

## An Investigation of Turkish High School EFL Teachers' Readiness to Promote Learner Autonomy

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## An Investigation of Turkish High School EFL Teachers' Readiness to Promote Learner Autonomy

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate high school EFL teachers' readiness for promoting learner autonomy in the Turkish educational context. For this aim, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. A questionnaire developed by Nakata (2011) was administered to 32 high school EFL teachers from different cities in Turkey. The 23-item questionnaire which has two sections investigates the teachers' perceived importance of certain strategies for promoting learner autonomy and their actual use of these strategies in the real teaching context in the first section, and in the second section it investigates the teachers' perceived importance of certain strategies for promoting professional autonomy and to what extent they make use of these strategies in practice. To support the quantitative data, a written protocol was conducted with four high school EFL teachers. The data gathered from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS. Content analysis technique was used in order to analyze the qualitative data gathered from the written protocol. The overall findings of the study inform us that many Turkish high school EFL teachers appear to be not ready to promote learner autonomy in their learners and to promote professional autonomy in themselves. The study findings indicate a significant difference between Turkish high school EFL teachers' perceived importance of certain strategies for promoting learner autonomy and their actual use of these strategies. Similarly, the findings point to a significant difference between Turkish high school EFL teachers' perceived importance of certain strategies for promoting professional autonomy and their actual use of these strategies.

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In today's world, there is a shift for us from being the product of our society to being the producer of our society, as Holec (1981, cited in Little, 2007) states. With this shift, the importance of autonomy has been valued more than ever, especially in the field of education. Autonomy was first defined by Holec (1981, as cited in Benson, 2011a) as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3). Along with this first definition, autonomy was later defined by many scholars like by Dickinson (1987, as cited in Benson,

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2011b) as “the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions” (p. 11), and by Littlewood (1996) as “a capacity for thinking and acting independently that may occur in any kind of situation” (p. 428). Still, when we review the literature, we see that there is no consensus on a single definition for/of autonomy.

As Little (1990, as cited in Benson, 2011a) states, since the concept of autonomy is not “a single, easily describable behavior” (p. 7), we cannot measure it as a whole. We need to define it in terms of its components, so we can measure the autonomy itself through these components. According to Littlewood (1996), “we can define an autonomous person as one who has an independent capacity to make and carry out the choices which govern his or her actions” (p. 428). He states that there are two components on which this capacity depends: ability and willingness.

While defining autonomy, Benson (2011a) chooses to use ‘control’ instead of other concepts like responsibility, charge, and so on to make this measurement process easier because ‘control’ is a more concrete and measurable concept compared to the others. Benson (2010) defines the autonomous language learners as the ones “who are in some sense ‘in control’ of important dimensions of their learning, which might otherwise be controlled by others or by nobody at all” (p. 79, single quotes are original). Here in this study, we adopt the definition of autonomy as taking control of one’s own learning as it is in Benson’s (2011a) definition because ‘control’ is a more concrete construct.

There are different definitions for teacher autonomy as it is the case with learner autonomy. Aoki (2002, as cited in Huang, 2005) tries to define teacher autonomy relating it to learner autonomy by stating “if learner autonomy is the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one’s own learning... teacher autonomy, by analogy, can be defined as the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one’s own teaching”(p. 211). Smith (2003) defines teacher autonomy building on the dimensions of teacher autonomy and creates a concept called teacher-learner autonomy. Smith (2003, p. 4) lists these dimensions as follows:

In relation to professional action:

- A. Self-directed professional action (=self-directed teaching)
- B. Capacity for self-directed professional action (=teacher autonomy 1)
- C. Freedom from control over professional action (=teacher autonomy 2)

In relation to professional development:

- A. Self-directed professional development (=self-directed teacher-learning)
- B. Capacity for self-directed professional development (=teacher-learner autonomy 1)
- C. Freedom from control over professional development (=teacher-learner autonomy 2)

Teacher autonomy is defined by McGrath (2000, p. 100) as “self-directed professional development”. Here in the current study, we adopt the McGrath’s definition of teacher autonomy, which was defined as capacity for self-directed professional development (teacher-learner autonomy 1) by Smith (2003) under the heading of professional development.

Benson (2008, p. 16) summarizes the shift in the autonomy literature from the “radically learner-centred” one to “a literature largely written by and for teachers”. In line with Benson’s observation, Huang (2005, p. 203) states that “the idea of teacher autonomy has been increasingly recognized as a major factor that affects the development of learner autonomy in second/foreign language learning”. Now we have far more comprehensive, dialectical, and multidimensional perspectives and definitions of both learner autonomy and teacher autonomy.

