ways for learners to be more autonomous for a better learning environment. Collaborative learning, which raises learners' responsibility level and help them learn from each other, might be one of these ways to promote learner autonomy.

Learner Autonomy in the Language Learning Contexts

Possessing the characteristics of autonomous learners provides a learner with various skills and features, which are desirable in a language learning process. Littlewood (1996) points out to the development of learner autonomy in language skills by stating that learners become competent in grammar and vocabulary choice; and they are able to determine which communication strategies they need to utilize to be successful in their communicative objectives. Learners are able to manage and regulate their own learning, give their own decisions about learning, and use language freely in the direction of their choice both in and out of the classroom.

Autonomous language learners have desired features such as self-determination, social responsibility and critical thinking in language learning-teaching environments

(Benson, 2012). Dickinson (2004) asserts that autonomous learners know the language learning-teaching process in details and study with the teacher to determine their learning aims. Clifford (1999) states that autonomous learners demonstrate their continuous improvement and willingness to reach knowledge, resources and support from varied sources. Likewise, Cotterall (2000) claims that autonomous learners seek and use different learning options, are aware of the consequences of the decisions and choices they make, question and try alternative learning strategies, and demand feedback on their language learning performance.

As seen in the literature, learners' taking the responsibility to learn is the core factor in the promotion of their autonomy level. For instance, autonomous learners tend to collaborate with their teachers and / or other students, which demonstrates their sense of responsibility. A language learning environment where learners are actively involved in their learning process is a desired feature of successful learning. Unlike traditional education, learners are independent and have the necessary decision-making skills in an autonomous learning environment. Not being able to take control of their learning leads students to limit what they can learn as they are only dependent on the teachers' instructions and choices.

Little (2006) highlights that the practice of learner autonomy requires an eagerness to be active in self-management, therefore motivation is essential for the development of learner autonomy. Furthermore, it is maintained that autonomous learners are able to apply their knowledge of the target language in each context outside the classroom or other environments in which language learning activity takes place.

In his study about the features of autonomous learners, Chan (2001) identified the following characteristics of autonomous learners as being:

- decisive in performing their skills,

- intrinsically motivated

- responsible for their own learning

- willing to ask questions

- self-instructed about their own learning

- active in self-development

- life-long learners

- able to control and assess their own learning

- effective problem solvers

- efficient in using the time.

All these characteristics of autonomous learners indicate the importance of and need for the autonomous learners for a better language learning environment, as well as being a desired objective in the teaching-learning process. Autonomous language learning is one of the features of students which is effective in their successful learning; therefore, many studies have been conducted to find ways to help them gain and/or improve their autonomous learner features.

Fostering Learner Autonomy

In the 21st century, helping students become more autonomous learners through various curriculum designs, activities and strategies has gained importance and been the aim of many studies. Lee (2008) claims that just highlighting the benefits of autonomy is not sufficient; instead, autonomy should be accepted as a "learning-related lifestyle" (p. 106) which stems from awareness of learning.

Various approaches, methods and techniques have been offered to create teaching-learning environments which encourage learners' autonomous learning. For instance,

Benson (2011) summarizes six main approaches which can be applied to foster autonomy:

- Resource-based approaches involve effective learning with the help of independent interaction with the materials and resources.

- Technology-based approaches emphasize using educational technologies independently to employ autonomous learning skills.

- Learner-based approaches involve producing behavioral and physiological improvements in the learners to enable them to take control over their own learning.

- Classroom-based approaches emphasize learners' control on the planning and assessment of the learning goals, the learning process, and evaluation.

- Curriculum-based approaches are used to enable learners control the curriculum as a whole.

- Teacher-based approaches emphasize the role of teachers and teacher education on promoting learner autonomy.

Additionally, Little (2007) proposes three general pedagogic principles for the development of learner autonomy: learner involvement, learner reflection, and appropriate target language use. By learner involvement it is meant that learners are led to engage with their learning and take responsibility for their language learning process. The principle of learner reflection refers to critical thinking of students about their learning process. Finally, the principle of appropriate target language use necessitates learners to use the target language as the main medium of language learning; that is, learners should use the target language both for communicative purposes and for reflecting on and assessing their performance and improvement in the target language. (Little, 2007). Likewise, Nunan (1997) suggested a framework based on the assumption

that autonomy has degrees, which are awareness, involvement, intervention, creation

and transcendence, and these levels need to be employed to foster learner autonomy, as

seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Nunan's framework for developing learner autonomy (Adopted from Nunan, 1997)

Level	Content	Process
1. Awareness	Raising learners' awareness about the goals, content and material	Learners analyze and determine their learning strategies.
2. Involvement	Learners' choosing their own goals	Learners make choices to determine the goals for their learning.
3. Intervention	Learners' adapting the goals and content	Learners modify tasks.
4. Creation	Learners' creating their own goals	Learners prepare their own tasks.
5. Transcendence	Learners' making connections between in and out of class learnings	Learners become teachers and researchers.

According to Thanasoulas (2000), learner autonomy is not a kind of teacherless-

learning; rather, autonomy is a feature which can be gained with the help of and

collaboration with the teacher. In this sense, autonomy might be promoted through

various techniques as a way means of changing learner beliefs and attitudes, which the

teacher encourages learners to use or implement. Similarly, the tasks which involve

communication and interaction among learners allow them to contribute to learning, and

encourage peer-teaching, which is a way to foster learner autonomy in learning

environments (Brown, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Cotterall (2000) states that courses need to be designed in a way that encourages learners to have and apply personal goals, and control and evaluate their own performance. Also, Balçıkanlı (2008) suggests that 1) arranging the syllabi considering the principles of learner autonomy, 2) evaluating the course books to see whether they foster autonomous learning or not, 3) providing in-service training for the teachers which will focus on how to support students' autonomy, and 4) founding self-access rooms at schools for students to study on their own and discover their own learning strategies might be some practices to promote learner autonomy in preparatory schools.

McCombs (2012) emphasizes the benefits of letting students work together with other students to increase their learner autonomy, and lists some general principles for the same purpose:

- Teachers should initially determine the performance indicators for learning.

- Students should be provided with meaningful choices to develop a sense of ownership of the learning process.

- Meaningful feedback about the skills they have obtained should be given to students.

- Teachers should support students to assess their own learning process.

In addition to these various instruction methods and techniques employed to promote learner autonomy, collaborative learning might be counted as another way to accomplish this aim. Through the interaction which collaborative activities provide for the students, they engage in discussions, learn to share their learning strategies, develop critical thinking skills and a sense of responsibility by activating their decision-making and problem-solving skills in group work, which are the expected features of autonomous learners.

Collaborative Learning

Conceptual roots of collaborative learning date back to early 20th century's sociocultural and activity theories (Leontiev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Sorden, 2011). Collaboration is defined as a lifestyle including interaction which augments learners to be responsible for what they do to learn, and value other learners' abilities and contributions to the learning environment (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012). Vesely, Bloom, and Sherlock (2007) state that collaboration occurs when members of a community interact for a certain purpose, such as learning.

Zhang (2012) defines collaborative learning as an instruction method in which students study in groups to achieve an academic aim, such as an essential problem or a project, and knowledge can be constructed when learners share their experiences and take on roles by studying and interacting actively. According to Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991, cited in Zhang, 2012), in collaborative learning knowledge is created and transformed by students, and the instructor provides the required conditions in which students can form the meaning by processing it. In Vygotskian sense, collaborative learning environments support interacting, sharing, and creating knowledge; therefore, foster effective learning (Maddux, Johnson & Willis, 1997).

Collaborative learning refers to a concept which is different from cooperative learning and interaction. Although general usage might treat these concepts as if they are the same; in fact they have different meanings. Oxford (1997) describes the important distinctions among these three notions of communication in the foreign or second language classroom, which are cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and interaction. Cooperative learning is a set of classroom techniques that promote learners' work distribution for the social development; collaborative learning, depended on

"social constructivist" philosophy, views learning as the formation of knowledge in a specific context and encourages learners to be included in a learning community, and interaction is the broadest one among these three terms and refers to general communication in social contexts (Oxford, 1997). Similarly, Wiersema (2001) makes a distinction between collaborative and cooperative learning expressing that collaboration is more than cooperation; cooperation is a technique to achieve completing a specific product together, whereas collaboration is the whole process of learning, which might include different types of interaction such as the student-student, teacher-student and even teacher-teacher interaction.

Benefits of Collaborative Learning

Studies point out to a number of benefits of collaborative learning. For instance, Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which can be defined as "the distance between an individual's actual and potential development level, can be narrowed through studying collaboratively with more capable learners" (as cited in Law, 2011, p. 210). According to the ZPD concept, studying together with a more competent peer, whose academic level is above the learner's capacity, is an effective way for the learner to make progress in their learning potential.

Collaborative learning provides learners with the chance to negotiate, take responsibility and think critically by taking a step to develop their own capacity, as suggested in ZPD. Laal and Laal (2012) claim that "shared learning gives learners an opportunity to engage in discussion and take responsibility for their own learning" (p. 492). As collaborative learning is an instruction method in which learners study together to achieve a goal, learners are responsible for theirs as well as others' learning, in a group. Thus, the success of one student helps others to be successful as well (Gokhale,

1995). Likewise, critical thinking and gradual increase of interest in learners may occur as a result of interaction in collaborative learning environments (Gokhale, 1995).

Johnson and Johnson (1989), and Panitz (1999) explain the benefits of collaborative learning on the basis of their work. These benefits are divided into three categories as social, psychological and academic:

• Social benefits:

- Self-development in a social support system,

- Understanding individual differences,

- Establishing a positive learning environment,

- Development of learning communities.

• Psychological benefits:

- Self-confidence via student-centered instruction,

- Feeling relaxed with cooperation,

- Desired behavior towards teachers.

• Academic benefits:

- Developing critical thinking,

- Active participation in the learning process,

- Academic success,

- Effective problem solving techniques,

- Benefiting from lectures,

- Increase in motivation level,

- Use of alternative evaluation techniques of students and teachers (as cited in Laal & Ghodsi, 2012).

It is obvious that most of the characteristics which learners gain through collaborative learning, such as sense of responsibility, critical thinking, negotiation with others and problem-solving skills, overlap with the features of autonomous learning. Also, sharing each other's learning styles and strategies via collaborative activities might provide learners an insight into realizing their own styles and strategies and revising or developing them. Therefore, collaborative learning might be considered as a means to help students increase their autonomy level in EFL contexts.

Collaborative Activities

Collaborative activities are regarded as alternative, practical and fun techniques which are employed to increase learners' linguistic skills and problem solving capacities through interaction in EFL classrooms (de la Colina & Mayo, 2007). Tuan (2010) asserts that collaborative activities enhance learners' cognitive growth, motivation and interaction in their language learning environment. In this section of the literature review, some of the most commonly used collaborative activities are presented. The collaborative activities conducted as the treatment in the experimental group and the selection criteria for those activities will be discussed in the methodology chapter.

- Brainstorming meetings: Brainstorming is a creativity-based activity which can be employed to develop learners' thinking skills (Houston, 2006). It can be used for a variety of topics, by generating or developing ideas to solve a problem. Brainstorming meetings activity is fulfilled as groups which gather regularly and develop the solutions gradually on a problem. In brainstorming sessions, ideas and suggestions are not ignored or judged; instead, they are valued and taken into consideration to solve the problems (Houston, 2006; Rao, 2007).

- Dialog writing: Writing dialog within a group is an alternative way for learners to interact more and construct a context for the improvement of language (Abdolmanafi Rokni & Seifi, 2013). The goal in this activity is to communicate by exchanging ideas and information in a writing session. Dialog writing as a collaborative activity enables students to use more sources of information, practice with the other learners collaboratively, and fosters reflective learning (Sun & Chang, 2012).

- Group Investigation: Each student investigate and study a subtopic of a topic and form groups. They prepare for their tasks individually and make presentations before the teacher and the students assess their final projects by considering how they worked together and how they can develop their collaboration for the future activities (Murphey & Jacobs, 2000). Group investigation requires elaborative planning and researching, as well as developing academic language skills (Holm, 2016).

- Jigsaw: Jigsaw is a collaborative learning technique which requires every learners' effort to achieve a final project. In a jigsaw activity, groups are formed and each member of a group is assigned a different part of the task. In another group called the "expert group", the students who have the same task gather to discuss their material. Finally, the member return to their home groups and teach that specific material to their group friends and construct the knowledge with the other members. This activity might be employed in order to increase higher cognitive skills (i.e., critical thinking) in collaborative learning environments (Holm, 2016; Mengduo & Xiaoling, 2010).

- Roundtable: In this method, learners share their knowledge or ideas with the other members of the group by making a written contribution to the group's project until they do not have anything new to add. Roundtable might be used for various other activities such as brainstorming or reviewing in especially in speaking and writing tasks (Al-Yaseen, 2014). Roundtable activity is especially employed to improve learners'

speaking and writing skills; and to lead them to develop their problem solving skills in a collaborative learning environment.

- Think/pair/share: This collaborative activity enables learners to think and develop their ideas individually, and share their ideas first working in pairs and finally with the whole group. In this activity, learners have the opportunity to share their language input with the other students and benefit from the feedback they receive from various sources (Holm, 2016; Tuan, 2010).

The collaborative activities mentioned here require elaborative planning and preparation, and take time to implement in the classrooms. They might be difficult to be compounded with the strict curricula in which every detail is set beforehand. Moreover, the majority of the collaborative activities, including the ones presented here, are either said to be more effective when used with online language learning tools, or they are only used within them. For the learners who have limited or no access to the internet, the use of the collaborative activities together with the online tools might not be effective enough. Instead, face-to-face collaborative activities might be preferred in the EFL contexts which do not have easy access to the online tools. For these reasons, the face-to-face collaborative activities, which are easier to employ in the classrooms, seemed to be more practical to implement in this study.

