

CONTRIBUTION OF THE ELP USE ON LEARNING TURKISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN TURKEY

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Abstract

The study explored the contribution of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) on students' attitudes towards learning Turkish. The study was carried out with 30 foreign students studying at Bartın University the Language Education and Instruction Application and Research Center in the 2018-2019 academic year. The data collection instrument used in this study was semi-structured interviews which were administered to thirty students and an attitude survey designed on a five-point Likert scale with 43 items.

The analysis of the interviews indicated that the ELP can boost self-assessment and as a consequence, the students support having more positive attitudes towards learning Turkish. Additionally, it was declared that the students felt positive towards the ELP. And also according to the results of the questionnaires, they had positive attitudes towards learning Turkish since the purpose of their learning is to survive in Turkey and to pursue their education and career.

Furthermore, the findings of the study indicated the students admitted that the ELP was a tool for self-assessment; however since the students were learning Turkish, they sometimes had some problems comprehending the sentences which later turned into an advantage giving them a chance to practice their Turkish.

Keywords: self-assessment, foreign language learning, CEFR, European Language Portfolio (ELP)

1. Introduction

With the advancement in correspondence and data innovations the disappearance of the borders with the spread of globalization, and the world's getting smaller make it important to gain proficiency with a foreign language. As per these progressions, the enthusiasm for the Turkish language likewise increases.

Thanks to the interest in the Turkish language, those working in the field mostly focus on how to teach Turkish more effectively. In other words, the developments in the field of education have started to be applied in teaching Turkish as a second language.

Governments, organizations, schools and instructors look for the courses through which they can cultivate student self-sufficiency, inspiration and mentalities towards learning Turkish. There are numerous systems educators as well as understudies can embrace to support inspiration and student self-sufficiency inside and outside the study hall by the assistance of self-evaluation apparatuses. European Language Portfolio (ELP) is a standout amongst the most significant methods for presenting and building self-appraisal in foreign language learning. The ELP is an archive whereby language students through formal or casual instruction can record and consider their very own language learning and encounters of culture.

"Autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's learning. Students can take charge of their learning through self-assessment. Students' self-assessment should be a part of the pedagogic process in all educational systems as it satisfies their educational, emotional, psychological and social needs and promotes their self-actualization and personal growth (both emotional and intellectual)" (Holec, 1981). During the process of self-assessment, learners develop critical-analytical skills and better self-awareness. "Additionally, since they are treated as equal partners in the learning and assessment processes, their self-esteem and self-respect are enhanced and they develop a positive self-concept as their opinions are valued. This has, in turn, a positive impact on their motivation which constitutes a key feature of successful learners" (Ushioda, 1996, p. 36). By taking charge of their learning process and learning outcomes, learners can "appreciate their strengths, recognize their weaknesses and orient their learning more effectively" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 192). Thus, the evaluation procedure turns out to be increasingly straightforward and it empowers students to accomplish their short and long haul objectives all the more effectively.

The ELP is considered as an effective self-assessment tool. Several researchers such as Glover, Mirici, and Aksu (2005) suggest that the ELP is a vehicle whereby learners can develop learner responsibility and autonomy by means of self-reflection and awareness. The Council of Europe (2006) also puts forward that the ELP is a tool to promote learner autonomy. Likewise, Glover, Mirici, and Aksu (2005, p. 90) stress that the ELP encourages language learning through motivating learners; therefore, enabling them to empower positive attitudes through learning a language. Also, learner style inventory and unit-based checklists help learners to realize their strengths and weaknesses, as a result, help them to gain positive attitudes towards learning.

2. Literature Review

It is widely believed that students' learning potential increases when their attitude towards language learning is positive and motivation runs high. The examination into the association between uplifting frames of mind and effectively learning a subsequent language bolsters this straightforward perception. Self-evaluation is a key for independent language learning. It empowers students to screen their advancement, relate figuring out how to individual needs. Preparing students in self-appraisal has increased expanding currency and has been explored in a significant number of studies.

Autonomy

Holec (1981, p. 3) defines learner autonomy as the "ability to take charge of one's own learning", emphasizing that this ability "is not inborn but must be acquired either by 'natural' means or by formal learning". The first step towards developing the ability to take charge of one's own learning is when s/he accepts full responsibility for the learning process, knowing that success in learning depends mainly on himself/herself rather than on other people. This acceptance of responsibility entails the idea that people set out to learn, "in a systematic, deliberate way" (Holec, 1981, p. 3), the skills of reflection and analysis that enable them to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning.