Teacher autonomy is addressed by La Ganza (2008) in The Dynamic Interrelational Space (DIS) model, in which the teacher may experience autonomy in four interfaces: (a) teacher-internal teacher, (b) teacher-learner, (c) teacher-institution, and (d) teacher-bureaucracy. The first one may involve teachers’ “... ongoing inner dialectics with past teachers, mentors, or significant others” (p. 74). The second is about

teachers' dynamic, non-patternised, varying relationships with learners, which are likely to lead teachers into "feel[ing] more free in their relationship with some learners than with others [, and] overcom[ing] his or her fears and anxieties related to encouraging learner autonomy" (p. 75). The third interface has to do with teachers' autonomy space that is exercised by the teachers and substantially "affected by their supervising or coordinating teachers" (p. 75). And in the last one, "[i]t is reasonable to assume that teacher autonomy could be affected by bureaucracies, institutions, and even powerful individuals beyond a teacher's teaching Institution" (p. 77).

In the passing, a word of caution is in order here, as Lamb (2008) duly warns,

Despite a shift in the field of learner autonomy towards a consideration of the role of the teacher and ways in which learner autonomy is bound up not only with the learners' but also the teachers' own learning and teaching experiences and their beliefs about autonomy, the interrelationships between the concepts are still largely unclear (p. 269)... Research into teacher autonomy in the field of second language education has had a short history (p. 274). ...[learner autonomy and teacher autonomy are] inextricably interwoven (p. 278).

Even though Hacker and Barkhuizen (2008) sound right in their stipulation that teachers "know what they believe about teaching and learning in order for them to develop as effective autonomous teachers" (p. 162), to be fully mindful of and manage the interrelationships between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy is challenging. As shown by Lamb (2008: 280), the "cyclical link between teacher autonomy and innovation towards the development of learner autonomy" is composed of (a) teacher as language or teaching-learner, (b) teacher as (critical) reflective practitioner, and (c) teacher as innovator-learner in developing autonomy learner, and requires the teacher to be equipped with knowledge, skills, and competence to perform these roles to effectively manage dialectic interfaces between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy.

There are numerous studies aiming to find out the learners' readiness for learner autonomy investigating learners' attitudes and expectations of language learning, teacher and learner roles, and their learning preferences and perceptions of learner autonomy (Chan, 2001a), investigating learner beliefs (Balcikanli, 2010; Cotterall, 1995), and investigating students' attitudes and expectations of autonomous learning and their readiness for it (Chan, 2001b).

However, there are fewer studies investigating the learner autonomy from the perspective of teachers' beliefs and practices or teachers' readiness for promoting learner autonomy. Similarly, Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) argue that "there is a large literature on learner autonomy which, though, awards limited attention to foreign language teachers' beliefs about this concept" (p. 7). This gap in the literature is an important research area as it may reveal some reasons hindering learner autonomy in language learning as Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) indicates in the following:

Teachers' beliefs can powerfully shape both what teachers do and, consequently, the learning opportunities learners receive. Therefore, the extent to and manner in which learner autonomy is promoted in language learning classrooms will be influenced by teachers' beliefs about what autonomy actually is, its desirability and feasibility (p. 6).

When we review the literature to see the studies about teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy, teachers' in-class practices to promote learner autonomy, and teachers' readiness to promote learner autonomy, we see a small amount of research on teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy, such as Chan (2003) and Tayjasanant and Suraratdecha (2016). In a multicultural study by Camilleri (1999, cited in Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012), teachers were asked through a questionnaire about the extent to which learners should be involved in decisions about a series of learning activities. The findings of the study revealed that while the teachers were positive about sharing the decision making process with the learners about some activities like assessing themselves, and deciding the learning procedures, they were not so positive

about some other activities like deciding on the course book, deciding on the time of the lesson, and so on. Camileri Grima (2007, as cited in Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012) replicated Camilleri's (1999) study in the Maltese context and reported similar findings.

While getting insights from the studies above, we should keep in mind the caution of Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) that these kinds of studies about teacher beliefs conducted using rather limited questionnaires methodologically may be “prone to generating socially desirable responses rather than insights which reflected teachers’ classroom practices” (p. 7).

When we search for the studies about teachers’ readiness to promote learner autonomy, we see even a smaller number of studies like Chan (2003), Tayjasant and Suraratdecha (2016), and Nakata (2011). Chan (2003) investigated the teachers’ perspectives of their roles and responsibilities and their students’ decision-making abilities and found that the teachers perceived their students to be ‘able’ in terms of decision making but did not want to share the responsibilities with the students. In Thai context, Tayjasant and Suraratdecha (2016) conducted a study to find out EFL teachers’ and learners’ beliefs about autonomous learning and how ready they were for autonomous learning. Among the others, one of the findings of their research indicated “the rarity in promoting a high degree of autonomous learning among Thai students at present” (p. 168). In another study, Nakata (2011) examined the teachers’ perceived importance and the actual use of strategies to promote learner and teacher autonomy, and reported that the teachers were not fully ready to promote learner autonomy.

Similarly, our study seeks to examine high school EFL teachers’ readiness to promote learner autonomy in the Turkish educational context, and sets out to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between Turkish high school EFL teachers’ perceived importance of certain strategies for promoting learner autonomy and their actual use of these strategies?
2. What are the significant differences between Turkish high school EFL teachers’ perceived importance of certain strategies for promoting learner autonomy and their actual use of these strategies?
3. Is there a significant difference between Turkish high school EFL teachers’ perceived importance of certain strategies for promoting professional autonomy and their actual use of these strategies?
4. What are the significant differences between Turkish high school EFL teachers’ perceived importance of certain strategies for promoting professional autonomy and their actual use of these strategies?
5. What do Turkish high school EFL teachers think of the possible reasons behind these differences?

## **2. Methodology**

The current study, which adopts a mixed-method approach, reports both quantitative and qualitative findings. The quantitative data were collected using a closed questionnaire, and the qualitative data were collected through a written protocol. The detailed information about the participants of the study, data collection tools, and data analysis is provided in the following sections.

### *2.1. Participants*

As the data were collected through two different instruments, there were two different samplings in the current study. In total, 32 English language teachers working in high schools in different cities (i.e., Ankara, Konya, Diyarbakır, Samsun, Isparta, Şırnak, Denizli, Gaziantep, Ağrı) in Turkey participated in this study. The questionnaire was administered to all the 32 participants. The written protocol was

conducted with four of these 32 participants. The four teachers working at the same school volunteered to participate and were within the reach of the researchers. Therefore, convenience sampling was used to form the sample group for the written protocol. A snowball sampling strategy, which is a purposeful sampling strategy, was used to reach the participants of the questionnaire.

The participants of the written protocol were asked if they would volunteer to contribute to the study through the written protocol after they filled in the questionnaire. Four English teachers working at the same high school in Ankara volunteered to participate. The demographic information about the participants of the written protocol is provided in Table 1.

Table 1  
Demographic Information of the Written Protocol Participants

Participants	A	B	C	D
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Female
Age	46	44	49	50
Teaching level	10 <sup>th</sup> ,11 <sup>th</sup> ,12 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup> ,11 <sup>th</sup> ,12 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup> ,11 <sup>th</sup> ,12 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup> ,11 <sup>th</sup> ,12 <sup>th</sup>
Teaching experience	21 years	18 years	25 years	23 years

## 2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

As our study adopts a mixed-method approach, it reports both quantitative and qualitative data gathered through two different instruments. In the following sections, detailed information about quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments and about data analysis is provided under separate headings.

### 2.2.1. Quantitative Data

The quantitative data were gathered from the questionnaire which was developed by Nakata (2011). The questionnaire was administered to 32 high school EFL teachers from different cities (i.e., Ankara, Konya, Diyarbakır, Samsun, Isparta, Şırnak, Denizli, Gaziantep, Ağrı) in Turkey. The questionnaire participants were reached by the researchers, co-workers of the researchers, and the co-workers of the first participants of the study through personal contacts. The questionnaires were either handed directly to the participants or administered by e-mail.

The 23-item questionnaire, which has two sections, investigates the teachers' perceived importance of certain strategies for promoting learner autonomy and their actual use of these strategies in the real teaching context in the first section. In the second section, it investigates the teachers' perceived importance of certain strategies for promoting professional autonomy and to what extent they make use of these strategies in practice. The first 10 items constitute the first section of the questionnaire, which covers the strategies to promote learner autonomy. The remaining 13 items form the second section of the questionnaire, and address the strategies to promote professional autonomy.

To analyze the data, descriptive statistics and paired sample t-test were applied using SPSS 20 for Windows. The mean scores and frequencies were calculated and presented through tables with the aim of showing the importance of the strategies. Paired sample t-test was administered in order to find out if there was any significant difference between the perceived importance and the actual use of the strategies.

When we examine the Cronbach Alpha reliability analyses of the scale calculated with the data obtained from the teachers, it was concluded that the reliability of the 'perceived importance' dimension was calculated as 0.73 and the 'real use' dimension reliability was as 0.70. According to Özdamar (1999), if

the Cronbach Alpha reliability value is 0.60-0.80, it is acceptable; if it is between 0.80-0.90, it is highly reliable; if it is between 0.90-1.00, it means that it is very reliable. In our context, it is seen that the dimensions of the scale have acceptable reliability values according to this criterion.

### 2.2.2. Qualitative Data

The qualitative data were collected through the written protocol to support the quantitative data and to find out the possible reasons behind the findings of the questionnaire. Four English language teachers working in the same high school in Ankara agreed to contribute voluntarily through the written protocol after the researchers administered the questionnaire to these participants. Interview questions similar to the ones used in the study by Nakata (2011) were asked in the written protocol to find out the possible reasons behind the differences between the teachers' perceived importance of certain strategies to promote learner autonomy and professional autonomy and their actual use of these strategies. The following four questions were directed to the participants in the written protocol:

1. What do you think of the differences between the perceived importance and the actual use of strategies to promote learner autonomy and of the possible reasons behind these? (for items 1-10)
2. Could you explain the reason why for some strategies there is no difference between the perceived importance and the actual use while there is more than 1-point difference for other strategies? (for items 1-10)
3. What do you think of the differences between the perceived importance and actual use of strategies to promote teacher autonomy and of the possible reasons behind these? (for items 11-23)
4. Could you explain the reason why for some strategies there is no difference between the perceived importance and the actual use while there is more than 1-point difference for other strategies? (for items 11-23)

## 3. Results and Discussion

The current study aims to investigate Turkish high school EFL teachers' readiness for promoting learner autonomy and tries to answer five research questions in line with its aim. The data gathered from the questionnaire were analyzed and the findings were presented to answer the first four research questions. The qualitative data were analyzed and used to answer the fifth research question. The findings are presented and discussed below under each related research question.

### 3.1. Research Question 1: Is there a significant difference between Turkish high school EFL teachers' perceived importance of certain strategies for promoting learner autonomy and their actual use of these strategies?

In order to find out if there was any significant difference between Turkish EL high school EFL teachers' perceived importance of strategies for promoting learner autonomy and their actual use of these strategies, we calculated the mean scores of all the strategies under the first section of the questionnaire for perceived importance and actual use separately. The figures are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2  
Descriptive Statistics and Paired Sample T-Test Results of The First 10 Items in Total

Pair 1 (Learner)	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	df	P
Perceived importance	35.13	32	4.42	3.991	31	.000*

Actual use 29.97 32 5.62

\*p<.05

As Table 2 clearly illustrates, a significant difference was found between the teachers’ perceived importance of strategies for promoting learner autonomy and their actual use of these strategies ( $t_{(31)}=3.991, p=.000<.05$ ). The findings are in favor of the perceived importance. In other words, the teachers stated that they perceive the given strategies for promoting learner autonomy as important (mean: 35.13); however, they do not use these strategies (mean: 29.97) in real teaching contexts. The difference between the mean scores of perceived importance of the strategies and their actual use is found to be significant according to the t-test results ( $p=.000<.05$ ). With the aim of having a deeper idea about this difference, we analyzed each item separately in terms of their perceived importance for and the actual use by the teachers. The item-based findings are presented and discussed in the following section.

3.2. *Research Question 2: What are the significant differences between Turkish high school EFL teachers’ perceived importance of certain strategies for promoting learner autonomy and their actual use of these strategies?*

As Table 2 offers a general picture for the teachers’ perceived importance and their actual use of strategies for promoting learner autonomy, reporting on the total mean score of all the 10 items in the first section for perceived importance and actual use separately, Table 3 provides a deeper analysis for each item giving descriptive statistics and making comparisons between the perceived importance (PI) and the actual use (AU) depending on the paired sample t-test analysis.

Table 3  
Descriptive Statistics and Paired Sample T-Test Results of the First 10 Items for the Comparison of the Perceived Importance (PI) and the Actual Use (AU) of Each Strategy

Strategies to promote learner autonomy...		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	df	P																																																																																												
1. help learners to identify their own strengths and weaknesses	PI	3.63	32	0.55	3.937	31	.000*																																																																																												
	AU	3.13	32	0.61				2. help learners to set up their own learning goals	PI	3.53	32	0.67	1.488	31	.147	AU	3.28	32	0.63	3. help learners to decide what to learn outside of the classroom	PI	3.44	32	0.62	3.712	31	.001*	AU	2.94	32	0.56	4. help learners to evaluate their own learning and progress	PI	3.50	32	0.62	2.879	31	.007*	AU	2.94	32	0.84	5. help learners to stimulate their own interest in learning English	PI	3.50	32	0.62	2.279	31	.030*	AU	3.03	32	0.86	6. help learners to learn from peers, not just from the teachers	PI	3.41	32	0.67	3.215	31	.003*	AU	2.91	32	0.73	7. help learners to become more self-directed in their learning	PI	3.41	32	0.80	2.701	31	.011*	AU	2.91	32	0.93	8. give learners chances to offer opinions in their learning	PI	3.56	32	0.56	3.570	31	.001*	AU	3.03	32	0.69	9. help learners to discover knowledge in English on their own rather than waiting for knowledge from the	PI	3.59	32	0.56	3.732	31	.001*
2. help learners to set up their own learning goals	PI	3.53	32	0.67	1.488	31	.147																																																																																												
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	AU	2.94	32	0.56				4. help learners to evaluate their own learning and progress	PI	3.50	32	0.62	2.879	31	.007*	AU	2.94	32	0.84	5. help learners to stimulate their own interest in learning English	PI	3.50	32	0.62	2.279	31	.030*	AU	3.03	32	0.86	6. help learners to learn from peers, not just from the teachers	PI	3.41	32	0.67	3.215	31	.003*	AU	2.91	32	0.73	7. help learners to become more self-directed in their learning	PI	3.41	32	0.80	2.701	31	.011*	AU	2.91	32	0.93	8. give learners chances to offer opinions in their learning	PI	3.56	32	0.56	3.570	31	.001*	AU	3.03	32	0.69	9. help learners to discover knowledge in English on their own rather than waiting for knowledge from the	PI	3.59	32	0.56	3.732	31	.001*		2.81		1.00																				
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		2.81		1.00																																																																																															



teacher	AU		32				
10. give learners chances to offer opinions on what to learn in the classroom	PI	3.56	32	0.67		4.447	31 .000*
	AU	3.00	32	0.76			