The Effect of Collaborative Learning on Learner Autonomy

The effect of collaborative learning on learner autonomy has been investigated in various studies (e.g., Clifford, 1999; Healey, 2014; Iborra et al., 2010; Law, 2011; Ma & Gao, 2010; Macaro, 1997). Autonomous learning is a process in which learners have the initiative to collaborate with others to raise self and social awareness (Hammond & Collins, 1991 as cited in Clifford, 1999). Collaborative learning can increase the

developmental transformation of the students while fostering their autonomy level. This transformation is based on the involvement of all learners in an interactive practice, and activates learners' desired skills like reflecting, considering, wondering and researching (Iborra et al., 2010).

Collaborative learning may help learners foster their autonomy level in the learning process. For instance, in the promotion of learner autonomy, some features of collaborative learning such as intercommunication, discussion and cooperation are accepted as significant factors (Lee, 1998). As Pemberton (1996) states, interpersonal environment is necessary for learning. Also, Garrison and Archer (2000) claim that learner autonomy may best be accomplished through collaboration with other learners and teachers. Similarly, collaboration requires the ongoing balance between an individual's study with the other learners and her personal goals and preferences for learning (Ma & Gao, 2010). Likewise, Macaro (1997) states that collaborative learning provides learners with a sense of more responsibility, be aware of their own learning and control their learning process efficiently.

As suggested in these studies, the collaboration of the learners they perform to achieve a task might promote their autonomous learner characteristics by advancing learners' responsibility. However, the limitation of these studies is that they mainly suggest that collaborative learning may be an alternative instruction method which helps foster learner autonomy. In this sense, this study might contribute to the literature by suggesting empirical results as to the effect of collaborative activities on learner autonomy in Turkish EFL contexts.

Learners' Perceptions of Collaborative Activities

In the studies looking at the learners' perception of collaboration, the prominent

themes center around the positive effects of collaborative activities on learners'
development in terms of learning more efficiently. For example, MacCallum (1994)
emphasized in her study that most of the students perceived a positive difference at the
end of a set of collaborative activities. They reported that they had generated and
structured better ideas together with their group friends and developed their decision-
making abilities. In her study about collaboration in online learning environments,
Grooms (2000) found out that learners believe collaboration is the key element to
achieve learning goals, and interpersonal interaction is highly valued. Furthermore,
Henry (2010) revealed that learners preferred to study in an interactive environment by
using collaboration tools with the other learners and the teacher. In Kılıç's (2014) study,
students' perspectives as to the small group collaborative tasks were highly positive.
They reported that they had the chance to learn from each other, study in a life-like
classroom environment, boost their self-confidence, and develop their self-expression
and self-assessment abilities, which indicated some certain features of autonomous
language learning. Kalaycı (2014) also stated that learners liked and preferred studying
with their classmates rather than studying alone; and added that collaboration is a tool to
help learners gain more responsibility for their learning and increase their autonomy
level. The results of these studies point to the learners' perceptions as to the positive
aspects of collaboration, which can also be employed in the language learning
environments in order to raise their autonomous skills.

Instructors' Perceptions of Collaborative Activities

The studies on the teachers' perceptions of collaborative activities generally
focus on the desired and expected learner features, such as motivation, willingness to
learn, participation and thinking critically in their EFL context. An, Kim and Kim

(2008) assert that teachers perceive themselves as the facilitators of collaboration to meet the learning goals of the students, and teach them to collaborate to learn. Yong and Tan (2008) stated that teachers were in favor of collaborative learning, as they thought collaboration was necessary to develop learners' cognitive and social skills and help them be more productive in critical thinking while exchanging ideas. Likewise, Shahzad, Valckeb and Bahoo (2012) conducted a study on the teachers' perceptions about the collaborative learning, and found out that a majority of the teachers thought the collaborative activities were good motivators for learners and increased their positive attitude and participation in the language learning process. The themes derived from these perceptions of the teachers might be associated with the features of autonomous learners, who are motivated, productive and able to control their own learning process.

Conclusion

An overview regarding learner autonomy, collaborative learning and the interplay between these two concepts in language learning has been provided in this chapter. The reviewed studies reveal the necessity of promoting learner autonomy in language learning and suggested theories/methods to accomplish it. The positive effect of collaborative learning on the promotion of learner autonomy has been suggested in various studies; however, there has not been an empirical study to demonstrate this effect. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap in the literature by examining effects of collaborative activities on learner autonomy. The next chapter will cover the methodology used in this study, including the participants, instruments, data collection and data analysis procedures.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The present study focused on the effect of collaborative learning on learner autonomy in the Turkish EFL context. The purpose of this study is to examine whether collaborative activities affect learner autonomy.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What is the effect of collaborative activities on college-level EFL students' learner autonomy in the Turkish context?

2. What are the students' perceptions of collaborative activities on learner autonomy development?

3. What are the instructor's perceptions of collaborative activities on learner autonomy development?

This chapter consists of five sections. In the first section, the setting where the study was undertaken is introduced. In the second section, the participants who took part in the study are described. Next, in the third section the instruments are explained in detail. Then, the data collection process and the data analysis procedure are introduced.

Research Design

In this study, the effect of collaborative learning (i.e., the independent variable) on learner autonomy (i.e., the dependent variable) was investigated, and a mixed method

approach was used to collect data. Mixed method designs "bring together the value and benefits of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, whilst at the same time providing a middle solution for many (research) problems of interest" (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007, p. 113). Brown (1995) suggests that making use of both qualitative and quantitative methods is essential, as both types of data can provide the researcher with valuable information, and makes the study complete. Qualitative tools in the study were index cards, journal and interview and the quantitative tool was a questionnaire, which was developed by Zhang and Li (2004), and translated into Turkish by the researcher and three other experienced instructors from Niğde University and one expert in the field. Table 2 demonstrates the research questions, the methods and the data collection tools used to answer these questions.

Table 2

Research Questions, Methods and Instruments Used in the Study

Research Question	Method	Data Collection Tools
1. What is the effect of collaborative activities on college-level EFL students' learner autonomy in the Turkish context?	Quantitative	Learner Autonomy Questionnaire
2. What are the students' perceptions of collaborative activities on learner autonomy development?	Qualitative	Index cards
3. What are the instructor's perceptions of collaborative activities on learner autonomy development?	Qualitative	Journal & Interview

One of the most commonly used designs in educational studies is quasi-experimental design which is a type of experimental design without random assignment

(Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). It necessitates a pre-test and post-test both for the control and experimental groups. In this study, a non-equivalent control-group design was employed; and the experimental group was exposed to a treatment, while the control group received no treatment (Figure 2). In the non-equivalent control-group design, the aim is to control the confounding variables as much as possible (that is, to keep the experiences of control and experimental group as similar as possible) so that the causality between the independent variable(s) and the dependent variable can largely be explained by the variables under scrutiny. In other words, the only difference should be that the treatment is given to the experimental group. For instance, the same pre-test and post-test are given to both groups at the same time in order to keep the experimental treatment as the only variable and to get more satisfactory results. The treatment can be said to have an effect if the change in the experimental group exceeds the change in the control group (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003).

| Experimental Group | | Pre-test | Treatment | Post-test |
| Control group | | Pre-test | No treatment | Post-test |
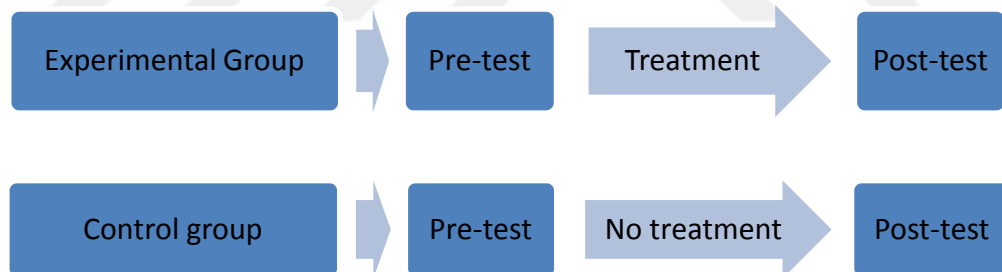
Figure 2. Non-equivalent control-group design

Setting

University. The study was conducted at Niğde University School of Foreign Languages. Niğde is a small city located in the south of the Central Anatolia Region. Niğde University, which is a state university, has 24.800 students in 7 faculties, 10 schools, 3 institutions and it has 876 academic staff.

EFL Program at the School of Foreign Languages. The School of Foreign Languages in Niğde University has 561 students, 494 of whom are in the obligatory program and 67 of whom are in the optional program. These students are from 11 different departments, three of which are required to take the Preparatory Program: Electrics-Electronic Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Agricultural Genetic Engineering. At the beginning of the academic year, students are required to take a proficiency test, and those who score at least 60 points can start studying in their departments. A placement test is also conducted to determine their levels and the students are placed according to their scores. Two levels are formed after a placement test: A1 (elementary) and A2 (pre-intermediate). Both levels are offered main course, reading-writing and CALL lessons for an academic year. The classrooms generally consist of 20 to 25 students. The courses that are offered in the Preparatory Program consist of four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking integrated with grammar and vocabulary lessons. Students take two midterms and approximately eight quizzes in a term which lasts for 14 weeks, and they take the final exam at the end of the year.

Participants

The participants of this study are 40 students who studied at the English Preparatory Program at Niğde University School of Foreign Languages in the 2013-2014 academic year. Two classes which had the closest grade point average (GPA) at the end of the Fall semester were selected as the experimental and control groups. The reason for considering students' GPA while selecting them as the control and the experimental group was the assumption in the literature that learners' academic success is closely related to their autonomy level. For instance, Furnborough's study (2012) reveals that learners' success levels predict how much they can demonstrate

autonomous learner features. Also, Thanasoulas (2000) associates the success rate of the learners with their motivation and autonomy level.

Twenty-one participants were in the experimental group while 19 participants were in the control group. In the experimental group, 6 of the participants were female and 15 were male. Five of the participants in the experimental group were in Agricultural Genetics Engineering Department, 10 were in the Electrical-Electronics Engineering Department, and 6 were in Mechanical Engineering. In the control group, there were 7 female and 12 male participants. Four of the participants in the control group were in Agricultural Genetics Engineering department, 10 of them were in the Electrical-Electronics Engineering department, and 5 of them were in the Mechanical Engineering department. The characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Characteristics of the Study Participants

Participants	Control Group		Experimental Group	
	N	%	N	%
Gender				
Male	12	63.15	15	71.42
Female	7	36.84	6	28.57
Department				
Agricultural Genetics Eng.	4	21.05	5	23.80
Electrical-Electronics Eng.	10	52.63	10	47.61
Mechanical Engineering	5	26.31	6	28.57
Total	19	100	21	100

A1 level classrooms were chosen for the study; as, according to common instructor perception at Niğde University, there are fewer autonomous students in A1

classes compared to A2 classes. A1 level does not necessarily refer to a more advanced classroom in terms of the grades students get from the placement test.

Data Collection Tools

The data collection instruments used in this study include a learner autonomy questionnaire, index cards, a journal kept by the course instructor of the experimental group, and an interview with the same instructor.

Learner Autonomy Questionnaire

In order to investigate the learner autonomy of the participants, a 21-item learner autonomy questionnaire designed by Zhang and Li (2004) was used. It was conducted as pre- and post-questionnaires before and after the three-week training. The Likert-scale items in the questionnaire addressed the aspects of an autonomous learner. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: The first part was a Likert-type scale and the second part had multiple choice questions. The questionnaire questions inquired about the autonomy level of the students, such as; "I make good use of my free time in English study.", "During the class, I try to catch chances to take part in activities such as pair/group discussion, role-play, etc.", "When I meet a word I don't know, I mainly: a) let it go, b) ask others, c) guess the meaning, d) B and E, e) look up the dictionary" etc (See Appendices A and B).

The criteria in selecting this particular instrument for the study are that this questionnaire has been shown to have high content validity and high reliability (Dafei, 2007). In Shangarffam and Ghazisaeedi's study (2013), the questionnaire was piloted among 20 participants who had the same characteristics (e.g., their similar scores of a TOEFL test and a writing pre-test, having taken an advanced writing course, and having

studied English for a period of nearly 10 years) as the target sample, to check reliability for this study. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated through Cronbach's Alpha, which is an acceptable range (.70). Also, the questions it covered were revised and used in various studies as the items in learner autonomy questionnaire utilized in this study ranged from dependent problem solving to independent problem solving, which is in accordance with the Vygotskian concept of learning development (Dafei, 2007; Nematipour, 2012).

Some other learner autonomy scales were investigated in the questionnaire selection process. For instance, the Learner Autonomy Scale developed by Macaskill and Taylor (2010), which covers 12 items, did not seem to be comprehensive enough for our study. The Learner Autonomy Scale developed by Dişlen (2010) from different scales and articles included many questions as to the role of the teacher in the learner autonomy; however it was aimed to find out only the autonomy level of the students without taking the others factors like this into consideration. The Learner Autonomy Questionnaire in EFL Reading, adapted and modified by Alyas (2011) from various scales, included items aiming to measure learners' reading autonomy in terms of their metacognitive strategies, which was beyond the scope of this study. Similarly, The Autonomous Learner Questionnaire adapted by Çiftçi (2011) investigates the possible relationships among self-efficacy, learner autonomy and academic success. The scale developed by Ghout-Khenoune (2015), some of whose items drawn from various scales about learner autonomy readiness, included three main points about learner autonomy: learners' motivation level, use of learning strategies and learners' perceptions of their own and teachers' responsibilities in language learning. As the present study did not aim to consider the effect of learners' motivation and learner strategies on their autonomy level, this scale was not used, either.

The learner autonomy questionnaire was originally in English. Since the purpose of the questionnaire was not to measure participants' proficiency level, the items in the questionnaire were translated into Turkish to make it more understandable for the participants and to prevent any possible misunderstandings, aiming to collect richer data. The questionnaire was first translated into Turkish both by the researcher and another experienced English instructor. By comparing each item in two translated versions, a final Turkish questionnaire was formed. Back translation was made by two more instructors, and any observed discrepancies in the Turkish version were reconciled. Finally, this last Turkish version was reviewed by a highly proficient field expert (See Appendix A for the final version of the questionnaire in Turkish).

Reliability

The Turkish version of the questionnaire was piloted on 21 students in one of the classes at the preparatory school of Niğde University School of Foreign Languages. That class was chosen because the students were placed at the same proficiency level with the control and the experimental groups, in order to keep the piloting population as close as possible to them. Cronbach Alpha test was calculated to determine the reliability coefficients of the questionnaire. Creswell (2012) defines Cronbach's Alpha as "a measure of reliability and, more specifically, internal consistency" (p. 606), and the alpha should be above .70 for a reliable result. It was found out that the reliability of the questionnaire was .76. The results of the pilot study indicated that the learner autonomy questionnaire was reliable.

Index Cards

Index cards were used in order to get the participants' positive and negative opinions about each activity. After each collaborative activity, participants filled out the index cards stating their opinions about them.

Index cards were analyzed separately for each collaborative activity, instead of the whole analysis of them, in order to compare the categories and find out which activity was the most effective in developing participants' autonomous learning features.

The participants were told that they can state their ideas either in Turkish or English, whichever one they would feel more comfortable. Most of them completed the cards in Turkish. These were translated into English by the researcher afterwards (See Appendix D).

Journal

A journal, in a way, is a type of diary kept to take notes of daily events and experiences of the researcher, which provides valuable data that is nearly impossible to reach through traditional data collection tools (Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli, 2003). In this study, the course instructor of the experimental group who implemented the treatment kept a journal throughout the 3-week collaborative learning training session to reveal her practices in the class of the experimental group. In this journal, the instructor was expected to write down her perceptions, experiences, observations, ideas and the problems she faced.

The journal was kept in Turkish by the instructor. It was translated into English by the researcher and this translation was confirmed with the instructor if there were any discrepancies between the Turkish and English versions. This method is called member-checking (Merriam, 1998), and it is applied in order to ensure the reliability of the

qualitative data.

Interview

Brown (2001) states that interviews are flexible and personal, so they provide the researcher with more detailed data. The items in the interview were written in order to get more detailed information from the teacher about her experiences in the collaborative learning implementation process in terms of teachers' roles and their ideas pertaining to learner autonomy. Semi-structured interviews give the researcher the opportunity to shape the structure of the interview with the interviewee's answers to the questions (Mason, 2004). The questions in a semi-structured interview are usually organized within the interview, rather than asking sequential standardized questions, in order to reveal any unexpected or ignored points (Mason, 2004). Through semi-structured interviews, detailed and extensive data might be reached.

The interview was conducted in Turkish, as the course instructor stated that she thought she would feel more comfortable and express herself better in her native language (See Appendix D). After the interview was recorded on the researcher's computer via the voice recorder, it was listened to again and translated into English by the researcher. Member-checking (Merriam, 1998) was realized with the instructor to see whether there were any discrepancies between what she expressed in the interview and its translation.

<div align="center">Procedures</div>

The researcher asked for permission from the Niğde University School of Foreign Languages to conduct the study. After the learner autonomy questionnaire was chosen for the study, it was translated into Turkish (see Appendix B). The classes for

experimental and control groups were chosen by determining the most similar classes in terms of their academic success after comparing their first term average scores, since the learner autonomy and the success profile of the learners are closely related according to the literature. The instructors of the control and experimental group were introduced with the aim and the function of the study. The instructor of the experimental group was also informed in detail about the collaborative activities which were going to be determined by the researcher. The implementation of the activities in the class was discussed and the lesson plans for the activities were prepared collectively by the instructor and the researcher. Next, the participants in the experimental group were informed about the study and they were asked whether they would like to participate in it. All the participants agreed to take part in the study, which lasted for three weeks, and for 6 class times in a week -18 class times in total.

The lessons were conducted in a teacher-centered traditional method with the control group during this process. This traditional method mainly includes the teacher's deductive instruction for the subjects and activities on the course book, and extra activities are hardly employed due to time restriction and the strict curriculum. The control group might have been exposed to some extent of collaborative activities in this process; however, the strictness of the curriculum in the prep school of Niğde University does not allow much space to apply any extra activities. Therefore, these activities were only limited to the regular ones within the curriculum.

Collaborative Activities

As part of this study, some collaborative activities, as being the independent variables of the study, were conducted in the experimental group in order to see whether these activities would have an effect on promoting learners' autonomy level. The activities chosen for this study were:

- Writing activity as a group,

- Peer-correction,

- Problem solving activities,

- Role-play,

- Games/competitions

The selection criteria for choosing these specific activities for the collaborative learning process were that these activities are not included in the syllabus of Niğde University Preparatory Program, and they are very rarely used in the classrooms by the instructors. By this way, these activities could make a difference in participants' perception of collaborative activities and their autonomy, by affecting their sense of responsibility. In addition, conducting these activities in the classroom requires participants to employ all of the four skills, and grammar and vocabulary knowledge. In order to increase the amount of interaction among participants in collaborative activities, they were asked to change groups for each activity.

In the literature, collaborative activities are commonly conducted in one of two modes: online and face to face. Practicing online activities might have been a problem, as there were not any computer labs available for students' free use at Niğde University, and most of them have difficulty in accessing computer and internet on their own. For this reason, face-to-face collaborative activities seemed to be more practical to implement in this study.

1. Writing an essay as a group: Ferris (1994, as cited in Aminloo, 2013) believes that "inadequate content", "poor organization" and "stylistic inappropriateness" are weaknesses of student writers. Therefore it is assumed that the students can improve their writing by working in groups. Collaborative activities give even the shyest students some security to take more part in the activities (Aminloo, 2013). This kind of

approach enables learners to analyze their ideas and think critically about writing, to develop an initiative, promote awareness of the writing process and take increased responsibility for their writing progress in the classroom; in this sense, writing as a group may be a means of writing and learning practices for students who might otherwise not be exposed to them (Boughey, 1997; Porto, 2001). This activity was completed in the class, after participants were given background knowledge and asked warm-up questions about the topics they were going to write about. Figure 3 and Figure 4 show examples of the writing activities which participants wrote as a group:

CROCODILE

Hippopotamus (Hippopotamus amphibius) may be the strangest water animal but they are not the fastest swimmers The fastest swimming animal is saltwater crocodile (Crocodylus porosus).

The saltwater crocodile can swim at about 26 kph to 27 kph. The average saltwater crocodile is 50 cm to 5000 cm high and weigh between 450 kg and 2000 kg. Saltwater crocodile live for about 80 years and more. Saltwater crocodile live on fish, bird and some mammal. Saltwater crocodile live in Oceania.

The saltwater crocodile is my favorite animal. Because it is cool and interesting. Its roof is laid to do back. Saltwater crocodile is one of the first animals. created.

Scientific name	Crocodilia
Common name	Crocodile
Size(cm)	50 cm - 5m
Weight(kg)	2000 kg
Lifespan(years)	80+
Speed(kph)	27 mts kph
habitat	America, Africa etc.
prey	Fish, bird and some mammal

Figure 3. An example of the group writing activity

EDUCATION SYSTEM OF TURKEY

For many years, government often change [AGR] education system in Turkey. Some scientists think this situation must be terrible for students and country. Because change is bad. However, other scientists think that it is very good for students and country. There are facts that support both sides of the argument.

On the one hand, some scientists think if you always change education system, you can not teach anything to students. They say education system must update for every year. This way is good for students and governments. Because if you update education system, you don't have to spend much money for education. So, it is profitable.

On the other hand, other scientist think if you want to develop your country, you have to support education. Because education is very important. If your country have good education, students will become a very good scientist, doctor, etc. They believe that your country develops. So, they say according to the scientific applications improving education system have to be updated.

In conclusion, I think education is very important to us but government don't [AGR] often change education system. They can update. In this way, we solve education system.

Figure 4. An example of the group writing activity

2. Peer-correction: Macaro (1997) states that there is a very pedagogically challenging possibility that learners will correct peers when they feel confident about their own accuracy. If this were found to be the case, and given the notion that each learner's interlanguage state is different (i.e. different learners are competent in different bits of the target language rule system at any one time), it would be a powerful argument for an increase in collaborative learning in the classroom. Connor and Asenavage (1994) state in their study that both less proficient and more proficient students gain language awareness and self-confidence from participating in peer feedback sessions. Furthermore, in his study, Franco (2008) found out that learners were able to develop their social skills in the sense that they "cooperated instead of competing" (p. 55), and their motivation level increased at the end of a wiki-based peer-correction session. For this activity, participants were given the writing assignment of a different group and they were asked to give feedback on them as a group. Figure 5 illustrates an example for the writing assignment and the feedback on it:
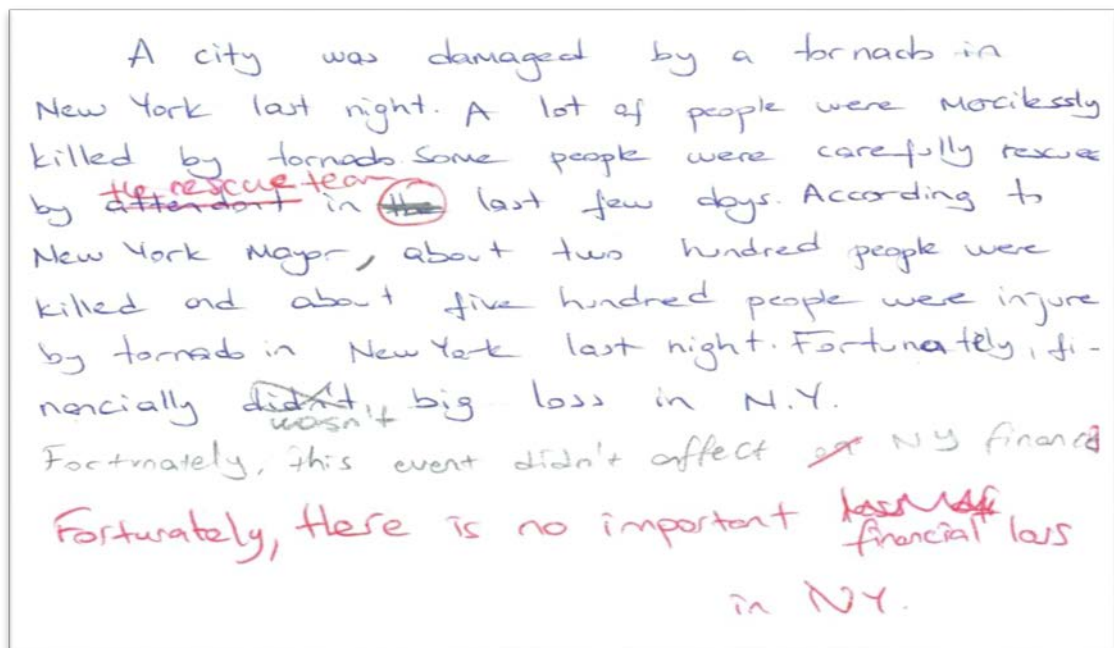
Figure 5. An example of the peer-correction activity

3. Problem-solving activities: Collaborative problem solving is estimated to be beneficial for learning processes and outcomes. "Learners share their perspectives on the case material within the collaborative setting and these different perspectives support them to apply their knowledge to different contexts outside the learning environment" (Helling & Ertl, 2011, p. 33). Furthermore, problem-solving activities contribute to students' personal and interpersonal development (Littlewood, 2004). The transfer of information and interaction performed during problem-solving activities are helpful in developing students' consciousness about their own learning; therefore, help them develop their autonomous learning skills. Problem-solving activities can be presented in various ways by incorporating different language learning skills. In this study, participants were given a problem and as a speaking activity, they discussed on a solution as a group. Examples for a problem solving activity are presented in Figure 6 and Figure 7.
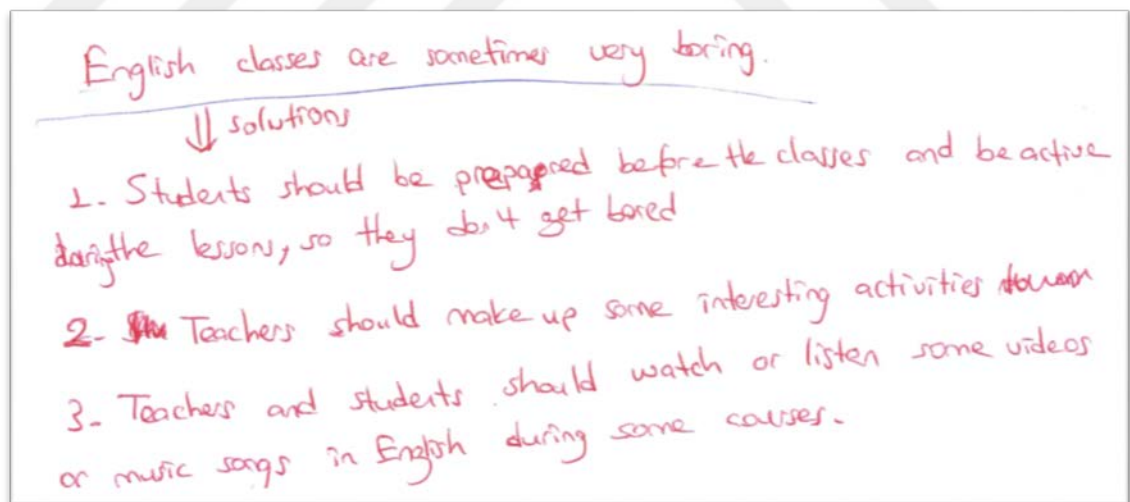
Figure 6. An example of the problem solving activity
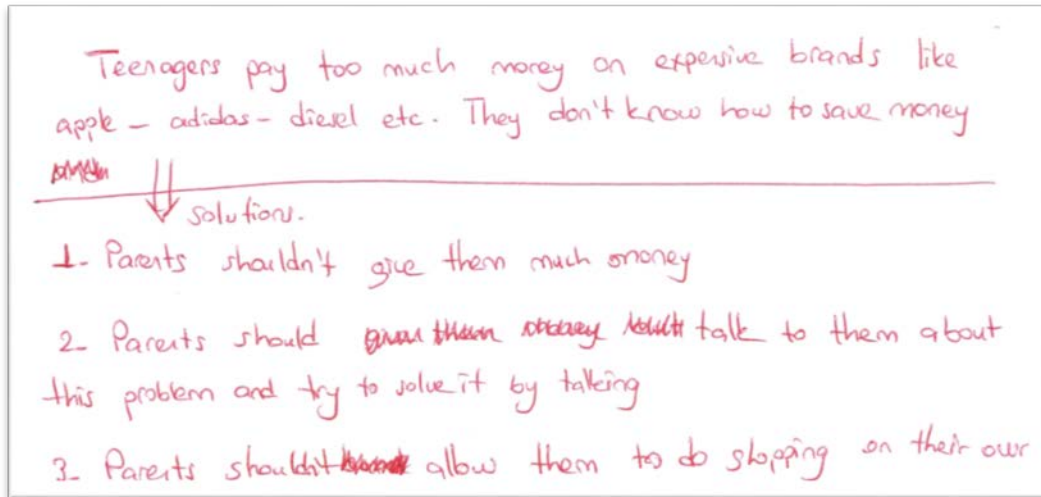
Figure 7. An example of the problem solving activity