2.1. Learner Autonomy and Attitudes towards Foreign Language Learning

Language learning attitude, which has a strong relationship with autonomy, is of high importance and one of the determining factors for language learning. According to Dickinson (1995, p. 173-174), based on cognitive motivational studies, learning achievement and positive attitudes are necessary in order for learners to be more responsible for their own learning and to come to realize that their success or failure is not due to the external factors such as a good teacher over which they have no control, but due to the efforts they spend during the learning

process. In other words, positive attitudes can be said to be a prerequisite for learner autonomy. This clearly shows the strong relationship between attitudes and autonomy.

Autonomous learners mainly have positive attitudes towards learning a language. Fazey and Fazey (2001) suggest that autonomous learners, who can take decisions as to their learning and who are in control of the learning process, process positive attitudes and self-efficacy. It is stated positive attitudes is needed for learner autonomy. This is supported by Childs (2005, cited in Balçıklanlı, 2010) who argues that when learners have positive attitudes towards learning a language, there is a lot more possibility that they will develop learner autonomy and take charge of their own learning.

Finally, Dörnyei (2001) clearly states the close relation of positive attitudes and learner autonomy by pointing out that self-determination theory, which posits that freedom to have a say in language learning by having the right of choosing. Therefore, we can say that promoting positive attitudes towards learning a language is very crucial for promoting learner autonomy.

2.2. The ELP as a Tool for Autonomy

The Council of Europe's educational projects has always emphasized the importance of learner autonomy (Little, 2002). In the Principles and Guidelines, it is explicitly mentioned that the ELP is a tool for learner autonomy and it develops the capacity for independent language learning. It is also insisted that it is the property of the learner, all of which imply that learners aim to gain autonomy by exercising their ownership by using the ELP to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning (Council of Europe, 2004). Kohonen (2001) states that students can have an idea of what they can do with the language in concrete situations and tasks; so the functional “can do” statements can help them understand and assess what they can do with their language in specific contexts. Being the core elements of learner autonomy, planning, monitoring and evaluating learning help students to develop metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness by enabling reflection on the learning processes and target language (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002).

In terms of goal setting through the ELP to advance learner autonomy, the descriptors and self-assessment checklists in the ELP promote metacognitive awareness of different skills, linguistic forms, and strategies of learning. In this way, students see the aims of their language learning in a more specific way. As they gradually understand the descriptors, they use them to set their aims by using the “I can...” statements (Kohonen, 2004). There are different ways to use descriptors and checklists to help learners set learning objectives. Some teachers get their learners to set short-term objectives to focus their learning on for a few weeks and then set new goals by reflecting on „I can do“ objectives; some teachers get their learners to establish their own long-term learning goals at the beginning of the course; and some enables their learners to achieve their aims by writing the descriptors of a certain level on a poster and asking students to put their names on it as they achieve a particular descriptor (Little & Perclova, 2001).

Choosing and/or activities and materials is also an indispensable aspect of learner autonomy that can be facilitated through the ELP. Kohonen (2004) states that seeing options, making choices, reflecting on the processes and outcomes and making new action plans help students develop more autonomy in their learning.

The teachers in the Finnish project found that independent student learning is enhanced when students are not given ready-made materials, activities or tasks, but when they are given assignments that were open enough to leave space for their own choices and to create their own materials. Little and Perclova (2001) also suggest building up a bank of home-made learning activities if the learners regularly create exercises in this way.

Regarding reflection fostered through the ELP, learners can reflect before they take an active role in a learning activity or communicative task by setting learning goals in the biography (planning), while they are performing the activity or task (monitoring), and after they have completed it (evaluation) by choosing the materials to include in the dossier, reviewing the learning goals set in the biography and adding more information on their profile of language skills in the passport (Little & Perclova, 2001). In developing the Finnish ELP Project, Kohonen (2004) focuses on the pedagogical significance of the ELP as a tool for reflective learning and he explores reflection based on students' self-understanding as language learners in the learning process. In this project, to introduce reflection, the teachers begin with the students themselves as language learners. They develop questions to guide students through reflecting on their learning in general as students and their language learning processes and aims in particular. The questions explore what students see as their strengths and weaknesses as a student and as a language learner; what goals they wish to set for the course and what they will be doing to reach these goals; how they might improve their working habits and improve their participation in groups, and so forth. Kohonen (2001) states that facilitating students to reflect on their learning processes and outcomes increases the visibility of the language learning since the goals, processes and the outcomes of language learning become more transparent to the students and they can see their progress of learning over time in terms of their linguistic abilities and study skills. Kohonen (2004) suggests that before using the self-assessment grid right away, students should be taught to be more reflective on their learning processes.

Another crucial aspect of learner autonomy, carrying out self-assessment, can be carried out in all 3 components of the ELP. The passport entails learners to assess their proficiency using the scales and descriptors derived from the Common European Framework. This kind of assessment forms as a summative assessment. The biography provides regular goal setting, which learners can do only if they regularly assess their own learning progress. When learners review their learning targets, they can write a short self-assessment on whether they have achieved their objectives, if so with what degree, etc. Lastly, the dossier also requires self-assessment while the learners select the material to include in the dossier. The self-assessment that is carried out in the biography and dossier components has a formative assessment function (Little & Perclova, 2001).

2.3. The ELP as a Tool for Improving Autonomy

A language learner having an ELP should do the following items which direct them to be inevitably an autonomous learner (Little, 2004):

- Know what their whole language skills are according to the common reference levels and reflect on the next targets of theirs in order to improve their learning.
- Give more importance to productive skills (such as, writing and speaking) (which many learners try to avoid) as they see that their improvement makes sense in the future.
- Reflect on the learning styles that are suitable to them so they learn how to learn which makes their job and also their teachers' job easier. This may also help them learn other languages, which leads to plurilingualism objectives of the ELP.
- When they discover the transparency of the targets of ELP, they can clearly see how their learning improves so they are keener on being engaged in the activities especially in communicative ones.

As ELP helps the teacher to convert any communicative activity into a recorded task and plan for individuals and the whole class both in short term and long term, and use a portfolio

approach in the assessment criteria. Thus, the learners experience the process and the results of the implementation of ELP and become more autonomous in the long run.

2.4. Research Questions

1. What are the foreign university students' attitudes towards Turkish language learning?
2. How does the ELP promote undergraduate EFL foreign students while learning Turkish?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants & Setting

The study was carried out in an EFL setting, at the Language Education and Instruction Application and Research Center at Bartın University. The participants were 30 (Female: 16, Male: 14), four-year undergraduate international students. Since the medium of instruction at the university is Turkish, these students were studying at the Turkish preparatory school prior to their faculty education. The students were B1 level students whose majors are different. The age of participants ranges from 17 to 24, with an average of 20.

3.2. Data Collection Instruments

The study employed a mixed-method in which both the qualitative and the quantitative data was addressed. While the quantitative data was gathered via an attitude questionnaire adopted from Dörnyei and Csizer (2006), qualitative data was gathered by means of semi-structured interviews with the students. A sequential-explanatory design was used in the study as the qualitative data were collected to validate the quantitative data.

3.2.1. Attitude Questionnaire

The quantitative data was assembled by an attitude questionnaire adopted from Dörnyei and Csizer (2006). There were eleven subscales in the questionnaire examining the degree of the participants' opinions and feelings about learning Turkish. Table 1 below presents the information about the scales in the questionnaire:

Table 1: The items of the questionnaire focus on the following domains:

Domains	Questionnaire item no.
Integrativeness	7, 12, 17
Attitudes to L2 Community	8, 10, 11
Cultural Interest	13, 14, 15, 16
Attitudes to learning English	18, 19, 20, 21, 22
Criterion Measures	24, 25, 26, 43
Ideal L2 self	27, 28, 29
Ought to L2 self	23, 30, 31
Family influence	32
Instrumentality promotion	9, 33, 34, 35, 36, 40
Instrumentality prevention	37, 38, 39, 41
Fear of assimilation	42

There are eleven subscales in the attitude scale. The first is integrativeness and cultural interest, which refer to desire to learn the language to communicate with members of the community (e.g. 17. How important do you think learning English is in order to learn more about the culture

and art of its speakers?); attitudes to L2 community and learning English are related to the set of beliefs that the learner has towards the L2 community of the target language and also towards the language, and these attitudes may control the learner's motivation to the learning itself. (e.g.11. How much do you like to meet people from English-speaking countries?); criterion measures refer to assessments of the learners' intended efforts toward learning English which is related to Ideal L2 Self (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 31) and Ideal L2 Self attributes that a person would like to possess (e.g. I would like to study English even if I were not required); Ought-to L2 Self is relevant to the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible unexpected results. This dimension corresponds to the less internalized type of instrumental motive. (e.g. My parents believe that I must study English to be an educated person.); and finally, instrumentality (Promotion-Prevention) refers to the idea that in today's globalized world, learning English as a lingua franca is a must for people to be professionally successful, and instrumental motives involve some personal goals such as career development, earning more money, or finding a good job (instrumental promotion), while there are some regulations of duties or obligations such as passing English to graduate (instrumental prevention) (e.g. How much do you think knowing English would help your future career?). Participants made their responses on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1= 'not at all, 5= 'very much').

3.2.2. Student Interviews

Interviews were done with ten students at the end of the study after they had used the ELP the whole year. The students were chosen randomly. Eclectic random sampling model was used. From the class list, the researcher chose ten students randomly. The interviews were held in Turkish and were held in a friendly atmosphere explaining and paraphrasing the questions to the students in order to enable them to understand the questions better. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The students were interviewed individually about what kind of activities they did for the ELP and what they experienced. Interview questions included Turkish learning experiences of the students, their purposes for learning Turkish and expectation for future use of Turkish, and their attitudes toward Turkish and their experiences of the ELP use. The researcher introduced the ELP, implemented it and the questionnaires. Also s/he did the interviews with the students since s/he was the director of the Language Education and Instruction Application and Research Center.

3.2.3. Student European Language Portfolios

The BEDAF model of the ELP is used. The BEDAF young adult model was chosen because it is very user-friendly in terms of usage. It is very easy to understand as the English translations are also given for each item and very practical. Furthermore, the Language Passport document is very useful for the students and they liked it since it helps the students to validate their language learning and shows their proficiency levels in detail. The students were introduced with the ELP over two class hours; however, this time was very short to cover the ELP in depth. Hence, they were introduced to the components of the ELP and how to work with it was explained to them. The students were asked to share their portfolios with their class advisors. The aim of asking the students to share their portfolios was to have an idea about what they had done to achieve chosen objectives in the ELP, and to what extent they had been able to develop their self-assessment. One of the aims of the ELP was to develop self-assessment. Thus, seeing the portfolios of the students would enable the researcher to get an idea to what extent they could set their own objectives and achieve them

3.3. Data Analysis

This study includes both qualitative and quantitative data. To this end, the quantitative data for this study was gathered through the attitude scale. Furthermore, to support the research

findings, semi-structured interviews with the students were arranged. The quantitative data was analyzed using a statistical software program; namely, SPSS version 22.00. Qualitative data were recorded and analyzed by transcribing the interviews. Content analysis was done and constant themes were found, thematic analysis was done. Transcripts were read by the researcher to categorize the data to put them into relevant groups for a better analysis. Inter-coder reliability was also checked.

4. Results & Discussion

1. What are the foreign university students' attitudes towards Turkish language learning?

The analysis of the data gathered from the attitude questionnaire shed light on the first research question which questions foreign students' attitudes towards learning Turkish. There were eleven subscales in the questionnaire and the mean scores for each domain is given in table 4.2.:

Table 2: Mean scores of the scales in the questionnaire:

Domains	Scale item no.	Mean	SD
Integrativeness	7, 12, 17	4.47	1.40
Attitudes to L2 Community	8, 10, 11	4.38	1.91
Cultural Interest	13, 14, 15, 16	4.24	2.37
Attitudes to learning Turkish	18, 19, 20, 21, 22	4.55	2.58
Criterion Measures	24, 25, 26, 43	4.55	1.69
Ideal L2 self	27, 28, 29	4.35	2.01
Ought to L2 self	23, 30, 31	4.10	2.10
Instrumentality promotion	9, 33, 34, 35, 36, 40	4.37	2.75
Instrumentality prevention	37, 38, 39, 41	4.64	1.81

'Instrumentality prevention' had the highest score M: 4.64, and the 'ought to self' had the lowest score M: 4.10. Since it was a five-point Likert scale, the ought to self is not very low even if it was the lowest score. Therefore, it shows that all scales affect students' attitudes towards learning Turkish and all had high scores. Since these students will live in Turkey throughout their university education, they are aware that they need to learn Turkish to survive in Turkey and to pursue their education at university. Therefore, their motivation to learn Turkish is high and it includes all aspects mentioned in the questionnaire.

2. How does the ELP promote undergraduate EFL foreign students while learning Turkish?

Interview results about the students' perceptions on the effectiveness of the ELP while learning Turkish will be considered under these categories:

- 1) awareness of the language level,
- 2) evaluation and self-assessment,

- 3) motivation,
- 4) contribution of the ELP to learning Turkish, practice Turkish,
- 5) problems related to the ELP.

The findings from the interviews related to these nine headings are presented below.

Awareness of the language level

The students were asked what they liked most about the ELP, and most of the students stated that by the help of the ELP, they became aware of the language level they have and also what they can do in this level with the help of the language descriptors. They also stated that since they learn Turkish and the ELP is in Turkish-English, they had the chance to compare the levels which is while A1 level has simple utterances C1 has longer sentences and expressions. In this respect, it also showed them that when they improve their Turkish, they can also understand longer and more difficult sentences. One student mentioned:

“Yeah. Well, I found out what I know, thanks to it. Yeah, something pleasing. I learned my level.” (Student 1)

Another student also stated:

“My favorite thing is that it gives me the opportunity to evaluate myself, where I am, where I am and I love Turkish.” (Student 2)

Another student also mentioned the same issue:

“In this portfolio, it showed me where I had language problems. Sure, it showed me what I have to work on.” (Student 3)

Another student also commented on this topic:

“You learn a new foreign language and see what level it is.” (Student 4)

Another student also uttered:

“My favorite thing is I've learned things I don't know, so I've learned my mistakes.” (Student 5)

Evaluation and self-assessment

When the students were asked what they liked most about the ELP most of the students mentioned about the chance of the evaluation and self-assessment. They stated that even if they see that their level is low or they cannot understand what the content of the level very well, they said that it is not negative, but actually positive since it gives them a chance to improve themselves. As the ELP is in Turkish and these students learn Turkish, they also had the chance to practice Turkish, therefore; it also enables them to evaluate their knowledge on the language. One student mentioned:

“My favorite thing about the European Language Portfolio is to evaluate myself, so I found myself moving from A1 to C1.” (Student 6)

Another student also uttered:

“My favorite thing is I've learned things I don't know, so I've learned my mistakes.” (Student 7)

When the teacher asks if s/he did not get frustrated when the student realized his/her mistakes, s/he stated that s/he did not because s/he said she had learned from it. S/he learned her/his deficiencies and try to compensate for it throughout the year.

Another student also proposed:

“The questions were good they understood what they asked. I realized my language skills, I understood what I was reading.” (Student 8)

Another student also stated:

“This portfolio showed me where I was missing. It showed me what I should study. (Student 9)

Another student also conveyed:

My favorite thing is that it gives me the opportunity to evaluate myself, where I am, where I am and I love Turkish. (Student 10)

Motivation

The students were asked if the ELP affected their level of motivation, and all of the students stated that by the help of the ELP, they were able to see how much progress they had during the term; therefore, it increased their motivation. They also said that even if sometimes they had not understood the statements or they had realized that their level had been low, it also affected themselves positively, increasing their motivation to study harder. One student mentioned:

“Yes, it has. Because after we know everything, our desire to learn increases. We love those things.” (Student 11)

Another student also suggested:

“Useful. Because most of the foreigners do not speak Turkish. It is good to understand Turkish in an easy or fun way.” (Student 12)

Contribution of the ELP to learning Turkish- Practice Turkish

Since the language of the version of the ELP the students used was Turkish-English, they practiced their language. While filling in the language descriptors, the students also tried to understand if they had any difficulty in understanding the phrases. In this respect, they also stated that they also had the chance to realize the improvement in their language level. They mentioned that while the sentences in A1 level were simpler, the sentences in C1 level were more difficult. Therefore, they were able to see how much progress they had during the term. As another point, being aware of the fact that they could do these things while using the language, they became more eager to continue. One of the students stated:

“Because A1 and A2 were basic skills. B1 and B2 are slightly higher level. When we arrived in Turkey we had no knowledge. I mean, I had no information. Now I can express my own thoughts in Turkish, I can agree, I can get ideas, I can discuss on a subject.” (Student 13)

Another student also said:

“My favorite thing about the European Language Portfolio is to evaluate myself, so I found myself moving from A1 to C1.” (Student 14)

Another student mentioned:

“We answered the questions. When I did not understand the questions and answers, later I tried to learn what they meant.” (Student 15)

Another student also commented:

“We worked on four skills. Reading, understanding, listening, speaking and writing skills. It makes me work harder because A1 and A2 were basic skills. B1 and B2 were slightly higher levels.

Yeah I think. Because, when we arrived in Turkey we had no knowledge. I mean, I had no information. Now I can express my own ideas in Turkish, I can agree, I can get ideas, I can discuss on a subject.

It’s useful. Because most of the foreigners do not speak Turkish. It is good to understand Turkish in an easy or fun way.” (Student 16)

Problems related to the ELP

There were two problems indicated by the students: having difficulty in understanding the statements in Turkish, too much time needed to fill in the ELP. The results related to each category are presented below. Since the statements in the ELP (the version they use) are Turkish-English, and they are learning Turkish as a foreign language, they stated that they had problems in understanding the statements. When needed, they ask it to their teachers and they help them, but sometimes when they fill C1 level for example, they state that the sentences are too long and difficult to understand. As another point just one student stated that it took a long time to fill in the ELP. It may be because of the fact that they also try to understand the sentences and fill in the sections. One of the students mentioned:

“Having lots of questions. It's a bit hard at C1 because we're having trouble understanding the meaning of words.” (Student 17)

Another student also stated:

“Yeah, it took me a long time to fill up. Yeah, it's kind of hard.” (Student 18)

Another student commented:

“I have had some questions so there were many questions which was very difficult to understand.” (Student 19)

Another student proposed:

“It was a bit difficult. I did not understand it. After I asked it to the teacher, I understood and I did.” (Student 20)

Another student also stated:

“I don't understand some words. So some words are very difficult. I looked up the dictionary, I looked for words. Sometimes I had some difficulty.” (Student 21)

5. Discussion & Conclusion

The analysis of the results affirmed that the ELP can be an important tool for self-assessment in foreign language learning. In view of the findings from the questionnaires and the interviews, it can be concluded that the ELP enabled learners to evaluate themselves, see their weaknesses and strengths and study accordingly. These students study Turkish to survive in Turkey, they will live in Turkey until they finish their university education and still go on living if they want to pursue their career in Turkey. Therefore, it is utmost important for them to be able to learn it better including all skills. They need to comprehend what is said, express themselves, write a report in Turkish, join the conversations. etc. In this respect, it is important for them to believe in their necessity to learn it and foster their motivation. The ELP helped them what they are supposed to do for each level and skill and where they are. As a result, they have the chance to see their deficiencies if any and try to compensate for it or they try to improve themselves and

do more. As the results of the questionnaires suggest, rather than learning Turkish for just their undergraduate education, they learn it to be able to live in Turkey.

This result also supports that of Glover, Mirici and Aksu (2005). They state that their result showed a positive attitude toward the ELP and most of the students reported that they became more interested in their own learning with the help of the ELP. They also propose that the teachers agreed that the ELP contributed to the motivation of the students. This result also supports that of Güneşli and Demirel (2006). They report that after a month's implementation of the ELP, learners reported having positive attitudes towards using the ELP in learning Turkish as a foreign language since they have been given the chance to monitor their own learning process and assess themselves. With training and implementation, effective results can be achieved. This finding supports Koyuncu (2006) since he states students liked working with the ELP and thought that the studying process for the ELP was helpful. Majority of the students participated in his study thought that the ELP showed them what they do in English and that the "can do" parts made them aware of their improvement in language process. Therefore, they had more positive attitudes towards learning English after they used the ELP. This result is in line with that of Karagöl (2008) that she states self-assessment checklists and learners' taking active role in choosing their tasks fostered their autonomy and this in turn raised positive attitudes towards learning a language.

As regards self-assessment practices, it was evident that learners benefited from the self-assessment sessions; since they mostly referred to the ELP as a tool for them to evaluate them and see their progress. While assessing themselves, they could remember most of the descriptors from the lessons; so they did not have much difficulty understanding and reflecting on them. As Little (1999b) states, students can have an idea of what they can do with the language in concrete situations and tasks; so the "can do" statements can help them understand and assess what they can do with their language in specific contexts. This finding is in line with Demirel (2003) in that he also suggests that the ELP contributed to the language learning and teaching process positively since their students gained more responsibility and ability to assess themselves. This result also supports that of Egel (2003). In his study, it was found that the ELP was an influential tool in promoting learner autonomy of the students in the experimental group, especially in the state school. Although self-assessment practices were not carried out much after the activities or lessons, one self-assessment session at the end of the term was even valuable for students to understand their standing in the language learning process. However, only one self-assessment session at the end of the term is obviously not enough for students to judge their own success objectively and discover their strengths and weaknesses to plan their learning accordingly.

The findings suggested that students needed to be given more control and responsibility in the learning process. This point was also highlighted in the literature (Bouchard, 2009; Reinders 2000, Şentürk, 2017; Şentürk & Mirici, 2019; Şentürk, 2019; Yüce, 2019). If they were given more responsibility and control, they felt more connected with learning processes and got more involved in the process. If their ideas or suggestions were valued and taken into consideration from the beginning to the end of the study, their autonomy level might probably increase.

In his study, Chan (2003) also concluded that students should be avail of opportunities for more negotiation and decision-making. Bayat (2011) also confirmed that if students were given opportunity to learn in autonomous learning settings, Turkish students learning English as a foreign language might be autonomous learners.

The current study also supports that of Şentürk & Mirici (2019). In their study, they highlighted to what extent the European Language Portfolio (ELP) can promote self-directed learning at Bülent Ecevit University. The analysis of the interviews gave almost the same categories

related to the ELP. It is important because the study was carried out in a similar context in Turkey. Like the students at Bartın University, the students at Bülent Ecevit University also state that the ELP is an effective tool for self-assessment and it fosters students' language learning enabling them to set their own learning goals, evaluate themselves and be aware of the process they are in while learning the language.

6. Pedagogical Implications

The ELP is recommended for implementation in the curriculum at the Foreign Languages Centers or Schools to promote learner autonomy. The ELP can be recommended as a tool which can be the first step to help the students develop learner autonomy because the ELP is a significant tool for promoting self-assessment. However, implementing it in the curriculum needs support both from the teachers and students since they already have excessive workload, and the ELP will be added to this workload both of the teachers and students. They should not perceive the ELP as a burden. Furthermore, even if they agree to work with the ELP, both the teachers and the students need an effective training on how to work with the ELP and how to make the best use of it in the language learning process. Since there are not many studies and pilot projects on the ELP other than the ones of the Ministry of Education which do not include universities, more studies should be conducted to see how the ELP works in Turkey and at Turkish universities.

Language teachers should encourage their learners to use the ELP since it will facilitate their learning process. While doing so, teachers should discuss the importance of the ELP for learners' language development; how learners can benefit from it best, how frequently learners should refer to it, how they can efficiently use the components of the ELP; i.e., the language biography, the language dossier and the language passport. In other words, teachers should train their students as to how to utilize their ELPs most effectively and efficiently. However, for the teachers who do not understand the importance of the ELP, it is very crucial to learn more about the ELP.

To sum up, the findings of this study indicate that the ELP can be a significant tool to promote self-assessment. However, it demands a great deal of effort both from the teachers and students because the educational system in Turkey is considered traditional, in other words teacher-centered. It can be difficult to change both the students' and teachers' attitudes towards autonomy (Yumuk, 2002) because it is the teacher who always takes the initiatives and is responsible for the learners' learning, in other words the teacher is the 'authority'.

7. Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

To begin with, the most important limitation of the study was the sample was small. The researchers had the chance to use the ELP with only thirty students (because the foreign students' number was limited) and the ones being interviewed were less, just ten students. If the sample could be bigger, it could have been better. As another point, the dossier part could not be used effectively. If the students had the chance to collect their materials and present them to their peers and the teachers, they could have benefitted more. Another study can be done with a large sample and more students can be interviewed and also the students can be interviewed regularly after they fill in each level. The comparative study with the foreign students learning Turkish and Turkish students learning English can also be done.

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