\*p<.05

Several interesting findings are most likely to be observed in Table 3. When we examine the mean scores of the perceived importance of each item and compare them with the mean scores of their actual use separately, we see that the findings are in favor of the perceived importance for all the items. Upon checking whether these differences are significant or not, we see that although the mean score of the perceived importance (3.53) is higher than that of the actual use (3.28), the difference in the 2<sup>nd</sup> strategy, which is “help learners to set up their own learning goals”, is not found to be significant (p=.147). Nevertheless, the difference between the perceived importance and the actual use of the remaining nine items is found to be significant in favor of the perceived importance. The analysis of the 1<sup>st</sup> item where the teachers are asked to rank their perceived importance and actual use of strategies to “help learners to identify their own strengths and weaknesses” shows us that this strategy is not as much used (3.13) by the teachers as it is regarded important (3.63) ( $t_{(31)}= 3.937, p=.000<.05$ ). The difference between the perceived importance and the actual use of the 3<sup>rd</sup> strategy, which is “help learners to decide what to learn outside of the classroom” is found to be significant ( $t_{(31)}= 3.712, p=.001<.05$ ), and so is the difference between the perceived importance and the actual use for the following strategies:

- ( $t_{(31)}= 2.879, p=.007<.05$ ) for the 4<sup>th</sup> strategy (“help learners to evaluate their own learning and progress”),
- $t_{(31)}= 2.279, p=.030<.05$  for the 5<sup>th</sup> strategy (“help learners to stimulate their own interest in learning English”),
- $t_{(31)}= 3.215, p=.003<.05$  for the 6<sup>th</sup> strategy (“help learners to learn from peers, not just from the teachers”),
- $t_{(31)}= 2.701, p=.011<.05$  for the 7<sup>th</sup> strategy (“help learners to become more self-directed in their learning”),
- $t_{(31)}= 3.570, p=.001<.05$  for the 8<sup>th</sup> strategy (“give learners chances to offer opinions in their learning”),
- $t_{(31)}= 3.732, p=.001<.05$  for the 9<sup>th</sup> strategy (“help learners to discover knowledge in English on their own rather than waiting for knowledge from the teacher”),
- $t_{(31)}= 4.447, p=.000<.05$  for the 10<sup>th</sup> strategy (“give learners chances to offer opinions on what to learn in the classroom”).

While the differences between the teachers’ perceived importance and their actual use for all the strategies except for the 2<sup>nd</sup> one are significant, the strategies that yield the biggest differences between the perceived importance and the actual use are the 1<sup>st</sup>, the 10<sup>th</sup>, the 3<sup>rd</sup>, the 8<sup>th</sup>, and the 9<sup>th</sup>.

*3.3. Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference between Turkish high school EFL teachers’ perceived importance of certain strategies for promoting professional autonomy and their actual use of these strategies?*

In order to find out if there was any significant difference between Turkish high school EFL teachers’ perceived importance of strategies for promoting teacher autonomy and their actual use of these strategies, we calculated the mean scores of all the strategies under the second section of the questionnaire for perceived importance and actual use separately. The results are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics and Paired Sample T-Test Results of the Items 11-23 In Total

Pair 2 (Teacher)	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	df	P
Perceived importance	44.75	32	5.21	3.903	31	.000*
Actual use	39.28	32	6.93			

\*p<.05

As can be seen from the table above, there is a significant difference between the teachers' perceived importance of strategies for promoting teacher autonomy and their actual use of these strategies ( $t_{(31)}=3.903$ ,  $p=.000<.05$ ). The findings are in favor of the perceived importance. In other words, the teachers stated that they perceive the given strategies for promoting teacher autonomy as important (mean: 35.13) although they do not use these strategies (mean: 29.97) in real teaching contexts as much as they perceive them important. The difference between the mean scores of the teachers' perceived importance of the strategies and their actual use was found to be significant according to the t-test results ( $p=.000<.05$ ). With the aim of having a deeper idea about this difference, we analyzed each item separately in terms of their perceived importance and their actual use. The item-based findings are presented and discussed in the following section.

*4.4. Research Question 4: What are the significant differences between Turkish high school EFL teachers' perceived importance of certain strategies for promoting professional autonomy and their actual use of these strategies?*

Table 4 above offers a general picture for the perceived importance that the teachers attach to the strategies for promoting teacher autonomy and the teachers' actual use of them, reporting the total mean scores of all the 13 items in the second section for perceived importance and actual use separately. Furthermore, Table 5 below provides a deeper analysis for each item giving descriptive statistics and making comparisons between the perceived importance (PI) and the actual use (AU) on the basis of the paired sample t-test analysis.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics and Paired Sample T-Test Results of the Items 11-23 for the Comparison of the Perceived Importance (PI) and Actual Use (AU) of Each Strategy

Strategies to promote teacher autonomy help teachers to...			Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	df	P
1.	identify their own strengths and weaknesses	PI	3.50	32	0.51	3.738	31	.001*
		AU	3.09	32	0.59			
2.	set up their own learning goals	PI	3.41	32	0.61	3.016	31	.005*
		AU	2.94	32	0.76			
3.	decide what to learn outside of the classroom	PI	3.34	32	0.70	1.488	31	.147
		AU	3.09	32	0.78			
4.	evaluate their own learning and progress	PI	3.53	32	0.62	2.627	31	.013*
		AU	3.13	32	0.75			
5.	stimulate their own interest in learning English	PI	3.56	32	0.67	3.129	31	.004*
		AU	2.97	32	0.86			
6.	motivate themselves in improving teaching skills required for English teachers	PI	3.34	32	0.70	2.436	31	.021*
		AU	2.97	32	0.90			
7.	motivate themselves in improving	PI	3.38	32	0.83	4.706	31	.000*

	English proficiency required for English teachers	AU	2.75	32	0.84			
8.	learn from colleagues at the school and those outside the school	PI	3.50	32	0.62			
		AU	3.03	32	0.69	3.304	31	.002*
9.	become self-directed in improving their teaching	PI	3.38	32	0.61			
		AU	3.03	32	0.82	2.075	31	.046*
10.	become self-directed in improving English proficiency	PI	3.28	32	0.68			
		AU	3.13	32	0.61	1.094	31	.282
11.	exchange opinions about the text with other teachers	PI	3.50	32	0.57			
		AU	3.13	32	0.61	2.547	31	.016*
12.	listen to learners' voices (e.g., questionnaire) and learn from them	PI	3.41	32	0.67			
		AU	2.91	32	0.82	3.357	31	.002*
13.	exchange opinions about the ideal lesson with other teachers	PI	3.63	32	0.61			
		AU	3.13	32	0.55	3.937	31	.000*

\*p<.05

There were 13 strategies under the heading of teacher autonomy. What stands out in Table 5 is that, for the 11 of the 13 strategies, there is a significant difference between the perceived importance and the actual use of the strategies for promoting teacher autonomy. Further analysis shows that the difference in each strategy pair is in favor of the perceived importance. The differences in Item 3 (“decide what to learn outside of the classroom”) ( $t_{(31)}= 1.488, p=.147>.05$ ) and Item 10 (“become self-directed in improving English proficiency”) ( $t_{(31)}= 1.094, p=.282>.05$ ) were not found to be significant. In the light of these findings, we can say that these two strategies are the ones which were both considered important and implemented in the real teaching contexts by Turkish high school EFL teachers. The strategies with the biggest gap between the perceived importance and the actual use are

- the 13<sup>th</sup> (“exchange opinions about the ideal lesson with other teachers”),
- the 7<sup>th</sup> (“motivate themselves in improving English proficiency required for English teachers”),
- the 1<sup>st</sup> (“identify their own strengths and weaknesses”),
- the 8<sup>th</sup> (“learn from colleagues at the school and those outside the school”), and
- the 12<sup>th</sup> (“listen to learners’ voices (e.g., questionnaire) and learn from them”).

Despite the fact that the strategy which has the highest mean score in terms of perceived importance was the 13<sup>th</sup> strategy, it is one of the strategies with the biggest gap between the perceived importance and the actual use. In other words, the teachers regard this strategy as the most important strategy of all, but they do not implement it in the real context as much as they perceive it important. The strategy which was valued the least by the teachers was the 10<sup>th</sup> (“become self-directed in improving English proficiency”). What is surprising is that the 10<sup>th</sup> strategy is one of the two strategies which have no significant difference between the perceived importance and the actual use. It follows from these findings that the teachers do not regard this strategy as important, nor do they implement it in the real context. The strategies which are implemented the most by the teachers are the 4<sup>th</sup> (“evaluate their own learning and progress”), the 10<sup>th</sup> (“become self-directed in improving English proficiency”), the 11<sup>th</sup> (“exchange opinions about the text with other teachers”), and the 13<sup>th</sup> (“exchange opinions about the ideal lesson with other teachers”, with the same highest mean score of 3.13). Lastly, the strategy which is implemented the least by the teachers is the 7<sup>th</sup> (“motivate themselves in improving English proficiency required for English teachers”), with the lowest mean score (2.75). This strategy is also one of the strategies with the biggest

gap between the perceived importance and the actual use. What is striking about this figure is that the teachers value this strategy a lot, yet they do not implement it in reality.

When we examine the big picture, we see that the teachers value the importance of promotion of both learner autonomy in their learners and their own professional autonomy; however, there is a huge gap between their perceived importance and the actual use of these strategies to promote both kinds of autonomy. In order to find out the possible reasons underlying these significant differences between the perceived importance and the actual use of these strategies, qualitative data were collected. Qualitative data are presented, analyzed, and discussed in the next section.

*5.5. Research question 5: What do Turkish high school EFL teachers think of the possible reasons behind these differences?*

The analysis of the quantitative data did not provide any information in terms of the possible reasons behind the significant differences between the perceived importance and the actual use of strategies to promote both learner autonomy and teacher autonomy. With the aim of finding out these possible reasons, we analyzed the qualitative data gathered through a written protocol. Analyses of the four teachers' written protocols are presented under two themes: learner autonomy and teacher autonomy.

#### *5.5.1. Learner autonomy*

Under this theme, the extracts from the written protocol of the teachers where they explained the reasons of the huge gap between the perceived importance and the actual use of the strategies for promoting learner autonomy were presented. The extracts given below are unedited, original as taken from the four teachers participating in the written protocol.

##### *Motivation*

The teachers indicate the reason they see behind the lack of learner autonomy from a shared point of view even though they verbalize differently and it is motivation (Dörnyei, 1994), which has been seen as one of the important driving forces for the second language learning:

*Although our students should be responsible for their learning, should participate in this learning process actively using their own knowledge, capacity, and strategies, what I have experienced is that they are not willing to learn English. This leads the difference between what we want to do and what we actually do.*

*The differences depend on the teacher's proficiency and the students' previous education.*

*There are some factors resulting in this like quantity –number of students in a class–, environmental effects, family conditions, etc.*

*One reason for this is that students do not value the things the teachers value as much as the teachers.*

*Foreign language is not a must for the students, it is just a course to pass for the students.*

*Although we warn and guide them about what to learn in their social life, in other words, outside the classroom, their examination (LYS) anxiety makes them push the language learning into the background.*

*In high school level it's not easy to change behaviours. Elementary school is the place where you can teach how to be a successful student.*

#### *5.5.2. Guidance*

The teachers do not report that they follow some strategies to increase the learner autonomy. However, the teachers believe the learners need guidance to become autonomous learners.

*They think “where will I need this?”. This is another reason of the difference between what we want to do and what we do. They totally need guidance.*

*Questioning is something that our students can't do. But if we teach the importance of questioning, they will be able to start questioning the quality of lessons, books, ...and themselves...*

### 5.5.3. Teacher autonomy

The theme of teacher autonomy covers the extracts from the written protocol of the teachers consisting of the teachers' explanations of the reasons for the substantial gap between the perceived importance and the actual use of the strategies for promoting teacher autonomy. As in the case of the learner autonomy theme, the extracts given below are unedited, original as taken from the four teachers participating in the written protocol.

#### 5.5.3.1. Factors related to the students

Motivation level of the students seems to be one of the two important factors affecting teacher autonomy negatively based on the interviews conducted with the teachers.

*Unwillingness of the students may affect the teachers.*

#### 5.5.3.2. Factors related to the education system

According to the qualitative data gathered from the participants, we see that another factor affecting the teacher autonomy in a negative way is related to the education system, like course books, exams, numbers of the students, and time issues. As Turkey is an exam-oriented country where students have to sit for a high-stakes test starting from primary to tertiary level (Özmen, 2011), it affects the whole education system and the teacher-learner autonomy alike. The limitations caused by the high-stakes tests on teacher autonomy are also mentioned in Nakata (2011).

*Fortunately modern coursebooks are prepared to lead teachers and students properly. If a teacher is dedicated to help and do their job, those books can help and guide. But the time and the number of the students that a teacher is responsible is very important to reach the goal.*

*In our education system it is to be criticized that we try to adapt students to a pattern, not creating a good pattern for each student.*

The findings of our study were found to be in line with the findings of Nakata (2011), who investigated the teachers' readiness to promote learner autonomy and reported statistically significant differences in all 23 items of the scale in terms of perceived importance and the actual use. The differences were in favor of the perceived importance. Similarly, in our study all the differences between the perceived importance and the actual use of the strategies for promoting both learner autonomy and teacher autonomy were found to be in favor of the perceived importance. What makes our study findings different than Nakata's is that the differences between the perceived importance and the actual use in three strategies (one strategy for learner autonomy, two strategies for teacher autonomy) were not found statistically significant. However, when we compare the qualitative findings of these two studies, the outstanding shared concept was seen as 'examination' as the underlying reason for the gap between what the teachers value and what they do actually. Benson (1996) argues that "autonomy not only transforms individuals, it also transforms the social situations and structures in which they are participants" (p. 34). Starting with Benson's argument, we can say that teacher autonomy can only be enhanced to the extent that the education system (referred to as social situations and structures in Benson, 1996) allows.

Additionally, we see that teachers state some student-related factors like motivation, unwillingness of the students, lack of questioning, and need for guidance affect the promotion of both learner autonomy and teacher autonomy negatively. In the process of promoting both learner and teacher autonomy, it should be taken into consideration that it is not an easy process because “autonomy is a multifaceted concept with political, psychological and philosophical ramifications” (Benson, 1996, p. 27). As Dam (1995, as cited in Dam, 2000) maintains, “developing learner autonomy is a long, difficult and often painful process, not least for the teacher. It demands constant effort on the part of teacher and learners, not only as individuals but in collaboration with one another. ...It is an experience-based learning process for teachers and learners alike.” (p. 6).

## 6. Implications and Conclusion

Vieira, Barbosa, Paiva, and Fernandes (2008) emphasize that “there has not been much research on how teacher education can promote a pedagogy for autonomy in the school context” (p. 219). They stress that “a *reflective approach* to teacher development offers the possibility of enhancing teacher and learner autonomy as interrelated phenomena, provided that the link is intentionally established” (p. 219, italics are original), and stipulate that “reflective teacher education should involve teachers in *action-based inquiry into the development of pedagogy for autonomy* in schools” (p. 219, italics are original). Hacker & Barkhuizen (2008) agree to Vieira et al. (2008) that “reflectivity is central to teachers’ developing their personal theories and ... that serious consideration be given to designing and implementing courses that call for teachers to engage in the reflective process” (p. 180). Also, suggestions made by Dam (2003) about a Continuing Professional Development on teacher autonomy can be an initial guide to develop a similar course for teachers, which will be useful not only for teachers but also learners.

Our study aimed to investigate high school EFL teachers’ readiness for promoting learner autonomy in the Turkish educational context and reported both quantitative and qualitative data. The findings of the quantitative data were found to be similar with the study of Nakata’s (2011) to a great degree. To compare the two contexts of these studies, Nakata (2011) administered the same questionnaire in the Asian context, and in the current study, it was administered in the Turkish context. As these two cultures tend to be classified as collectivistic and teacher-centered, the similarities between the two studies are not so surprising. Overall, in the current study it was found that Turkish high school EFL teachers value the strategies to promote learner autonomy and teacher autonomy more than they actually implement the strategies. In the light of these findings, we can cautiously conclude that Turkish high school EFL teachers are not fully ready to promote learner autonomy, and that reflectivity and action-based inquiry would contribute to narrowing the gap between EFL teachers’ awareness of learner autonomy and teacher autonomy and their actual practices to promote learner autonomy and teacher autonomy.

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### Appendix A

#### Questionnaire: Teacher Perceptions about Strategy Importance and Use

This questionnaire aims to find out teachers' perceptions about the importance and use of strategies to promote learner autonomy and to promote teachers' professional autonomy. The answers will be used for a scientific study and will not be used for any other purposes. Your personal information will not be mentioned in the study. The first 10 items are the strategies for promoting learner autonomy, and the following 13 items (11-23) are the strategies for promoting professional autonomy for teachers. Please read the strategies carefully and on the right column, please indicate your actual use of these strategies in your classrooms, and on the left column, please indicate the level of your perceived importance of these strategies. Thanks for your cooperation.

#### Demographic Information

Gender and Age:

Teaching school (school's name/city):

Teaching level (which grade):

Teaching experience (how many years):

Perceived Importance				Strategies...	Actual Use			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				1. help learners to identify their own strengths and weaknesses				
				2. help learners to set up their own learning goals				
				3. help learners to decide what to learn outside of the classroom				
				4. help learners to evaluate their own learning and progress				
				5. help learners to stimulate their own interest in learning English				
				6. help learners to learn from peers, not just from the teachers				
				7. help learners to become more self-directed in their learning				
				8. give learners chances to offer opinions in their learning				
				9. help learners to discover knowledge in English on their own rather than waiting for knowledge from the teacher				
				10. give learners chances to offer opinions on what to learn in the classroom				
				11. identify their own strengths and weaknesses				
				12. set up their own learning goals				

				13. decide what to learn outside of the classroom				
				14. evaluate their own learning and progress				
				15. stimulate their own interest in learning English				
				16. motivate themselves in improving teaching skills required for English teachers				
				17. motivate themselves in improving English proficiency required for English teachers				
				18. learn from colleagues at the school and those outside the school				
				19. become self-directed in improving their teaching				
				20. become self-directed in improving English proficiency				
				21. exchange opinions about the text with other teachers				
				22. listen to learners' voices (e.g., questionnaire) and learn from them				
				23. exchange opinions about the ideal lesson with other teachers				