4. Role-play: Role-playing activities offer opportunities for experiential learning within a collaborative learning environment by allowing students to develop an understanding of others' perspectives, encouraging students to work with others in examining situations and developing solutions, and give students the chance to gain insights into social sharings (Lombard & Biglan, 2011). Role-play can be used to help learners gain a critical point of view for the course materials. Role-play encourages students to see perspectives which might be different from their own, and it requires them to explore relationships among people, texts, and contexts; in addition, it can be used to help students engage with course material, considering social consequences (Shapiro & Leopold, 2012). In this activity, participants were asked to write a short role-play script as a group and play it in front of the class. Figure 8 shows an example of the instructor's draft for the role-playing activities which was prepared as a guide for the participants.

Role-Play! Grammar Subject: How long....? Questions with present perfect cont. tense. and answers.

① ~~Students worked in 4 groups~~ ~~different~~
~~Each group~~
    Students worked in groups of 4 or 5.

② There were 4 groups in the class, so 4 different situations were written on the board and each group chose one of them.

Situations! 1 - ~~Group name~~ (Girls) → You're house wives and you're in ~~a neighbor~~ (4 girls) ~~your~~ house drinking coffee and chatting.

2 - Group 51 → You're ~~~~ all very rich businessmen.
(5 boys)   You're at a pool party - You're drinking something and chatting

3. You he he) → You're married with kids. You
(5 boys)   are in a family friend's house with your wives and kid You're drinking tea, eating pastries and chatting

4. ~~hot macha~~! → You're high school friends. Now
(5 boys)   You're 30 years old. You haven't seen eachother for years You get together after a long time. You're sitting at a café and chatting.

_____

Task! All groups write a dialogue. They can create the dialogue however they want. They can use any kind of decora and costumes. There's ~~only~~ one rule. Each group has to use ~~two~~ ~~one~~ of the questions, and ~~~~ appropriate answers to the questions.   on the board
These questions on the board ~~were~~ written by the students during the previous classroom activity.

Figure 8. Instructor's draft for the role-playing activities

5. Games / competitions: Games can be used in the classroom for various aims, such as creating a positive classroom atmosphere, developing linguistics awareness, help teachers motivate students or as ice-breakers. Games produce more interactive

language (classroom language) (Macaro, 1997), and they can encourage the importance of cooperation and teamwork between students and thus enhance their communicative skills (Hainey, Westera, Connolly, Boyle, Baxter, Beeby, & Soflano, 2013). Participants played language games in groups verbally, after they were given instructions.

Ethical Considerations

At the beginning of the study, firstly the instructors of the experimental and control groups were informed about the study and asked if they would like to join it. They agreed to conduct the questionnaires in their classes. Also, the instructor of the experimental group was comprehensively informed about the three-week study of collaborative activities, and she accepted to implement the study in her class.

The participants were also informed about their participation in the study before the implementation. They were told that if they do not want to take part in the study, they could ask the instructor to be held exempt from it. All the participants agreed to participate. They were also told that their names were going to be kept anonymous, and everything they wrote would be used only for this study.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from pre- and post-questionnaires were analyzed via SPSS statistical program in order to compare participants' responses to see whether there is any change in their autonomy level after the three-week treatment of collaborative activities in the experimental group. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for the bio-data type questions in the first part of the questionnaire. The normality assumption test result (see Appendix C for the test result) showed that the data were not normally distributed; therefore, non-parametric tests, which are The Wilcoxon Matched

Group and Mann-Whitney U Test, were used in this study. The Wilcoxon Matched Group Test was used in order to determine the difference between the repeated measures. Mann-Whitney U Test was used to find out the difference between two groups in the comparison of the quantitative data, and for the determination of the group which caused the difference.

Index cards which participants filled out after each activity, instructor's journal and interview done with the instructor were analyzed qualitatively. Content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. Content analysis is a qualitative research analysis which is used to analyze every kind of textual material, such as interviews, journals, media products etc. Mayring (2000) defines the main idea of this procedure as the formulation of the data gathered from a material in terms of a theoretical background and research question to determine a certain aspect of the material. As the material is reduced to some extent in content analysis, it is clearer, unambiguous, and easier compared to other methods of data analysis (Flick, 2009).

Conclusion

This chapter described the research methodology of the study including the setting, participants, instruments, data collection procedures and data analysis. A total of 40 participants and an instructor from Niğde University School of Foreign Languages English Preparatory Program took part in the study. The pre- and post- learner autonomy questionnaire, index cards, journal and interview were put to use as data collection methods, and the data which was obtained from these methods were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The detailed analysis of the data will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This study investigated the effect of collaborative activities on college-level EFL students' learner autonomy, and students' and instructor's perceptions of collaborative activities on learner autonomy development. The research questions that shaped the study were:

1. What is the effect of collaborative activities on college-level EFL students' learner autonomy in the Turkish context?

2. What are the students' perceptions of collaborative activities on learner autonomy development?

3. What are the instructor's perceptions of collaborative activities on learner autonomy development?
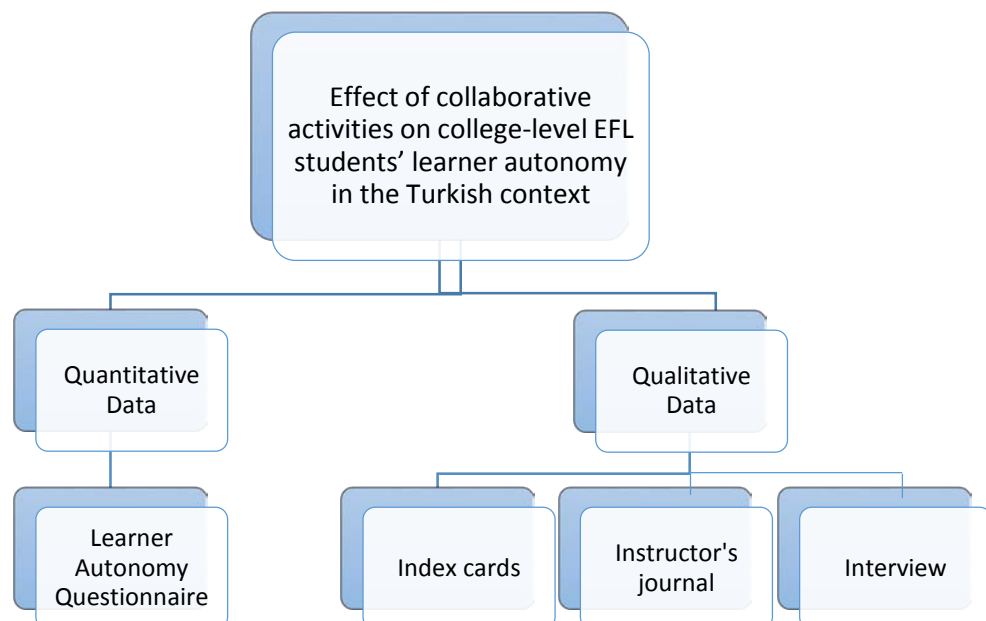
Figure 9. Data collection procedures of the study

In order to answer this research question, a quasi-experimental study was conducted; and the effect of the independent variable (collaborative learning) on the dependent variable (learner autonomy) was investigated in this study. A control and an experimental group were chosen among the preparatory program classes at Niǧde University School of Foreign Languages, considering their first term grades of these two groups. Both the control group of 21 participants and experimental group of 19 participants were given the learner autonomy questionnaire as the pre-questionnaire. After the collaborative activities were implemented in the experimental group for three weeks, both groups were given the same questionnaire as the post-questionnaire. Also, the participants in the experimental group were asked to fill in index cards after each collaborative activity was completed, to state their positive and negative ideas and perceptions about the activity. As part of the study, the instructor of the experimental group kept a journal in which she stated her instructional methods, observations, ideas and the problems she faced during the implementation of collaborative activities. At the end of this three-week training, the course instructor was interviewed in order to get her ideas about the implementation and possible changes she observed in the autonomy level of the participants. The data gathered from the pre and post-questionnaire scores were analyzed quantitatively, while the data from index cards, the instructor's journal and the interview were analyzed qualitatively.

This chapter will first present the data analysis procedures, and then the results of the quantitative data analysis will be provided. In the next section, the results of the qualitative data will be discussed.

Data Analysis Procedures

After the pre and post-questionnaires were conducted both in control and

experimental group, the data gathered from these questionnaires were entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 20. To determine the changes in learner autonomy level of the participants after collaborative learning treatment for three weeks, several statistical tests were used. The data collected from the index cards, interview and the journal were analyzed qualitatively to find common patterns or themes in these various texts. The researcher also looked for any other theme that might emerge from the data.

Findings

Research Question 1: The Effect of Collaborative Activities on Learner Autonomy

The data gathered from the Learner Autonomy Questionnaire was analyzed with the use of SPSS. First of all, the distribution of the participants' genders and departments in the groups was analyzed. For this aim, descriptive statistical methods (percentage, means, and standard deviation) were used. As the normality assumption test result (see Appendix C for the test result) showed that the data were not normally distributed, non-parametric tests, which are The Wilcoxon Matched Group and Mann-Whitney U Test, were used for the data analysis. The Wilcoxon Matched Group Test was used in order to determine if there was a change in participants' autonomy levels and to see if this change is a statistically significant difference between the repeated measures. The Wilcoxon matched-pairs test is "often favored over the paired t-test because of the misconception that no assumptions have to be met for the test to be valid" (http://influentialpoints.com/Training/Wilcoxon_matched_pairs_signed_rank_test_use_and_misuse.htm). Mann-Whitney U Test was used to determine the difference between two groups in the comparison with the quantitative data; in other words, it was used to find out how far the collaborative activities conducted in the experimental group

made a difference in the learner autonomy levels of the participants and for the

determination of the group which caused the difference. The Mann-Whitney U test is a

non-parametric test used to find out "if the mean of two groups are different from each

other, and is an alternative to the parametric two-sample t-test" (Sorden, 2011, p. 99).

The findings were evaluated in the 95% reliability and 5% significance level.

In this section, the following analyses and the results of the analyses procedures

will be introduced as in Table 4.

Table 4

Analyses and Analysis Procedures in the Study

	Analyses in the study	Analysis procedures
Results for group differences	Pre-total scores of the groups	Mann-Whitney U
	Post-total scores of the groups	Mann-Whitney U
	The difference between the pre-total and post-total scores of the control group	Wilcoxon test for matched groups
	The difference between the pre-total and post-total scores of the experimental group	Wilcoxon test for matched groups
	Gain scores of the groups	Mann-Whitney U

Table 5

Pre-total Scores of the Groups

	Group	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	MW	p
Pre-total	Control	19	71.89	10.24	112.00	0.018
	Experimental	21	64.90	5.55		

Mann-Whitney U test was conducted in order to determine whether the participants' pre-total scores had a significant difference in terms of groups; and the result of test (Table 5) showed that there is a statistical difference between the mean scores of the groups (Mann-Whitney U=112.00; p=0.018<0.05). The pre-total score of the control group ($\overline{x}$=71.89) was higher than the pre-total score of the experimental group ($\overline{x}$=64.90).

Table 6

Post-total Scores of the Groups

	Group	N	$\overline{x}$	Ss	MW	p
Post-total	Control	19	66.63	11.21	69.50	0.000
	Experimental	21	78.48	6.12		

Table 6 demonstrates the results of the Mann-Whitney U test, which was applied in order to determine whether the participants' post-total scores had a significant difference in terms of groups. The result of the test revealed that there is a statistical difference between the mean scores of the groups (Mann-Whitney U=69.50; p=0.000<0.05). The post-total score of the control group ($\overline{x}$=66.63) was lower than that of the experimental group ($\overline{x}$=78.48).

Table 7

The Difference between the Pre-Total and Post-Total Scores of the Control Group

Groups	N	$\overline{x}$	Ss	Z	p
Pre-total	19	71.89	10.24	-1.58	0.113
Post-total	19	66.63	11.21		

As the result of the Wilcoxon test for matched groups (Table 7), which was conducted to determine whether the means of the pre-total and post-total scores of the control group had a significant difference, a statistical difference was not found between the means (p>0.05).

Table 8

The Difference between the Pre-Total and Post-Total Scores of the Experimental Group

Groups	N	$\overline{x}$	Ss	Z	p
Pre-total	21	64.90	5.55	-3.87	0.000
Post-total	21	78.48	6.12		

As seen in Table 8, it was found that there was a statistical difference between the means (Z=-3.879; p=0.000<0.05) as the result of the Wilcoxon test for matched groups, which was conducted to determine whether the means of the pre-total and post-total scores of the experimental group have a significant difference. The mean of the pre-total score ($\overline{x}$=64.90) was lower than the post-total score ($\overline{x}$=78.48). This result implies that learner autonomy level of the experimental group changed significantly as a result of the collaborative learning treatment. Figure 10 demonstrates the pre-test and post-test levels for the control and experimental groups.
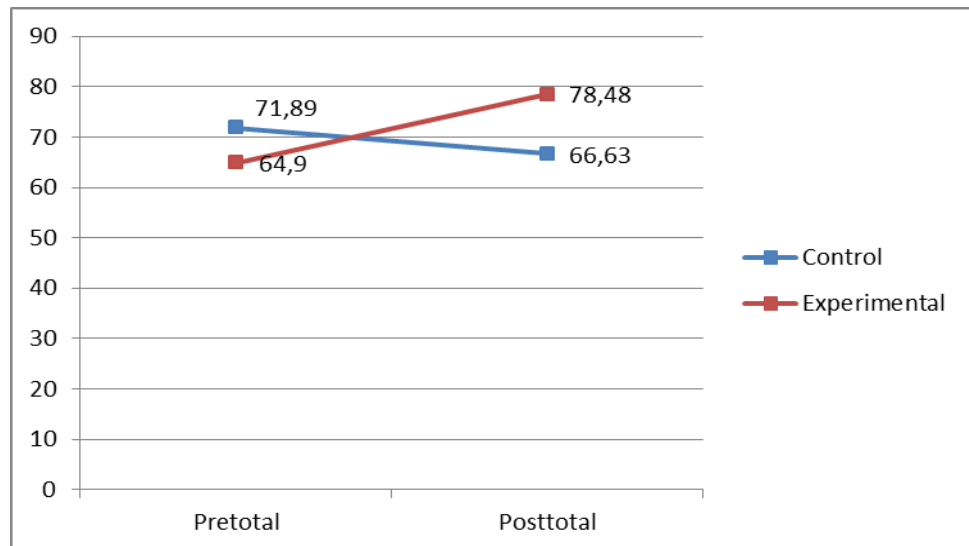
Figure 10. Pre-test and post-test levels for the control and experimental groups

As displayed in Figure 10, the learner autonomy level of the experimental group showed a significant difference at the end of the collaborative learning treatment, while the change in the control group is not statistically significant.

Table 9

Gain Scores of the Groups

	Group	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	MW	p
Gain score	Control	19	-5.26	14.29	58.00	**0.000**
	Experimental	21	13.57	8.84		

Gain score is the score of the difference between post-test and pre-test; in other words, it shows the difference between the questionnaire scores before and after the implementation process (Gain score=post-test–pre-test). Becker (2000) states that a positive gain score indicates that the post-test score is greater than the pre-test score.

Table 9 illustrates the results of the Mann-Whitney U test which was conducted in order to determine whether the participants' gain score means had a significant difference in terms of groups. The result showed that there was a statistical difference

between the gain scores of the groups (Mann-Whitney U=58.00; p=0.000<0.05). As seen in Figure 11, the gain score of the control group ($\overline{x}$=-5.26) was lower than the gain score of the experimental group ($\overline{x}$=13.57).
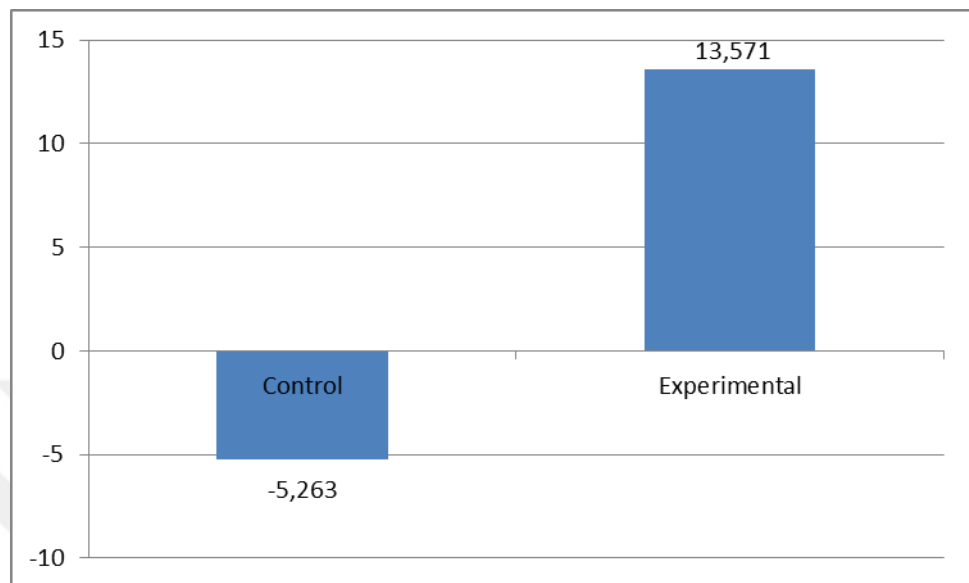
Figure 11. Gain scores of the control and experimental groups

It is clear from Table 8 and Figure 11 that the gain score of the experimental group exceeded that of the control group, which implies that the experimental group's capacity to show autonomous skills was positively affected at the end of the treatment process.

Research Question 2: Students' perceptions of the collaborative activities on learner autonomy development

The second research question of the study aimed to reveal the students' perceptions of the collaborative activities on learner autonomy development. It is aimed to give a detailed information of the data analysis gathered from index cards to answer this question. The data was analyzed through content analysis.

Content analysis is one of the most commonly-used procedures for analyzing

textual material wherever this material comes from, such as media products to interview data (Mayring, 2000). Krippendorf (2004) defines content analysis as a "research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts or other meaningful matter to the contexts of their use" (p. 18). Mayring (2000) states that the aim of content analysis, contrary to other procedures, is to reduce the material. The themes and main ideas are categorized in the data through constant comparison. The content could be words, themes, ideas and any messages in the resource or material.

Category development is made inductively in this study, in which the categories are formed step by step. Inductive category development (Mayring, 2000) consists of the following steps:

1. Research question,

2. Defining the categories,

3. Formulation of inductive categories from the data,

4. Revising the categories after completing 10-50 % of the material,

5. Final revision of the texts,

6. Interpreting of results.

In this study, the qualitative data was analyzed with the use of inductive category development. Firstly, in light of the second and third research questions, the categories of the themes in the qualitative data were deduced. These categories were defined by formulating and revising the repeated data gathered from the materials.

Index cards. The data from the index cards were analyzed with content analysis. The themes and categories were derived from the index cards for each collaborative learning activity. The categories derived from index cards were separated into two

groups as "student based" and "task based" categories.

Table 10

"Writing as a Group" Theme

Categories	n	%
Student Based Categories		
C1. Correcting the mistakes in the group	3	14.2
C2. Developing writing skills	6	28.5
C3. Developing grammar and vocabulary	4	18.9
C4. Correcting the spelling mistakes	1	4.7
C5. Developing self-confidence	1	4.7
C6. *Learning from the other students	5	23.8
Task Based Categories		
C7. Entertaining/not boring	2	9.5
C8. Permanent learning	1	4.7
C9. Time taking	2	9.5
# of index cards analyzed	19	

At the end of the writing activity which participants fulfilled as a group, it is seen that (Table 10) participants learned from the other participants in the group in 5 cases (%23.8). The category "learning from the other students" indicates that the participants could fulfill one of the autonomous learning skills with the help of this activity. They were able to not only observe their friends' learning methods in the group, but also share their study skills with them.

"I saw that my friends have different styles in writing tasks. One of them uses free-writing, for example. I've never tried it. It can be a little waste of time, but it can help me write better."

Table 11

"Peer Correction" Theme

Categories	n	%
Student Based Categories		
C10. Correcting others' mistakes	6	28.5
C11. *Learning from the other students	7	33.3
C12. Developing grammar and vocabulary	5	23.8
C13. Seeing varied examples of writing tasks	4	19.0
C14. Developing self-confidence	5	23.8
# of index cards analyzed	19	

In seven cases (%33.3), participants in the experimental group stated that they learned from the other participants after the peer-correction activities as well (Table 11). In this activity, they learned from the participants not only in their own groups, but also from the participants in the other groups, in contrast to "writing as a group" activity. All of the categories derived from the index cards about peer correction activity were student based.

Table 12

"Problem Solving" Theme

Categories	n	%
Student Based Categories		
C15. Correcting each other's grammatical mistakes	2	9.5
C16. *Learning from the other students	5	23.8
C17. Developing speaking with the other students	6	30.0
Task Based Categories		
C18. More enjoyable lessons	4	19.0
C19. Disrupting the class	2	9.5
C20. The solutions should be applied	7	33.3
# of index cards analyzed	18	

In the index cards filled by the participants after the problem solving activities, it is seen that (Table 12) participants claim they learned from the other participants 7 times (%33.3). They did this by noticing and correcting other participants' mistakes, and becoming familiar with the structures and expressions that the others use in their tasks.

"I corrected my friends' mistakes, because I did the same activity with them. It helped me see their mistakes more easily, I guess."

Participants expressed that the solutions which they suggested for the problems in the activity should be implemented in the daily life. Most of the participants thought that their solutions were applicable.

"If we could apply the logical solutions of this activity in our life, we would have better results, and we could develop our English more. I mean, applying them would encourage us."

"The solutions should definitely be implemented. For example, our solution was about planting trees, and we think that something has to be done about it. We even have a slogan: Plant a tree for a clear life!"

Some of the participants stated that the lesson was disrupted because of the problem-solving activity only in two index cards, by adding that it was unnecessary and preventing them from learning the main course subjects.

"As long as the lesson is not disrupted, the activity is fine."

"I don't think this activity is necessary. They are just a good chance to disrupt the lesson."

Table 13

"Role-play" Theme

Categories	n	%
Student Based Categories		
C21. Learning grammar	8	38.0
C22. Learning vocabulary	3	14.2
C23. Learning and developing speaking	9	42.8
C24. Learning writing	1	4.7
C25. Developing self-confidence	7	33.3
C26. *Helping and learning from each other in class	10	47.6
C27. Learning and having fun at the same time	3	14.2
C28. Developing & correcting pronunciation	2	9.5
Task Based Categories		
C29. Continuity of the collaborative activities	4	19.0
C30. Good opportunity for shy students	1	4.7
C31. Time taking	2	9.5
# of index cards analyzed	19	

Participants in the experimental group stated that this activity allowed them to do something together and help each other in the class, besides developing other skills, which allowed participants to learn from the other participants as well in 10 cases (%47.6), as seen on Table 13.

Table 14

"Games and Competitions" Theme

Categories	n	%
Student Based Categories		
C32. Struggling to remember words	1	4.7
C33. Remembering the forgotten words	5	23.8
C34. *Learning from the other students	3	14.2
Task Based Categories		
C35. Broadening the vocabulary	6	28.5
C36. Entertaining	6	28.5
C37. Beneficial activity	3	14.2
# of index cards analyzed	18	

The data gathered from the index cards filled after the game and competition activities show that participants mentioned they learned from each other in 3 cases (%14.2), as seen on Table 14. For instance, by "learning from each other", they mean that the activity helped them learn, repeat and remember new words and broaden their vocabulary knowledge, after a word game.

As seen in these categories derived from the participants' index cards after the collaborative activities were conducted, participants' perceptions as to the collaborative activities were highly positive. Most of the activities were reported to be beneficial and fun by the students. This collaboration process helped them gain self-confidence, and participants expressed that they learned from each other and improved their autonomous skills, such as controlling their own learning and selecting the right method to learn, by experiencing other participants' learning methods, besides other skills, such as writing, speaking, grammar and vocabulary.

Research Question 3: The instructor's perceptions of the collaborative activities on learner autonomy development

The third research question of the study aimed to find out the instructor's perceptions of the collaborative activities on learner autonomy development. For this aim, two data collection tools were employed: a journal kept by the instructor of the experimental group, and an interview done with her.

Journal. The instructor of the experimental group was firstly asked to keep a journal throughout the 3-week collaborative learning training session to reveal her perceptions about the collaboration process. In this journal, the instructor wrote down her experiences, observations, ideas and the problems she faced. The major themes in the journal were found to be:

1. The preparation process for the activities: The instructor wrote down notes about how she applied the five collaborative activities in the experimental group. While she was preparing these activities, she mentioned that she considered the time, participants' level, their interests, lesson plan and the target structures that students were supposed to learn in that lesson. She wrote that she did not do the work distribution in the groups since she expected the participants to do it on their own. Also, she did not interfere with what participants chose as the topics of the activities; she explained to them the process for each activity and gave them the instructions.

2. Instructor's observations as to the participants and their autonomy level: In the journal, the instructor included her observations about herself and the participants, and the possible changes in their autonomy level. The most frequently used themes about these points were participants' increased interest, the change in her usual teaching style, and their sense of responsibility to control their own learning.

2.a. Participants' increased interest: Firstly, the instructor mentioned how participants' attitudes changed during the study. She stated that the attitudes of the participants towards the collaborative activities were positive and they were quite interested in completing these activities. She used the word "interest" three times in her journal. The instructor also had the opportunity to critically look into the course book which is used in the preparatory program.

> Students are much more interested in these activities. If I were telling them to do an activity in the book, for example "complete the sentences with the correct form of the verbs" etc., they would be bored, complaining or grunting. But now they are waiting each activity with excitement. I can say that this study helped me understand the lacking points and negative sides of our course book. I will surely try to add similar activities into my lessons from now on.

2.b. Change in the focus of teaching: While the instructor was applying these activities in the classroom, she became a guide in the study and the focus changed from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning. The instructor gave some information to the participants about each activities, told them what and how to do, and what she expected from them at the end of the activity and which structures she wanted them to use. The participants were only free in terms of choosing the topics of the activity.

> I'm not exactly telling them what and how to do, I'm just letting them do whatever they want after I give them the activities. They're often asking me if they can do this and that… and I'm just saying "You're free!" They are suggesting some ideas for the activities most of the time.

Han (2014), regards teacher's role as a guide as teaching the most effective ways to learn English autonomously and developing students' skills in various ways with different techniques. Similarly, in this study, being a guide in the classroom seems to have allowed the instructor to apply a different instruction method which might result in a positive change in the learner autonomy level of the participants.

2.c. Possible changes in the autonomy levels: The instructor also expressed her observations about some possible changes in the learner autonomy level of the participants. In the journal, she included a couple of expressions which indicate some of the autonomous learner features, such as "participation", "interact", "work together" "quiet and shy students showed difference" etc.:

> I think they all enjoyed the freedom of doing something out of the course book. As far as I have observed they are more active in the class now than in the past; I mean participation has increased slightly. Also, they interact more with each other; they tend to work together (in pairs and groups) more. As I make use of pair and group work in the class a lot, I'm happy about it; however, not all activities are good or suitable for pair and group work. So I guess I must draw a line between individual and group work during the lessons. Other than that, I should state that the quiet and shy students showed a bit more difference than the others. Most of them are not hesitating to ask a question or participate anymore. But of course, some of them are still hopeless…

In this journal, the instructor firstly presented her practices in the classrooms, by mentioning how she prepared the collaborative activities for the experimental group. Furthermore, she added notes about her observations about some changes in the learning-teaching process, such as participants' increased interest for the activities, the change in her own teaching process and her perceptions about participants' autonomous learning practices. The instructor expressed her opinions about the participants' development in terms of showing more autonomous skills than before, such as being interested in and willingness to take part in the classroom activities, and taking responsibility.

Interview. A semi-structured interview was conducted with the instructor who implemented collaborative activities in order to understand her perceptions of the collaborative activities on learner autonomy development. The interview was

transcribed from audiotape by the researcher and a content analysis was applied to identify themes. The major themes were:

1. *Positive effects of the activities observed by the instructor:* The instructor of the experimental group said that the first positive aspect of this process she observed was that the participants were very interested and willing to do all the activities. When asked for the possible reasons of the participants' willingness, she said:

> The program we use is very strict and dependent on the course book very much. Therefore the students are usually bored with the usual and expected activities and techniques in the frame of this lesson plan. But these collaborative activities made students much more willing and they all wanted to take part in these activities. First, we started with the role-play activities. When I explained them what we were going to do, they immediately got in groups and shared the activities. They stated that they wanted to act them out again for our end-of-year party.

2. *Comparison between the instructor's previous teaching style and the 3-week process of collaborative activities:* When the instructor was asked whether she used any methods, techniques or activities different from the collaborative activities in the process, she stated that everything went on its normal and regular flow, apart from the activities. The only extra activities were these collaborative activities.

3. *The activity/activities which worked better than the others:* The instructor was asked which activity she thought helped the participants be more responsible and learn better, and in which one they undertook more tasks in the group work. She expressed that she observed them share responsibility and work together in all of the activities, but especially role play activity made a greater difference compared to the others:

> In role play activities students struggled more, I think. Because everybody needed to write their own role and at the same time, they had to work together while doing this. Every one of them had to contribute to the conversation, I mean they were expected to take the responsibility. Also, the fact that they

were going to act it out in front of the class made them more serious and responsible about their activities, I think.

4. *Difficulties and problems which the instructor encountered during the process:* When the instructor was asked about which activity she had the most difficulty and if there were any other problems she encountered during the process, she stated that none of the activities was difficult to apply in the class, because they were all interesting activities for the participants. However, in the preparation process she had timing problem as she had to keep up with the strict lesson program. Therefore, she added some rules into the activities and had participants use some of the target structures in the activities. For instance, in the problem solving activity, participants were supposed to prepare news bulletin and use "past passive" in some of their sentences. Also, for the writing activity, they were asked to use "as…as" at least in one sentence in their paragraphs. So, the program went on its way. In terms of time, the role-play activity was more time-taking than the others.

5. *Instructor's perception about the level of autonomy after and before the study:* At the end of the interview, the instructor was asked to state whether she observed any changes in the participants' level of autonomy at the end of the study and what her general idea about this process was. She said both she and the participants generally liked the activities and nearly all of them were interested in and willing to do them. She expressed that she understood the reason of students' reluctance, which was the strict and regular lesson program. Everything in the program was so expected and regular that the students knew what was coming next and were usually bored. Therefore, she said that it was very good for them to experience all these benefits of this study, such as enthusiasm, confidence, relaxation, sharing and learning from each other, and taking the responsibility. She added that the participants inclined to study together more in some activities after the process, saying that they were learning better if they studied together.

The data gathered from the journal and the interview revealed that the instructor of the experimental group had positive perceptions of collaborative activities on the learner autonomy development. First of all, the instructor reported that the participants were quite interested in the activities and a majority of them were willing to take part in them. She stated that even the shy students seemed more self-confident and enthusiastic during the activities. They also demonstrated some of the autonomous learner features such as sharing the knowledge, learning form the other learners and taking responsibility. Based on the data in the journal and the interview, it can be deduced confidently that the instructor's perceptions of the collaboration on learner autonomy development was quite positive, and collaborative learning practices seem to affect the development of learners' autonomous skills positively.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires and qualitative data gathered from index cards, journal and interview with the instructor in order to answer the research questions. First, the result of the analysis for the quantitative data was explained. The result of the Mann-Whitney U test showed that there is a statistical difference between the mean scores of the groups. The gain score of the control group (x=-5,263) was lower than the gain score of the experimental group (x=13,571).

Second, the themes which emerged from the qualitative data, which clarified the perceptions of the students and the instructor concerning the positive contributions of collaborative activities on learner autonomy development, were provided. Both the students' and the instructor's perceptions were quite positive. Index cards, which the participants filled out at the end of each activity, revealed their perceptions about the

development of some autonomous learner features, such as "helping and learning from each other in class", "taking the responsibility for their own learning". Moreover, the instructor's journal and the interview conducted with her indicated that the course instructor also took a positive stance towards the contribution of the collaborative activities to learner autonomy development. For instance, the instructor stated that the participants were willing to take responsibility and managed their own learning in the group work. Taking responsibility and managing one's own learning are features of autonomous learners; and this change of the participants can be said to indicate that collaborative learning practices positively affected their learner autonomy, as revealed in the quantitative data results.

The next chapter will discuss the findings in detail, offer pedagogical implications, present limitations and give suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore whether collaborative activities had an effect on promoting college-level students' learner autonomy in the Turkish EFL context. The research questions addressed in this study were:

1. What is the effect of collaborative activities on college-level EFL students' learner autonomy in the Turkish context?

2. What are the students' perceptions of collaborative activities on learner autonomy development?

3. What are the instructor's perceptions of collaborative activities on learner autonomy development?

In the study, mixed method was used to collect the data, which included a questionnaire, index cards, journal and an interview with the instructor. The questionnaire on learner autonomy was conducted as pre-test and post-test, along with the implementation of a three-week collaborative learning procedure on the experimental group. During this 18-hour procedure, various collaborative activities (i.e., writing activity as a group, peer-correction, problem solving activities, role-play and games) were employed in the experimental group, whereas the control group continued its regular teaching-learning process with no change. The results of the quantitative data were obtained through percentage, mean, standard deviation, Mann-Whitney U test and Wilcoxon test for matched groups on SPSS. The data collection procedures also

included index cards, which were used to get the participants' perceptions and opinions about each activity; a journal kept by the instructor of the experimental group, and an interview with this instructor, which were conducted to investigate the instructor's perceptions. With all these qualitative methods, it was aimed to have a closer look into the participants' and the instructor's perspectives with respect to the collaborative nature of the activities used, and understand their possible contributions on learner autonomy with richer data. To analyze the qualitative data, content analysis method was used.

This chapter discusses the findings reached in this study, suggests pedagogical implications, presents the limitations of the study, and offers suggestions for further research.

Discussion of the Findings

The Effect of Collaborative Activities on Learner Autonomy

The first research question of this study aimed to investigate the effect of collaborative activities on learner autonomy. The purpose of looking at the group differences in this study was to find out if there was a difference in the groups' autonomy level scores before and after the collaborative learning implementation.

First of all, the differences between the pre-total and post-total scores of the control and experimental groups were analyzed. In the control group, a statistical difference was not found between the pre-test and post-test. However, the experimental group showed a significant statistical difference between the pre-test and post-test. Similarly, the analysis of the difference between gain scores of these groups revealed that there was a statistical difference between the mean scores of the groups. The gain score of the experimental group was higher than the gain score of the control group.

These results indicate that raising the level of learner autonomy was achieved through collaborative learning practices during the three-week study in the preparatory program of Niğde University School of Foreign Languages. However, the control group, which was taught traditionally, showed no significant difference in terms of learner autonomy level.

These results are in line with those of the studies of Clifford (1999), Garrison and Archer (2000), Gokhale (1995), Iborra et al., (2010), Law (2011), Ma & Gao (2010), Macaro (1997) and Thanasoulas (2000). For instance, Iborra et al. (2010) claims that the use of collaborative learning as a language teaching instrument may help teachers boost students' development towards higher autonomy and self-reflective capabilities with the help of participants' interaction. Garrison and Archer (2000) note that cognitive autonomy of the learners might be developed by encouraging them to collaborate with the other learners. In addition, Ma and Gao (2010) states that learners are required to work collaboratively and make decisions as a group if they want to benefit from the opportunities of learning in a social environment. Likewise, Thanasoulas (2000) regards autonomy as a social process, which necessitates collaboration of the learners in order to achieve the learning goals in their foreign language learning process. All in all, these studies have suggested that collaborative learning develops various features of learners such as responsibility, intercommunication, problem-solving, decision-making and cooperation, which are also some of the characteristics of autonomous learners. For this reason, it is concluded in this study that implementing collaborative learning practices in EFL classrooms might help promote the learner autonomy levels of students.

Students' Perceptions of the Collaborative Activities on Learner Autonomy Development

The second research question aimed to find out the students' perceptions of the collaborative activities on learner autonomy development. For this aim, the participants in the experimental group were asked to fill in index cards after each collaborative activity was completed, in order to get their perceptions about these activities. The data coming from the index cards was analyzed through content analysis. The results indicated that participants' perceptions as to the collaborative activities on learner autonomy development were highly positive. Most of the participants in the experimental group stated that they liked the activities, and their language skills such as writing, speaking and vocabulary, and language learning skills such as free-writing, interacting with group members, correcting their own and other participants' mistakes, and being aware of the varied examples developed. Increasing their self-confidence, learning and having fun at the same time, and sharing their knowledge with the others were some of the numerous benefits of collaborative activities which the participants perceived during the treatment. These results are similar to the results of the studies of Henry (2010), Kalaycı (2014) and Kılıç (2014), who revealed that the learners were in favor of the collaboration, and developed various skills in their language learning process. For instance, Kılıç (2014) expressed that learners preferred studying collaboratively as they thought they would increase their self-confidence and had the chance to learn from each other.

In addition, they were able to practice some of the autonomous learner features. For instance, participants claimed that they learned from the other participants in their groups. Imai (2010) suggests that collaborative learning allows learners to interact socially and benefit from each other's learning style in many ways. Likewise, Sinclair (2008) emphasizes that participants in a group have the opportunity to learn much from

one another, which is an indicator of learner autonomy. Communicating, interacting, discussing and sharing knowledge with other learners on an activity is one of the categories of learner agency, which are also the signs of a highly autonomous language learner (Özköse-Bıyık, 2010; Ozkose-Biyik & Meskill, 2015). Correcting one's own mistakes during language learning practices is directly linked to self-assessment, which is a feature of autonomous learners. Macaro (1997) suggests that learner autonomy shows itself in the self-assessment of the learning process. All in all, the data coming from the index cards indicated that participants' perceptions of the collaborative activities were positive, and they were able to obtain some of the autonomous learning features as a result of the collaborative learning implementation.

These findings are also consistent with the Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). ZPD is defined as the distance between an individual's actual and potential development level; and it can be narrowed down by adult guidance and collaborative practices with more proficient learners (Law, 2011; Tzuriel, 2001). In other words, working together with more capable peers might help learners improve their language learning and make progress towards the next step. In this study, learners were able to interact socially and improve their knowledge and experience more by being exposed to practices of various learners, compared to the traditional learning methods applied in their classrooms. Changing the members of the groups for each collaborative activity might also be said to increase the amount of interaction among participants.

In addition, participants in this study had the opportunity to observe how the other members of the group work on classroom activities and which techniques and methods they use. According to Bandura (1977), this kind of learning is "vicarious", which is learning by observing the consequences of other person's behavior and deciding whether to do it herself or not. Bandura (1977) asserts that "in the social learning

system, new patterns of behavior can be acquired through direct experience or by observing the behaviors of others" (p. 3). The social interaction provided with the collaborative learning environment might help learners to observe each other's learning strategies and approaches to studying, and obtain them as a model to foster their own learning. Such a process can assist learners to take control of their own learning, which is the main indicator of autonomous learning. It can be deduced from the analysis of index cards that participants of the study learned vicariously to some extent through experiencing learning together with the other participants, and take a step towards autonomous learning.

Apart from these positive results, participants had the opportunity to develop most of their language skills, such as grammar and vocabulary, and especially the productive ones such as speaking and writing. Most of them stated that they had fun while learning and wished to continue doing the collaborative activities.

Instructor's Perceptions of the Collaborative Activities on Learner Autonomy Development

In order to answer the third research question of the study, the data gathered from the journal and the interview were analyzed through content analysis method. The themes derived from these two data collection tools and the results of the data analysis will be presented in this part of the study.

Journal. The journal, which was kept by the instructor of the experimental group, included the instructor's preparation process for the collaborative activities, and her observations and perceptions as to the changes she observed about the learner autonomy of the participants and her teaching practices. The most frequently used themes in the journal were participants' increased interest, the change in the instructor's usual teaching style, and their sense of responsibility to control their own learning.

Firstly, the instructor mentioned that the participants' attitudes towards the collaborative activities were generally positive, and they were interested in completing the activities. She added that the students were usually silent in the classroom and the participation in the regular activities was low; however, even the shy students were willing to take part in the collaborative activities. A similar result is seen in the index cards of the participants. The reason of this change might be due to the novelty effect caused by the collaborative activities. Novelty effect is defined as the increased interest, participation and motivation of students when they are doing something different form the usual classroom practices (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999) and "short-lived increase in students' efforts" for learning (Kozar, 2015). What Kozar (2015) meant by "short-lived increase" is that the change in learners' interest and motivation might be temporary and their willingness to learn might disappear when the activities are not new for them anymore. In short, the collaborative activities might have caused learners to be more interested in the process, as these activities were not very frequently used in the classrooms.

Another change the instructor observed during the study was that *"she became a guide in the study and the focus of learning changed from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning"*, a theme in accordance with An, Kim and Kim's study (2008), who stated that teachers perceive themselves as the facilitators in collaborative teaching environments. This change might be due to taking participants' interests into consideration while the collaborative activities were planned by the instructor and the researcher. Student-centered learning might be considered as a way through which learners can gain autonomous learning features with the help of collaborative practices. Similarly, according to Dam (2011), the development of learner autonomy might be associated with the change from a usual teacher-centered teaching environment to a

possible student-centered learning environment.

Finally, the instructor stated that she observed some possible changes in participants' autonomous learner features. For instance, she claimed that the participation raised slightly in the classroom, the students started to interact more with each other, and even the shy students started to take part in the in-class activities, all of which are indicators of autonomous learning. From this finding, it can be deduced that collaborative learning allows learners to feel more responsible, as they are expected to contribute in the group tasks and achieve a goal together with their peers. This result is in tune with the results of studies which have discussed the effect of collaborative learning on learner autonomy and the notion of responsibility in this interplay (Benson, 2012; Healey, 2014; Iborra et al., 2010; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Laal & Ghodsi, 2012; Lee, 2008; Macaro, 1997; Nguyen, 2010; Panitz, 1999; Shahzad et al., 2012; Sinclair, 2008). Iborra et al. (2010), for instance, makes a connection between collaboration among learners and self-reflective skills in terms of learner autonomy. Shahzad et al. (2012) highlight the teachers' perceptions of how learners gained motivation and positive attitude in their learning process. Likewise, Lee (2008) associates learner autonomy and collaborative learning by stating that autonomy might be achieved through collaboration among learners, and Sinclair (2008) asserts that interaction among learners is necessary to develop their autonomous learning capacity. However, the instructor was not comfortable with the result that the participants tended to study together with their peers during the activities, even in the cases when she instructed them to study individually. This fact might be seen as a disadvantage of using collaborative activities as a teaching practice intensely for a period of time.

The results of the journal sheds light not only to the practices of the instructor but also to her perceptions about various changes during the implementation of

collaborative activities. It could be concluded that the instructor had positive perceptions about the collaboration in the classroom, and the collaborative learning practices in the experimental group increased participants' autonomous learning level to some extent.

Interview. A semi-structured interview was conducted with the instructor in Turkish and it was translated into English by the researcher. Some similarities were found between what the instructor said in the interview and what she wrote in her journal. For instance, the positive contributions of the collaborative activities observed by the instructor are confirmed with the findings about the participants' positive attitudes expressed in the journal. In addition to these positive perceptions of the instructor, the participants' reported intention and willingness to continue doing the collaborative activities are consistent with the themes coming from the index cards. Moreover, the instructor's idea about the level of autonomy after and before the study and the possible changes she observed in the experimental group revealed similar findings with the data from the index cards and the journal. Yong and Tan (2008), and Shahzad et al. (2012) reached similar results in their studies, and concluded that collaboration was an effective method in developing learners' autonomous skills in the EFL context.

Apart from these findings, when the instructor was asked about her perceptions whether she thought any of the collaborative activities were more effective in supporting the development of learner autonomy, she expressed that sharing the responsibility and working together were fulfilled in all of the activities, but especially the role play activity made a difference compared to the others. This result might have stemmed from the fact that the participants were going to act it out in front of the class, which could have made them feel more serious and responsible about this activity.

The instructor also expressed that the only difficulty she encountered during the implementation of collaborative activities was the limited time because of the strict lesson plan of the preparatory school. However, she turned this crisis into an opportunity by instructing the participants to use some of the appropriate target structures which they were supposed to learn in the normal process of the lesson plan.

Additionally, the implementation of collaborative activities was an opportunity for the instructor to develop her reflective practice. Reflective teaching supports and guides teachers in their teaching practice and enforces their awareness about the factors shaping their teaching (Garcia, 2015). While implementing the collaborative learning practices in the study, she noticed some of the situations which she could change or improve for a better teaching-learning process. For example, she stated that the students were usually bored with the usual and expected activities and techniques in the frame of the regular lesson plan. Furthermore, the instructor found out that this process helped her see the shortcomings and negative aspects of the course book, such as the repetitive activities and insufficient group and pair work practices.

Pedagogical Implications

This study aimed to find out whether collaborative activities had an effect on promoting learner autonomy. And the results of the study indicate that collaborative learning is effective in improving learners' autonomy level. Therefore, the main pedagogical implication which the study suggests is that collaborative learning should be integrated into the curricula of the preparatory schools and implemented in the classrooms effectively in order to foster students' learner autonomy level.

If students are involve in the decision-making process and their opinions are respected by the other students and the teacher in a collaborative learning environment,

their autonomous learning skills improve. In such an environment, students take responsibility, and help and learn from each other, which leads them to think independently and control their own learning. This being the case, collaborative learning creates a natural environment in which students have the opportunity to develop their autonomous learning skills (Clifford, 1999; Duan, 2005).

Data coming from the index cards, journal and interview support this idea in terms of creating a positive atmosphere in the class with the help of collaborative activities. Creating this collaborative learning environment at preparatory schools begs for various arrangements as follows, categorized under the titles of curricula, professional development, course book choice and physical features:

- Curricula:

- The principles of learner-centered education should be included into the curriculum of the preparatory schools, so as to create opportunities for students to take control of their own learning.

- Both the syllabus and assessment style of the educational institutions should be rearranged by including various collaborative activities into them.

- Professional Development:

- In-service training and seminars could be organized in preparatory schools to inform EFL instructors about the importance of autonomous learning and how it can be fostered with the help of collaborative activities. If necessary, they should get a training about it to strengthen students' sense of responsibility, and to help them take control of their own learning and become more autonomous learners with the help of collaborative activities. A professional training might be useful especially for the novice teachers, whose knowledge about learner autonomy is mostly structured in such professional development practices (Reinders & Balçıkanlı, 2011).

- Teacher educators could come up with new professional development programs to create teacher awareness for the positive effects of employing collaborative activities. In these programs, they can exemplify specific collaborative activities that will help develop students' autonomous skills, and inform teachers about how they can integrate these activities into their teaching practices.

- Course Book Choice

- In choosing the course books for the preparatory schools, one of the criteria should be whether and how much it includes group and pair work activities and encourages students to collaborate to learn something new.

- Physical Features

- The physical settings in the institutions should be arranged to create flexibility for students to study together. For example, the desks and chairs in the classrooms shouldn't be fixed on the floor, they should be arranged in a way that allows students to form groups easily and complete a task together any time. Also, the necessary technical equipment, materials and resources should be provided for students to accomplish this aim.

Changing some traditional methods into the modern ones in schools might be challenging both for the administrations and the instructors, especially in countries such as Turkey where teacher-centered method have been the norm and students' ideas are hardly ever taken into consideration even at the college-level. This study offers administrators and instructors an insight into the promotion of learner autonomy; it suggests them an alternative way about how they can encourage learners to take greater control of their learning through collaborative activities.

Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of the study was the limited amount of time in which the study was conducted. The collaborative activities were practiced in the experimental group for 18 classes, each lasting 45 minutes. The results might have been different if this process had been longer; however, the curriculum of the preparatory program of Niğde University is a strict one and have to have standardization, since the level of the students' needs to reach a standard point (i.e., intermediate) and all the classes take the same exams (including pop-quizzes) at the same time. Therefore, even a little delay in the curriculum is hardly ever allowed. Due to this reason, the study had to be implemented in three weeks. The instructor herself expressed the strictness of the curriculum as one of the difficulties she encountered during the process.

In addition, if the study had been conducted not only at the preparatory school of Niğde University School of Foreign Languages, but also in the preparatory schools at other universities, the results of the study might have changed.

Another limitation of the study was the number and variety of the collaborative activities used in the treatment process. In this process, five different collaborative activities which were writing activity as a group, peer-correction, problem solving activities, role-play, games/competitions were used. With the employment of a wider range of activities, the participants could have been exposed to collaborative learning more, and the study might have yielded different results.

The fact that the study was based on a quasi-experimental design, which includes pre-test and post-test method conducted both in the control and experimental group, and the use of collaborative activities as the independent variable point to the strength of this study. In other words, the results obtained at the end of this study are not merely based

on the reported opinions of the participants or the instructor; based on the experimental design, it is seen that the difference between pre-test and post-test scores indicate a positive change in the learner autonomy level of the participants. However, some factors in the experimental studies might threaten the validity of the experiment and weaken the strength of the study. For instance, if the results of the study are the ones only coming from the independent variable, and if they can be generalized to other contexts, the experiment is considered to be valid. Therefore, controlling for these factors is necessary to be able to indicate a direct cause and effect relationship between the use of collaborative activities and learner autonomy level of the participants. These factors are divided into two categories as internal and external validity. Internal validity focuses on the factors other than the independent variable, or the extraneous variables, which might have an effect on the dependent variable and change the results if not controlled. External validity is the extent to which the findings of a study can be generalized to other groups or settings. If the results of a study cannot be replicated in other setting beyond the one in the study, then it has low external validity (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003; Gay & Airasian, 2003).

In order to eliminate the confounding variables, the researcher tried to control some factors for the validity of the study. First of all, the academic success of the preparatory school students in the first terms were examined and the two groups which had the closest average scores were chosen as the control and the experimental group, with the aim of keeping the difference between these two groups as low as possible. By this way, the researcher attempted to invalidate "differential selection" effect, which is a threat or the internal validity (Gay & Airasian, 2003, p. 361). In addition, the instructors of the control and the experimental groups were told to carry on their regular teaching style and practices in the classes throughout the study, except for the collaborative

activities implementation in the experimental group, so as to assign only one treatment in the study and eliminate the "multiple-treatment interference" for the external validity (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003, p. 375).

However, other than controlling these factors, there is the possibility of other threats to the validity of the study, which might have altered the results. In terms of internal validity, statistical regression, which occurs when "the extremely high or extremely low scorers tend to regress to the mean of retesting" (Gay & Airasian, 2003, p. 363) might have affected the results of this study. The results may also have been affected as a consequence of the change in participants' behavior due to being aware of taking part in this experimental study, which is called Hawthorne effect, a threat to the ecological validity (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003).

The extraneous variables need to be eliminated as much as possible to increase the validity of the experimental studies. In this study, some attempts have been taken to increase the validity; however, the confounding factors in an experimental study are almost impossible to avoid in social sciences as people are always part of these studies. This, as a result, remains as one of the main limitations in the current study.

Suggestions for Further Research

The present study was conducted to find out whether collaborative activities had an effect on the learner autonomy. Some suggestions for further research can be made depending on the findings of this study. First of all, this study could be replicated in various contexts in order to get more generalizable results. For instance, the data might be gathered from other preparatory school students all around Turkey.

Secondly, in further studies, some other variables might be included into the

research design, such as instructors' level of education, their autonomy level, students' proficiency level and academic success, etc.

Thirdly, other types of data collection procedures can be used, such as observing classrooms, conducting interviews with participants, student journals, etc. Moreover, other independent variables can be tried out as treatment to see the possible effects they might have on students' learner autonomy. Similarly, the interaction between collaborative learning and various other factors might be investigated.

Additionally, in this study, the data were gathered only from university students at the preparatory school. However, further studies could be done with different groups, such as high school students, to get a more detailed picture for the effect of collaborative learning on learner autonomy in the EFL context in Turkish context.

Finally, students' level of learner autonomy depending on the collaborative learning variable can be investigated in the language learning skills, such as speaking and reading, which might yield different and various results.

