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Older Adult EFL Learners' Readiness for Autonomous Language Learning

Abstract: Learner-centred education has emphasized the significance of learner autonomy in language learning over the past forty years. Currently, the literature on the topic implies that cultural and educational environments affect autonomous learning perception and practice, therefore students' readiness must be examined before creating autonomous learning activities. Given the scarcity of studies, the purpose of this research is to shed light on the issue of whether older adult learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are ready for learner autonomy. To achieve this goal, the present study collected responses from sixty-five EFL learners, aged between sixty and eighty-six. The data were obtained through a questionnaire consisting of five sections: background information, views on teacher and student responsibilities, decision-making skills, motivation, and autonomous activities both within and outside the classroom. Furthermore, eight voluntary EFL learners participated in the follow-up interviews. The analysis involved utilizing descriptive statistics from the questionnaire replies, as well as interpreting the interview data. The findings revealed that Turkish older adult EFL learners exhibited a limited degree of readiness for autonomous language learning, despite their notable levels of enthusiasm and eagerness to improve their English proficiency.

Keywords: learner autonomy, older adults, older adult English, readiness for learner autonomy

1. Introduction

Learner autonomy, as described by Holec, refers to the capacity to take control over one's own learning. Holec, in a seminal report issued under the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project, was the first to propose this concept (Benson). Autonomy in language acquisition has been described using several approaches. Thus, for instance, Holec treated autonomy as an attribute of the learner. In contrast, Dickinson (as qtd. in Benson), who defined it as a condition in which learners have the responsibility to make decisions on their own learning and carry out these

decisions, used the term to describe learning situations. