

## EXPLORING THE NATURE OF SHIFTS IN LEARNER AUTONOMY AND TEACHER AUTONOMY IN AN ONLINE EFL CLASS IN TURKIYE: A CASE STUDY

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**Abstract:** *The need to understand the manifestation of learner autonomy in the online learning environment and its challenges in the classroom is increasing with the rise of online education. Although learner autonomy (LA) is increasingly important in language education, there is less knowledge about teachers' and students' comprehension and use of this concept. In order to address this lack of information, a case study was conducted to explore the perceptions of teachers and learners about learner autonomy in an online environment. The study's data sources include reflective journals, lesson observations, and focus group interviews. The study, conducted at a Turkish foundation university, identified a variety of control shifts in the courses. This research explored the concept of learner autonomy in the context of online language training. The findings indicated that students had a favorable perception of online learning, highlighting its flexibility, ease, and ability to establish individual standards. Nevertheless, there was a noticeable difference between how they perceived autonomy and how it was really put into practice, typically favoring a teacher-centered approach. Several factors that impacted learner autonomy in online learning were recognized, such as the need for autonomy, inadequate information, and a transition toward teacher-centric approaches. The research emphasized the significance of aspects such as guidance and support systems, adaptability, student motivation, customized learning speed, and communication technologies.*

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**Keywords:** *Learner Autonomy; Teacher Autonomy; Online Learning Environment; Autonomy Shift*

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### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated a slew of issues and has an impact on education. In response to the pandemic, worldwide school closures were implemented as a crucial precaution to prevent the virus from spreading. As a result, a rapid shift to online learning is required, employing both synchronous and asynchronous digital platforms to deliver continuing formal education (Murphy, 2020). After the pandemic emphasized the critical role that technology plays in safeguarding communities, educational institutions

adopted online teaching and evaluation strategies to satisfy curricular requirements. The use of technology in education, which has risen globally as a result of COVID-19, has continued at Turkiye's higher education institutions in the aftermath of a major earthquake. Learning management systems (LMS) and online education thus kept being employed in Turkiye, especially in higher education, demonstrating their flexibility and ability to adapt to the changing educational landscape. The long-standing incorporation of online learning into language education has resulted in a wide range of programs, websites, online courses, and other options for learning English as a foreign language. The relevance of online education, especially its continued and widespread use, has been further highlighted by the commencement of the epidemic and subsequent events. The necessity to examine their experiences and mechanisms within the context of ongoing online education was brought on by the fact that both teachers and students had to navigate and adjust to this new educational paradigm.

The question of how autonomy plays out in online education has come to light as a result of the swift improvements occurring around the world and the growing integration of online education into our educational life (Stoian et al., 2022; Sadeghi, 2019; Dalilan, 2021). Autonomy is frequently seen as a desirable educational objective and a defining quality of proficient language students and teachers. It is a skill that helps learners learn more successfully and independently. Teachers need to be independent in their work if they want to support their students' autonomous learning (Cotterall, 2008; Dikilitaş et al., 2020). Research on autonomy in language teaching and learning usually focuses on how to best support learners' autonomy or their capacity to direct their own learning (Benson, 2011). Learners need to be able, willing, and free to choose what they want to learn, how to learn it, and how to monitor their progress and evaluate their progress. Little et al. (2017) claim that in order for it to continue growing, there must be a gradual transfer of power from professors to students throughout the learning process. According to this perspective, teacher autonomy has an impact on how learners develop their autonomy. To make informed judgments regarding when and how to share authority with their students, teachers need to acknowledge and make use of their autonomy in their professional development and instructional practices (Little, 1995; Thavenius, 1999).

A few studies have examined how autonomy is seen, used, and negotiated via LMS, despite its significance (Bradley, 2020; Gu & Lee, 2019; Wong et al., 2019; Hidayeti & Husna, 2020; Ong, 2019). In order to close this research gap, a thorough case study that explores the subtleties of teacher and student autonomy in an online learning environment is being conducted in this study. This study's main goal is to provide a thorough knowledge of autonomy in online learning environments, with a particular emphasis on a Turkish institution. A greater understanding of how student and teacher autonomy is negotiated and experienced within online learning systems is consequently necessary, given the rising popularity of online education. This research attempts to fill this gap by carrying out a

thorough case study and examining the intricacy of both teacher and learner autonomy inside the online learning environment. Notably, it centers on Türkiye's academic environment. This research aims to contribute to the area of language education and inform teaching practices in online language learning within the Turkish context by examining the attitudes, practices, and experiences of instructors and students.