Conclusion

The present study, which was carried out with 40 participants in the preparatory program of the Niğde University School of Foreign Languages, aimed to find out whether collaborative activities had an effect on Turkish university EFL students' levels of learner autonomy. Both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were used to reach this aim. The findings indicated that collaborative learning practices are effective in fostering learner autonomy level. Certain features of autonomous learners were carried out by the participants of the experimental group during and after the collaborative learning treatment. The findings of this study are also in accordance with

the literature which suggests that collaborative learning affects learner autonomy level of the EFL learners positively (Benson, 2012; Clifford, 1999; Garrison & Archer, 2000; Gokhale, 1995; Iborra et al., 2010; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Laal & Ghodsi, 2012; Law, 2011; Ma & Gao, 2010; Macaro, 1997; Nguyen, 2010; Shahzad et al., 2012; Thanasoulas, 2000; Yong & Tan, 2008). However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there has not been any studies which investigate the effect of collaborative learning on learner autonomy empirically. Therefore, this study might contribute to the literature by illuminating the positive effect of collaborative learning practices on the learner autonomy level of Turkish EFL learners.

To conclude, the current study might encourage EFL teachers and instructors to apply collaborative activities more in their classroom in order to foster learners' autonomy levels by raising their sense of responsibility and allowing them to take control of their own learning.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Öğrenci Özerkliği Anketi

Sayın katılımcı,

Bu çalışmanın amacı üniversite öğrencilerinin İngilizce öğrenmedeki özerklik seviyelerini ölçmektir. Aşağıdaki maddeleri cevaplayarak vereceğiniz bilgiler, sadece araştırma amacıyla kullanılacağından isim belirtmeniz gerekmemektedir. Verdiğiniz cevaplar araştırmacı dışında kimse tarafından görülmeyecektir. Sizden, bu ifadeleri okuyup karşılarındaki seçeneklerden size en uygununu işaretlemeniz beklenmektedir. Araştırmanın güvenilirliği açısından, vereceğiniz samimi cevaplar son derece önemlidir. Lütfen her ifadeye mutlaka tek yanıt veriniz ve hiçbir ifadeyi boş bırakmayınız.

Demet TURAN ÖZTÜRK

Bilkent Üniversitesi

Kişisel Bilgiler

1. **Yaş**:_____
2. **Cinsiyet**: Kız ☐   Erkek ☐
3. **Bölüm**: Tarımsal Genetik Müh. ☐   Elektrik-Elektronik Müh. ☐   Makine Müh. ☐

Bölüm 1	Kesinlikle katılıyorum	Katılıyorum	Kararsızım	Katılmıyorum	Kesinlikle katılmıyorum
1. İngilizceyi öğrenme yeteneğimin iyi olduğuna inanıyorum.					
2. İngilizce çalışma konusunda boş vakitlerimi etkili bir şekilde değerlendiririm.					
3. Derslerden önce ön hazırlık yaparım.					
4. Ödevlerimi zamanında bitirdiğimi düşünüyorum.					
5. Çalışırken neler yaptığımın (örneğin, günlük tutma, gözlemlerimi yazma şeklinde) notunu tutarım.					
6. Kendi oluşturduğum sorularla ön-değerlendirme yaparım.					

7.	Başarılı olduğumda kendimi alışveriş, oyun gibi aktivitelerle ödüllendiririm.					
8.	İngilizceyi pratik etmek ve öğrenmek için sınıf dışı aktivitelere katılırım.					
9.	Ders sırasında ikili tartışmalarda ya da grup tartışmalarında ve rol yapma gibi aktivitelerde yer almak için fırsat yaratmaya çalışırım.					
10.	İngilizce çalışma konusunda güçlü ve zayıf yanlarımı biliyorum.					
11.	Kitapları, alıştırmaları benim için ne çok kolay ne çok zor olacak şekilde seçerim.					

Bölüm 2

12. İngilizce öğreniyorum çünkü
A) ailem istiyor

B) İngilizceye meraklıyım

C) iyi bir iş bulmak ve okuduğum bölüme katkı sağlamak istiyorum

D) İngiliz kültürüne (film, spor, müzik vs.) ilgi duyuyorum

E) C ve D

13. Bence öğretmen-öğrenci ilişkisi;
A) alan ve veren

B) ham madde ve onu işleyen,

C) müşteri ve dükkân sahibi,

D) iki partner,

E) keşfeden ve onu yöneten arasındaki ilişki gibidir.

14. İngilizcedeki başarımın veya başarısızlığımın temel sebebi;
A) şans ya da kader,

B) İngilizce çalışma ortamı,

C) çalışmayı destekleyen unsurlar,

D) öğretmenler,

E) kendim

15. Öğretmenlerin ders planlarını öğrencilerle birlikte hazırlamaları konusundaki fikrim;

A) kesinlikle katılıyorum,

B) katılıyorum,

C) tarafsızım,

D) katılmıyorum,

E) kesinlikle katılmıyorum.

16. Öğretmen soru sorduğunda;
A) diğerlerinin cevabını beklemeyi,

B) düşünüp cevaplamaya hazırlanmayı,

C) kitap ve sözlüklere bakmayı,

D) öğretmenin soruyu daha açık hale getirmesini,

E) ikili tartışmalara ya da grup tartışmalarına katılmayı tercih ederim.

17. Bilmediğim bir kelimeyle karşılaştığımda,
A) anlamına bakmam,

B) başkalarına sorarım,

C) anlamını tahmin ederim,

D) B ve E,

E) sözlüğe bakarım.

18. Çalışırken hata yaptığımda,
A) öylece bırakırım,

 B) öğretmenin düzeltmesini isterim,

C) sınıf arkadaşlarımın düzeltmesini isterim

D) başkalarının düzeltmesini isterim,

E) kitap ve sözlüklere bakmayı tercih ederim.

 19. Daha önce kullanmadığım teknolojileri (internet tartışması gibi) kullanmam istendiğinde,
A) yeni becerileri öğrenmeye çalışırım,

B) diğer arkadaşlara bakarak öğrenirim,

C) endişeli hissederim,

D) ertelerim veya kaçınmaya çalışırım,

E) kullanmamaya çalışırım.

20. Bence İngilizce çalışmada en iyi yol;

A) not almadır,

B) mekanik ezberdir,

C) dilbilgisi, çeviri, kelime alıştırmaları yapmaktır,

D) sınıflama, gruplama, karşılaştırma yapmaktır,

E) grup tartışmalarıdır.

21. Genellikle

A) sadece öğretmenlerin,

B) genellikle öğretmenlerin,

C) öğretmenlerin ve kendimin,

D) genellikle kendimin,

E) sadece kendimin seçtiği materyalleri kullanırım.

Appendix B: Learner Autonomy Questionnaire

Dear participant,

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the learner autonomy level of university students who are learning English. As the information you give here by answering the statements below will only be used for research purposes, you don't need to write your names. The answer you give will be seen by no one except the researcher. You're only required to read the statements and choose the most suitable option for yourself. The honest answers you give are essential for the reliability of the research. Please give only one answer for each statement and don't leave any of them unanswered.

Demet TURAN ÖZTÜRK

Bilkent University

Personal Information

1. **Age:**_____
2. **Gender:** Female ☐   Male ☐
3. **Department:** Agricultural Genetics Eng. ☐   Electrical-Electronics Eng. ☐
    Mechanical Eng. ☐

Part 1	I strongly agree	I agree	I'm not sure	I disagree	I strongly disagree
1. I think I have the ability to learn English well.					
2. I make good use of my free time in English study.					
3. I preview before the class.					
4. I find I can finish my task in time.					
5. I keep a record of my study, such as keeping a diary, writing review etc.					
6. I make self-exam with the exam papers chosen by myself.					
7. I reward myself such as going shopping, playing etc. when I make progress.					
8. I attend out-class activities to practice and learn the language.					
9. During the class, I try to catch chances to take part in activities such as pair/group discussion, role-play, etc.					
10. I know my strengths and weaknesses in					

my English study.					
11. I choose books, exercises which suit me, neither too difficult nor too easy.					

Part II

12. I study English here due to:

A. my parents' demand

B. curiosity

C. getting a good job, help to my major

D. interest of English culture, such as film, sports, music, etc.

E. C and D

13. I think the learner-teacher relationship is that of:

A. receiver and giver

B. raw material and maker

C. customer and shopkeeper

D. partners

E. explorer and director

14. I think my success or failure in English study is mainly due to:

A. luck or fate

B. English studying environment

C. studying facilities (aids)

D. teachers

E. myself

15. Whether students should design the teaching plan together with teachers or not, my opinion is:

A. strongly agree

B. agree

C. neutral

D. oppose

E. strongly oppose

16. When the teacher asks questions for us to answer, I would mostly like to:

A. wait for others' answers

B. think and ready to answer

C. look up books, dictionaries

D. clarify questions with teachers

E. join a pair/group discussion

17. When I meet a word I don't know, I mainly:

A. let it go

B. ask others

C. guess the meaning

D. B and E

E. look up the dictionary

18. When I make mistakes in study, I'd usually like the following ones to correct them:

A. let them be

B. teachers

C. classmates

D. others

E. books or dictionaries

19. When I am asked to use technologies that I haven't used before (e. g. internet discussion),

A. I usually try to learn new skills

B. I learn them following others

C.I feel worried, but anyway

D. I put it off or try to avoid it

E. I resist using them

20. I think the following way is most useful in my English study:

A. taking notes

B. mechanic memory

C. doing exercises of grammar, translation, words etc.

D. classifying or grouping or comparing

E. group discussion

21. I usually use materials selected:

A. only by teachers

B. mostly by teachers

C. by teachers and by myself

D. mostly by myself

E. only by myself

Appendix C: Normality Test Results

The normality assumption tests were examined before determining the type of statistics in SPSS to be used for the results of the quantitative data. Firstly, Levene's test was conducted in order to test for homogeneity of variance. Table 15 indicates the result of the Levene's test.

Table 15

Levene's Test for the Homogeneity of Variances

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	*p*
7714,000	1	58	,000

The result of the Levene test (Table 15) reveals that the variances are not homogenous at the significance level of .05. ($p = .000 < .05$). In Levene's test, the *p* value which is less than .05 indicates a violation of the assumption. If a violation occurs, it is likely that conducting the non-parametric equivalent of the analysis is more appropriate.

Secondly, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted to determine whether the data were properly distributed. If the sample size of the study is greater than 29, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is used to examine the normality of the data (Kalaycı, 2010).

Table 16

Normality Test for the Gain scores

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]		
	KS	df	*p*
GainScore	,18	40	,001

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (Table 16) showed that the data were not normally distributed at the significance level of .05 (KS (40) = 0.18, p = .001 < .05). When the data are not normally distributed, using non-parametric data analysis should be preferred (Conover, 1999). Therefore, the results of the Levene's test and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test led the researcher to conduct non-parametric tests in this study, which are the Mann-Whitney U test and Wilcoxon Matched Groups test.

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Introductory talk: First of all, thank you very much for your time and effort you spent during this study. This interview is necessary for the study to support and enrich the data. I will use my computer's voice recorder to record our interview and everything we speak will remain confidential. So, please feel free to express whatever you want to share about the treatment process.

1. What did you generally observe about students during this three-week study?

   a. What did you encounter as hard and easy to apply in this process? Did you have any difficulties?

   b. Did you observe any changes about the students' autonomous learner skills? In what way do you think they changed?

   c. Especially which activity do you think helped students be more responsible in the groups and learn from each other better? In which activity did they undertake more work in the group?

2. Which activity do you think was the hardest to apply in the class?

   a. What did you do to eliminate this difficulty?

3. Did you apply any methods or techniques apart from these activities at the study? I mean, do you think there was any unusual ones different from your regular teaching style?

Appendix E: Sample Index Cards

1. Problem-Solving Activity

Bence bu aktiviteler bizim için çok yararlı oluyor. Bu aktivitede çok güzeldi. Bizim düşünme yeteneğimizle birlikte ingilizce- mizi geliştiriyor. Bu görüşlerin bazıları uygulanabilir.

> I think these activities are very beneficial for us. This activity was nice, too. It develops our English, along with the thinking skill. Some of these

2. Writing as a Group Activity

Bu aktivitede arkadaşları- mızla doğru ve yanlışları tartışma fırsatı bulduk bu yaptığımız yanlışların akılda daha çok kalacağına inanıyorum Grup şeklinde bir şeyler yapmamız diğer arkadaşımı- zin bilgilerini bizle paylaşması- nı sağladı ve writing'e eğlenceli bir bakış açısı kattırdık.

> In this activity, we had the chance to discuss the rights and wrongs with our friends. I believe that our mistakes will be more permanent by this way. Working as a group allowed our friends to share their knowledge with us, and we gained a fun point of

3. Role-play activity

> - It's very good.
>
> - I believe it will help us
>   speak English. I haven't
>   seen any disadvantages.
>
> - I think we should do it
>   once a week. Note: But I
>   would rather play the

> First of all, I had the
> chance to do something with
> my classmates. It was fun.
> The English grammar
> structures are permanent for
> me as the sketch was
> entertaining. Because what

4. Peer-correction

> This activity enables us
> to use the grammar structures
> in speaking and collaborate
> more in the class. Such an
> activity develops our English
> speaking skill, imagination,
> and writing skill.

Gup galişmasinin herzaman öğretici olduğunu düşünü-yorum. Hatalarımızı düzelt-memizi yararlı buluyorum. Olumsuz tarafını göremedim.

> I think that group work is always informative. I find correcting our mistakes is beneficial. I haven't seen a negative side of the activity.

5.   Games & competitions

Bana unuttuğum kelimeleri hatırlattı. Arkadaşlarım arasında yardımlaşnayı öğretti. Daha çok kelime öğren-miş olduk böylece.

> It reminded me the words I forgot. It taught me to help my friends. By this way, we learned more words.