As online education becomes increasingly prevalent, it is crucial to comprehend the process and perception of autonomy in this context. Investigating the perception, implementation, and negotiation of autonomy in the online learning environment is a component of the research project, which also involves investigating the perspectives and experiences of both educators and learners. In the Turkish context, numerous academics have examined learner autonomy (Cakici, 2017; Balcikanlı, 2010; Yukselir & Ozer, 2022; Sener & Mede, 2022). However, only very few numbers of studies (Yildiz Durak, 2023; Irgatoglu et al., 2022; Uslu & Durak, 2022) have investigated this concept in an online setting. The study elucidates the factors that influence the changes in independence that occur between students and instructors in the online learning setting.

The following research questions will be the focus of the study:

1. What are the overall perceptions of L2 learners on online education?
2. How is autonomy enacted and negotiated in the online learning environment?
3. What factors influence the shifts in autonomy between learners and teachers in the online learning platform?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Unveiling Teacher Autonomy and Learner Autonomy: Control Shift**

Considerable attention has been devoted to the notion of teacher autonomy. This concept is defined as "a personal sense of freedom from interference or in terms of teachers' exercise of control over school matters" (Wilches, 2007, p. 245, as cited in Vangrieken et al., 2017, p. 303). The concept involves the capacity to cultivate essential skills, knowledge, and attitudes as an educator, either alone or in cooperation with others (Johnson, 2017). However, the concept of "learner autonomy" (LA) has generally been given greater importance in educational discourse than "teacher autonomy." Conducting a study on learner autonomy is essential for developing a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics between educators and students. Holec (1981) provided a definition of learner autonomy as "the ability to assume accountability for one's own learning" (p. 3). In his research, Benson (2001) provided a definition of this concept as "the capacity to assume accountability for one's own acquisition of knowledge" (p. 47). Learner autonomy refers to the transfer of power from teachers to students when students take charge of their own learning processes (Wang & Ryan, 2020). Throughout this transition of power, educators must diminish their dominance in order for students to assume responsibility for their own learning endeavors. In courses characterized by a high degree of learner autonomy,

students take charge of their own learning process and actively develop their learning abilities. By doing so, they discover and cultivate their passion, competence, and independence in this domain.

Voller (1997, p. 106) states that the transfer of power from instructors to students is a complex process in which the learner's influence increases while the teacher's authority diminishes. Studies have examined the connection between student and teacher autonomy, which fosters a dynamic and enhanced learning environment that supports learner autonomy and enables creative teaching and learning approaches (Lamb, 2008; Thavenius, 1999). Teachers play a vital role in cultivating students' enthusiasm for learning and their ability to motivate themselves, eventually resulting in the development of "learner autonomy." However, successfully accomplishing this transition smoothly and simultaneously in real-world situations typically involves careful contemplation and intentional exertion. Remarkably, there is a scarcity of available work (Benson, 2007; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2017; Wang & Ryan, 2022) that thoroughly investigates the mechanisms that underlie this mediation.

The present study seeks to examine several aspects of learner autonomy (LA) using Wang's (2020) research results as a basis. These aspects include learner engagement (Benson et al., 2003), genuine utilization of the target language (Dam, 1995), fostering learner consciousness (Nunan, 1997), and encouraging reflective behaviors (Little, 2007). In addition, we will examine signs of authentic transfer of control and efficient learner support (Benson, 2011; Candy, 1991), both as proof and contradictory evidence of LA.

Facilitating learners in assuming responsibilities such as determining their learning trajectory, tracking their own advancement, evaluating results, identifying their requirements, and establishing their own learning objectives (Holec, 1981; Reinders, 2010) is crucial for properly supporting the learning process. These components will offer concrete proof of behaviors that promote learner autonomy while enhancing our comprehension of the conceptualization and practices associated with teacher autonomy that contribute to the advancement of learner autonomy (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019).

### **Understanding Teachers' Cognition and Autonomy Practices**

This article embraces a comprehensive approach to teacher cognition, which pertains to the fundamental cognitive dimension of teaching - covering teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and ideas (Borg, 2019). Within this approach, teachers' cognitive existence considers knowledge, belief, and reasoning as a cohesive entity. This approach is used to examine the cognitive processes and instructional techniques of the instructor in relation to learner autonomy. Teacher cognition research conducts thorough investigations of teachers' personal, professional, social, cultural, and historical backgrounds to understand their thoughts and emotions and how these elements influence their progress and advancement as educators (Borg, 2019, p. 1167). This is consistent with the goal of the research, which

seeks to understand the complexities of instructors' cognitive domains, particularly in relation to promoting learner autonomy via the transfer of authority, and how teachers' views are apparent in and influence their classroom approaches. Teacher cognition is often seen as a complex and dynamic system that encompasses individualized, practically oriented, and contextually sensitive characteristics (Woods & Akr, 2011).

The tailored component highlights the distinct characteristics of educators and their own cognitive processes, which may manifest in many forms and span a diverse array of disciplines (Feryok, 2010). The emphasis on practice underscores the reciprocal nature of the connection between teacher cognition and classroom activities rather than it being predefined (Borg et al., 2018, p. 86). Both cognition and practices include several aspects that change over time, including ideas that are expressed verbally or via actions, as well as behaviors that are observed or described (Borg, 2018). Over the last ten years, there has been an increase in empirical research on the cognitive processes and practices of instructors related to language assessment in response to Camilleri's work in 1999.

Considering the presence of two extensive evaluations (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019; Wang, 2016), attention will be directed to three recent and possibly influential research. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) voiced their discontent with the little research conducted in this field and underscored the need of examining teachers' understanding and attitudes concerning LA. Their research, which included 37 items, investigated instructors' viewpoints on LA from various technical, psychological, social, and political angles. Later on, this carefully designed and thorough survey was used in further investigations, which included many cases of partial duplications (Barnard & Li, 2016) carried out in eight Asian nations. These seminars were significant since they also analyzed the subsequent professional development workshops. Certain workshops, like the one led by Wang & Wang in 2016, led to an increase in practitioner research, hence improving the applicability of this study. Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019) conducted a significant analysis on a large sample of 359 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors from a single institution, achieving a response rate of 78%. Their research captures the unique conceptualizations of LA English language instructors, including both its institutional scope and its representativeness. Moreover, this study to enhance the qualitative evidence about how instructors perceive and encourage learner autonomy, particularly in online education.

### **Autonomy in Online Learning: Opportunities and Challenges**

According to Benson (2001), autonomy is a versatile term that can emerge in various ways that depend on the individual and the context. Autonomous learning refers to a process where individuals gradually become self-aware and share control with teachers, allowing learners to take more responsibility for their own learning experiences. The process also involves an increasing awareness of the learning environment. The goals of autonomous learning and the educational possibilities provided by contemporary

technology, though, contradict the traditional concept of instructors as the primary sources of instructional content and authority. Encouraging students to take more control over their learning relies on teachers undergoing a pedagogical transformation and requires active involvement and communication between them (Yang & Fang, 2008; Ding, 2009).

Moreover, the realm of education has expanded to encompass online learning due to the increasing impact of technology. Online education empowers students to assume autonomy over their own education. Online courses are designed to be efficient and user-friendly, allowing students the flexibility to explore and expand their knowledge from other sources (Prasasti et al., 2019). Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of research on the development and transformation of learner autonomy in online learning environments (Reinders & White, 2016; Prasasti et al., 2019). In order to achieve learning objectives in online language learning, teachers must foster and facilitate students' independence as learners (Mulyah et al., 2020). Abuhassna et al. (2023) found that engaging in collaborative learning inside online learning environments enhances students' academic achievement, autonomy, and enjoyment. Online learning promotes student-centeredness, fostering discussions on autonomy and accountability in the learning process (Kardana et al., 2023).

As Morales and Perez (2022) noted, students' level of autonomy in online learning courses is enhanced by increasing the frequency of instructional activities related to autonomous learning. Dalilan (2017) emphasizes the importance of online learning autonomy in fostering students' ability to independently plan and execute their learning activities. Engaging in learner autonomy might present difficulties, such as fatigue resulting from online learning, disruptions, an overwhelming workload, and inadequate study techniques (Febriana et al., 2022). Amidst the online learning mode, certain students may lack the necessary learning autonomy (Mulyati, 2019). The academic achievement of kids, which is influenced by various circumstances, poses another challenge. Learners' academic success can be influenced by their racial backgrounds, economic factors, and available resources. In addition, teachers persist in struggling with the challenge of effectively delivering instruction to students (Feldman, 2021). To gain a profound understanding of how students interact with autonomy practices, conceptualize it, and how teachers facilitate it during synchronous learning, a comprehensive analysis of the change in autonomy between teacher and learner in language acquisition is necessary.

In conclusion, online learning offers both opportunities and challenges in promoting and implementing learner autonomy for both educators and learners. Online learning poses challenges such as adapting to unfamiliar technologies and teaching methods, effectively managing time, and maintaining motivation and engagement throughout the learning process. However, it also allows learners to take control of their own learning, establish goals, and determine the means to accomplish them. Teachers can assist students in practicing learner autonomy by developing and executing learning activities, and providing adequate guidance and support to students who might find autonomous learning difficult.

## METHOD

A case study was selected within an interpretive paradigm to address the research questions posed in the present study. Case studies systematically investigate a specific phenomenon to understand how events, contexts, individuals, beliefs, and ideas are perceived. This approach focuses on describing and explaining a single event or a small number of events or units in a detailed and comprehensive manner (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Yin, 2018). The interpretive paradigm prioritizes comprehending the subjective experiences and significances of those engaged in the case (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). To obtain comprehensive and detailed data regarding the case, the researcher can employ many data-gathering techniques, including interviews, observations, and document analysis (Smith, 1993). The data analysis process is frequently iterative and requires the researcher to understand the meanings and experiences of the individuals involved. For these reasons, the case study approach within an interpretative paradigm provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject under inquiry (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013).

## Participants

The present study was conducted with three EFL instructors and six L2 learners. It is worth noting that the researcher took part in the study since she was one of the observed class teachers.

**Table 1.**  
 EFL Instructors' Profiles

T	Gender	Qualifications	Years of Exp.	Previous Working Experience
T1	Female	BA, MA in ELL	11	EFL instructor since her graduation. She worked at a state university for five years and has been working in her current workplace for six years.
T2	Female	BA, MA in ELT	6	She worked at a private institution for one year. She has been working at university as an EFL instructor for five years.
T3	Female	BA in Translation & Interpretation	1	She worked as a translator in a publishing house. It is her first year as a teacher at the university.

It is significant to state that three of the EFL instructors taught different types of areas. For example, T1 was the Main Course teacher of the observed class. T2 was the Reading and Writing teacher, and T3 was the Listening and Speaking teacher. Each teacher taught seven hours per week except T1 because T1 taught ten hours per week to the observed class as the syllabus was designed so. Each class was a 40-minute long. Table 1 shows the details of the teachers' qualifications, years of experience, and previous working experience. The L2 instructors were selected in accordance with convenience sampling since they were the instructors of the observed classes.

**Table 2.**  
L2 learners' profiles

<b>T</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years of Learning Eng.</b>	<b>Hours of lessons taken per week in total</b>	<b>Language Level - CEFR</b>
P1	Female	9	24	B1
P2	Female	1	24	B1
P3	Female	Over ten years	24	B1
P4	Male	8-9	24	B1
P5	Male	1	24	B1
P6	Male	Over ten years	24	B1

As shown in Table 2, they all took 24-hour intense English lessons, including Main Course, Reading and Writing, and Listening and Speaking. All the participants had B1 level English. Table 2 also shows participants' years of learning English experiences to understand their engagement with the language. The participants studied at a school of foreign languages in Turkiye. At first, L2 learners were selected in accordance with convenience sampling in the first focus group interview. However, the participants for the second focus group interview were selected in accordance with purposive sampling.

### **Setting**

The present study was conducted through Learning Management Systems, namely Microsoft Teams (<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software/>). Due to an exceptional situation in Turkiye, the 2022-2023 Spring term was conducted in an online setting in all the universities in Turkiye. The institution where this study was conducted was a foundational university, and they adopted Microsoft Teams to deliver lessons to the learners. On MS Teams, learners and teachers can share their content, speak on the mic, write their messages on the chatbox, and meet individually and as a group. They can also follow the lessons synchronously and asynchronously.

### **Data Collection Tools**

The current study employed several data collection tools to triangulate the data, such as focus group interviews, learner autonomy rubrics, reflective journals, and lesson observations. First, two focus group interviews were arranged with the learners due to the time limitation. The first focus group interview explored learners' overall perceptions of online education. It took approximately one class hour (40 minutes). In the first interview, learners were asked 15 questions; in the second interview, learners were asked five questions. Then, another focus group interview was arranged with those who emphasized the learner autonomy to have a deeper understanding of the conceptualization, and it took roughly thirty minutes.



The present study conducted lesson observations to explore the autonomy shift between instructors and learners. These observations also shed light on the enactment and negotiation of autonomy in online classes. One module lasted eight weeks. One hour of lesson took 40 minutes. 1., 3., and 5. The week's lessons were observed to give insight into the autonomy shift over time until data saturation was reached due to the limited time. In order to observe the learners' autonomy in online classes, a rubric developed by Cullen and Harris (2018) was adopted. It consists of three main components: engagement and empowerment, assessment and evaluation, and community building, with seven subcomponents. However, the components, namely engagement and empowerment, were taken to evaluate learner autonomy. This component has two subcomponents: the role of the professor and independent learning opportunities, assessing the concept autonomy from low, emerging to high. As for the focus area, it comprises transmissive/web-supported, referring to low autonomy; transactive/hybrid/mixed delivery, referring to emerging; and transformative/fully online, referring to a high level of learner autonomy.

Then, three EFL instructors wrote a reflective journal on Google Docs. They wrote a two-paragraph on the effects of online education on learner autonomy. They were given the operational terms to ensure that they comprehended the concept of autonomy. They were asked to mention their experiences in online education as an EFL instructor, the control shifts between them and their learners, activities they have done in the class to promote learners' autonomy, and their perceptions and opinions on the concept.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

The data analysis procedure involved several steps to analyze the collected data comprehensively. First, participants were informed about the research content, and their oral consent was obtained before collecting data. Then, learners were contacted. Sixteen learners were registered for the online class. However, not all of the learners participated in the study. Only six of them participated in the focus group interviews.

In the second step, the audio recordings of the focus group interview were conducted with learners. The transcripts were then analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved a systematic process of coding, categorizing, and organizing the data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to learner perceptions, experiences, and observations regarding autonomy in online education. In order to provide reliability and credibility of the data, peer debriefing was applied. An ELT expert with an MA degree in ELT checked the coded data, themes, and patterns.

In the third step, the reflective journals written by the EFL instructors were analyzed in a manner similar to that of a focus group. These reflective journals were analyzed thematically, and lesson observations were similarly analyzed thematically and provided qualitative data related to the effects of online education on learner autonomy. Common patterns and emerging themes were identified, and direct quotes or excerpts were extracted

to support the analysis. The instructors' perspectives and experiences provided rich qualitative data for understanding the nuances of autonomy in the online education context. In this step, a peer debriefing method was also applied.

In the last step, structured observation protocols were used to document key aspects of autonomy observed during each lesson for the lesson observations. These notes were carefully reviewed and analyzed to identify patterns, trends, and changes in the autonomy dynamics between instructors and learners over time. Data saturation was considered when the observations reached a point where no new significant information or themes emerged. The learner autonomy rubric, consisting of three components and several subcomponents, was analyzed systematically to evaluate the level of learner autonomy in online lessons. During analysis, themes and subthemes were identified by assigning codes to understand both students' and teachers' perceptions of online teaching and learner autonomy. Additionally, the study used quotes from teachers and students as supporting evidence.

All data collected from focus group interviews, learner autonomy assessment scales, reflective journals, and lesson observations were subjected to a meticulously comprehensive analysis process. On the other hand, during the analysis process, themes and sub-themes were determined by consensus, and disagreements were resolved through comprehensive discussions to ensure the study's reliability and validity. The emerging themes, patterns, and findings were then organized and presented coherently to provide a comprehensive understanding of learner autonomy in the online education context.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

#### ***The Overall Perceptions of L2 Learners on Online Education***

The six L2 learners who study at a preparatory school in Istanbul participated in the focus group interview to explore their perceptions of online education. The following categories and themes were extracted from the interviews with the learners (See Table 3).

**Table 3**  
 L2 Learners' Perceptions on Online Education

Categories	Themes	Quotations
Motivation in online classes	Opportunity to attend class from home	<i>"One thing that motivates me in online classes is the opportunity to attend class from home."</i> <i>"I like being able to attend my classes without having to go to school, and the platforms we use make it easier for me to reach my teachers when I have questions."</i>
	Easier to follow the lesson on the screen and in the textbook	<i>"I find it easier to follow the lesson on the screen and in my textbook."</i>
	Use of interactive materials	<i>"The use of interactive materials motivates me."</i>
	Use of intonation and addressing students by their names	<i>"In online classes, the use of intonation by the teacher when explaining the lesson motivates me."</i> <i>"It also motivates me when they address us by our names."</i>
	Being able to allocate time saved from commuting to oneself; Learning in a comfortable environment	<i>"The features I like in online classes are being able to attend classes in my own comfort zone, not having to go to school to attend classes, and being able to allocate the time I would spend on the road to myself."</i>
	Attendance flexibility	<i>"These situations and being with my family are motivating factors for me."</i>
Strategies for active participation in online classes	Taking notes during class	<i>"I take notes when I attend class. This helps me be more active in class and lets the teacher know that I'm present."</i>
	Minimizing distractions (e.g., silent mode on the phone, staying away from social media)	<i>"During class, I try to minimize distractions. I put my phone on silent mode and stay away from social media and other online platforms."</i>
	Setting small goals for motivation	<i>"In the previous module, I used to set big goals for myself. For example, I would try to catch up on missed classes in one go, but I realized that it was too tiring. Now, following the advice of a teacher I had in high school, I set small goals to stay motivated in class."</i> <i>"To stay on track, I work based on deadlines and set reminders for assignments and exams. This helps me stay organized and ensures that I meet my own expectations."</i>
	Actively participation and listening to the lesson	<i>"I also try to actively listen to the lesson or aim to complete my assignments on time. As I achieve these goals, I motivate myself and participate more actively in classes."</i>
	Completing assignments on time	<i>"I generate personal motivation by setting my own standards and expectations. I remind myself of my goals and the importance of learning, which keeps me motivated to actively participate in online classes."</i>

Categories	Themes	Quotations
Teacher support and opportunities for independence in learning	Teacher guidance	<i>“When there is a topic I want to learn, I seek help from websites and various videos. I put a lot of effort into learning. I also consult people around me to see if they have any ideas. However, I find it challenging to learn without teacher guidance.”</i>
	Providing additional lessons and resources	<i>“Even if there is no strict attendance requirement in online classes, I take responsibility for my education and attend classes regularly. I understand the importance of consistent learning and actively engaging in the additional material outside the classroom provided my teachers.”</i>
	Feedback and evaluation	<i>“I find my progress in online classes quite good, and I can evaluate it better based on my participation and the results I achieve as well as my teachers’ feedback. I track my progress in learning by looking at the knowledge I have had, and I realize that I become more independent as I add more to that knowledge.”</i>

Table 3 revealed that learners have expressed positive attitudes towards online education for a number of reasons. Among these reasons are L2 learners’ motivation in online classes, strategies for active participation, teacher support, opportunities for independence in learning, and the ability to set their own standards and expectations.

### ***Autonomy Enactment and Negotiation in the Online Learning Setting***

In the present study, autonomy enactment and negotiation in the online learning setting were utilized in three data sources. The second focus group interviews with students were utilized to delve deeper into their views on learner autonomy in online classes. During these interviews, students were asked for detailed opinions on learner autonomy in online courses. The responses collected from the students shed light on their perspectives regarding learner autonomy. Additionally, classroom observations were conducted to examine how teachers incorporated the concept of autonomy into their classroom activities, as well as to observe how learner autonomy was actively present in the classroom, based on the *Online Learner Autonomy Rubric* developed by Harris and Cullen (2018). Table 4 displays L2 learners’ perceptions on learner autonomy in online classes:

**Table 4.**  
 L2 Learners' Perceptions on Learner Autonomy in Online Classes

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Quotations</b>
Flexibility in online classes	<i>"Regarding our online classes, I really enjoy the flexibility they offer."                      "... allows me to organize my schedule better and learn at my own pace."</i>
Interactive nature of online classes	<i>"I find motivating is the interactive nature of online classes."</i>
Encouragement of independent work	<i>"My teacher encourages me to take ownership of my learning by providing opportunities for independent work."                      "...These tools allow me to practice independently and track my progress over time."                      "These technology tools and online platforms greatly contribute to my independent learning and overall learning experience."</i>
Exploring personal interests and developing own ideas	<i>"This way, I can explore topics that interest me personally and develop my own ideas."</i>
Reliance on self-study and online resources	<i>"When it comes to learning without teacher guidance, I rely on self-study and online resources."</i>
Utilizing online tutorials and video lessons	<i>"I also make use of online tutorials and video lessons to gain a better understanding of difficult subjects."</i>
Sense of control and independence in online learning	<i>"In online learning, I feel a sense of control and independence over my own learning journey."</i>
Utilizing technological tools and resources for independent learning	<i>"To enhance my independence in online classes, I utilize various technological tools and resources."                      "I make use of online forums and discussion boards where I can interact with other learners and exchange ideas."</i>

Considering the findings presented in Table 4, teachers should actively promote learner autonomy within the classroom. However, when these activities are evaluated according to the rubric, it is observed that learner autonomy starts at a very low level at the beginning of the lesson and progresses to an "emerging" level in the middle of the lesson. At this level, it is seen that teachers guide student interaction. Teachers encouraged students to make connections related to the subject during the lesson, compare newly acquired knowledge with previously learned information, and support them in conducting more independent work. However, although the activities aim to promote learner autonomy, participation generally only occurred from 2-3, sometimes 5-6 students out of a class of 16.

Furthermore, the majority preferred to remain silent and disengaged from the lesson. In these aspects, towards the end of the lesson, autonomy once again shifted to the teacher. Considering this, using the rubric as a basis, the learners' autonomy decreased as the teacher's role increased. This situation led to students reverting to teacher-centered learning activities. However, in the second focus group interviews conducted with the students, they emphasized the concept of learner autonomy in many aspects (See Table 5).

**Table 5.**

Some of the Observed Practices Oriented to Language Learner Autonomy (LA)

<b>Observed Practices</b>
Collaborative writing practices
Intragroup problem-solving
Individual / Team Presentation
Peer error correction
Group Discussions (Breakout rooms)
Deciding on the content of the lesson (for skills lesson)

Although students emphasized the concept of LA in discussions, their performance in classes generally progressed in a teacher-centered manner. They did not make additional efforts to increase their autonomy. This situation highlights the importance of analyzing the factors that influence students' contradictory attitudes.

### ***Factors Influencing the Shifts in Autonomy Between Learners and Teachers in the Online Learning Platform***

In order to dig into the details of the factors influencing the shifts in autonomy between learners and teachers in the online learning environment, two EFL instructors were asked to write a reflective journal on the autonomy shift between learners and teachers. The researcher also wrote a reflective journal as the teacher of the class observed.

**Table 6.**

Factors Influencing the Shifts in Autonomy Between Learners and Teachers.

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Quotations</b>
Shift of control towards the teacher in online education	<i>"The distribution of control tends to favor the teacher as a result of the learning environment, which can lead to learners feeling distant and disconnected in online education."</i> <i>"The teacher keeps a significant amount of control, as learners typically receive information passively without actively participating or taking responsibility for their own learning."</i>
Flexibility and convenience	<i>"Courses provide students with the flexibility to choose the time and location at which they wish to engage with the content. This allows students to customize their learning experience according to their interests and needs."</i> <i>"Online education offers opportunities for both learning and exploration."</i> <i>"Although online education provides flexibility and convenience, it also brings challenges in terms of maintaining learner engagement."</i>
Individual learning pace	<i>"... gives learners control, over when and how they schedule their learning."</i> <i>"Online platforms often have tools like progress tracking and personalized feedback allowing learners to keep track of their progress and make informed choices about what to prioritize in their learning."</i>

Categories	Quotations
Indifference and disengagement among learners in online education	<p><i>"In the absence of a physical instructor, learners may experience reduced accountability and motivation to assume responsibility for their own learning process."</i></p> <p><i>"... lacking participation and decreased learner autonomy."</i></p> <p><i>"The learners' lack of interest and motivation also prevents them from being willing to explore on their own and invest in their learning process."</i></p> <p><i>"The learners' disengagement continues, which hinders the development of a feeling of ownership and active participation in their learning."</i></p> <p><i>"As an EFL instructor, I encounter learners who show a lack of interest detachment, and a lack of enthusiasm towards online education. I must acknowledge that promoting learner autonomy can be a difficult task."</i></p> <p><i>"It is disheartening to observe a widespread feeling of detachment and inactivity among the students."</i></p>
Communication tools for online learning	<p><i>"Communication tools are essential for promoting interaction and participation among learners in online education."</i></p>
Interactive learning platforms	<p><i>"My goal is to set up an educational setting that focuses on the needs and interests of the learners, utilizing interactive methods and encouraging independent learning."</i></p>
Self-discipline requirements	<p><i>"In the absence of a physical instructor, learners may experience reduced responsibility and motivation to assume responsibility for their learning process."</i></p> <p><i>"Some students may have difficulties in sustaining the necessary self-control and drive needed for independent learning in an online setting."</i></p>
Importance of guidance and support systems in online education	<p><i>"Guidance and support systems are necessary for the learners to overcome their disinterest and participate actively in the learning process."</i></p> <p><i>"Access to mentors or instructors with experience, structured learning pathways, and peer interaction opportunities are just a few examples of the guidance and support systems that online learning platforms must provide to foster learner autonomy."</i></p> <p><i>"I am dedicated to investigating innovative approaches and pursuing alternate techniques to promote learner independence."</i></p>
Abundance of resources and tools supporting autonomous learning in online education	<p><i>"There is no shortage of resources or tools to facilitate independent learning in online education."</i></p> <p><i>"... online education gives students a lot of resources and tools that help them learn languages on their own." Students can find many learning materials online, such as engaging tasks, video tools, and real-life language examples, in virtual libraries and online platforms. There are so many tools available that students can make their learning fit their hobbies and way of learning, which gives them even more autonomy. "</i></p> <p><i>"It can be hard for students to find and use the best online tools because there are so many of them."</i></p>
Aspects of online education that are liked and motivating	<p><i>"Online education provides unique opportunities for independent learning and exploration that can motivate students."</i></p>

An extensive knowledge of the variables affecting shifts in autonomy between students and instructors in online learning settings was obtained via the collection of reflective diaries from EFL teachers and a second focus group interview. Flexibility, student motivation, self-paced learning, engagement, communication tools, self-discipline, accessibility to resources, coping mechanisms, advice and support networks, and the effect of online learning's motivating elements are some of these variables.

## **Discussion**

The study revealed that there was evidence of a control shift in only a few sessions when considering students' beliefs and teachers' behaviors. However, the nature and intensity of this control shift differed from one lesson to another, indicating a range of control releases. Teachers' impressions of their practices and learners' enactment of autonomy were obtained through the use of reflective diaries, focus groups, and asynchronous classroom observations, which were conducted to explore the connection between these activities and their beliefs.

The research findings provide a valuable understanding of the perspectives and behaviors of teachers and students on learner autonomy in an online learning setting. The initial dataset focused on the overall perception of online learning among L2 students. The students had positive views towards online learning, highlighting the motivation they derived from the convenience of attending classes remotely, the utilization of interactive resources, and the ability to study in a conducive setting. Active participation strategies include note-taking, minimizing distractions, and setting attainable goals for motivation. The students highly appreciated the teachers' assistance, encompassing projects, independent research, mandatory readings, assessments, and additional classes and resources. They also emphasized the importance of cultivating intrinsic motivation, taking personal responsibility for their education, and establishing their objectives and standards. The findings align with previous research that has highlighted the benefits of online learning, including its adaptability, convenience, and interactive features (Molnar et al., 2019; Simonson et al., 2019). Moreover, learner autonomy is promoted through opportunities for independent work, exploring particular interests, utilizing online resources, and engaging with fellow learners. This finding is also consistent with the previous literature (Martin & Bolliger, 2018; Wang et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, there existed a disparity between the perceptions of the learners and the actual actions seen while examining the implementation and negotiation of autonomy within the realm of online education. Despite the students recognizing the importance of learner autonomy, classroom observations indicated that it was still in its early stages and often returned to a teacher-centered approach. While learners value autonomy, this discrepancy indicates that they might encounter difficulties in actively exercising it within an online learning setting. The majority of the students displayed a tendency for silence and



disinterest throughout the lecture, indicating a dependence on the teacher for direction in the classroom. These findings align with previous studies that identified challenges in promoting learner autonomy in online education (Breen & Mann, 2017; Harris & Cullen, 2018). Two factors that can influence the shift towards a teacher-centered approach are the need for self-discipline and the abundance of information and technologies that can be overwhelming for learners (Smith et al., 2018). The classroom activities showed the existence of pseudo-autonomy when students were given responsibilities without genuine dedication or conviction. It was noted in both reflective diaries and classroom observations (Wang, 2016).

The findings also emphasize the significance of acknowledging and resolving problems that contribute to learners' contradictory views about autonomy in order to successfully foster learner autonomy. This study used reflection diaries and focus group interviews as research methodologies to examine the elements that impact alterations in autonomous dynamics between students and instructors in an online learning platform. These concepts embraced a wide range of principles, including adaptability, learner drive, personalized learning speed, learner involvement, communication methods, self-control, available resources, coping mechanisms, guidance and support systems, and motivating aspects in online education. The results are consistent with other studies that identified these characteristics as important contributors to learner autonomy and online learning (Benson, 2011; Kabilan et al., 2010; Salmon, 2004).

The results emphasize the significance of timely feedback and efficient communication channels in promoting learner autonomy. Furthermore, they emphasized the need to establish an educational environment that is inclusive and stimulating, promoting student motivation and offering systems for assistance and support. The results underscore the need for self-discipline, and the requirement for resources and coping methods, in enabling learners to participate in autonomous learning. This research contributes to the current knowledge on student and teacher autonomy in online learning by offering valuable insights into the attitudes, actions, and other variables that impact the negotiation of autonomy in online learning settings. The findings suggest that although students derive satisfaction from having independence, they may encounter challenges in completely implementing it within online education. The study highlights the importance of pedagogical strategies and instructional design that effectively promote learner autonomy in online education, considering its complexity and various influencing factors.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the findings of this study are specific to the individuals and the academic environment in Turkiye. Hence, it is advisable to take caution when extrapolating the findings to different circumstances. Further research is required to examine the notion of learner autonomy in online learning across various educational environments and cultural backgrounds to get a more comprehensive understanding of the intricacies and effective strategies for fostering learner autonomy in online learning.

## **CONCLUSION**

The current study explored learner autonomy perceptions and use in MS Teams, an online learning environment. Online language education student and teacher autonomy is explored in the research. It examines autonomy perceptions and practices in Turkish Foundation University online classes. The research shows the challenges of online autonomy, identifying key factors that influence learner-teacher control transfers and offering pedagogical implications. This study found that second language (L2) learners use online learning because of its flexibility, motivation, tailored learning pace, convenience, interactive materials, and comfort. Autonomous learning, support from teachers, active engagement, and self-determined standards and expectations were stressed by students. Online education approaches show that learners' autonomy needs to be applied as perceived. A teacher-centered approach is replaced by a student-centered one. The findings also demonstrated numerous variables that affect online learner autonomy perceptions and practices. Some of these causes were the overload of material and the shift to a teacher-centered approach. The research stresses learning impacts and the necessity for instructors to be aware of students' challenges with online autonomy.

Teachers should encourage self-directed learning and communication skills to help students thrive. Interactive sessions, group collaboration, and solo investigation may create an intellectually stimulating learning environment to motivate students. Advice and support, including experience and good communication skills, may help learners grasp control and autonomy. Students need self-discipline and problem-solving abilities, including time management, goal setting, and self-assessment. Self-directed learning requires technology and internet platforms. Digital forums and platforms should encourage student involvement. Online teacher development aims to promote student autonomy and address online learning difficulties. Teachers must be able to create online teaching resources, prioritize student needs, give constructive comments and support, and provide an ideal learning environment. Thus, online education must promote learner autonomy. Overall, online education must promote student autonomy. Through evaluating students' viewpoints, rectifying problems, and employing efficient teaching methods, educators can create captivating and powerful online learning experiences that foster learner independence and facilitate significant language acquisition.

This study initially had a small sample size and focused on one school setting. Thus, the findings may not be generalized to different settings or learners. Longer-term investigations might reveal learner autonomy's growth and variability. The impact of cultural and institutional factors on learner autonomy has yet to be discovered since this research did not examine them. Subsequent studies may include such features. Given these limits, future research may concentrate on these drawbacks and provide a complete understanding of learner autonomy in online education, which will inform instructional design and pedagogy.

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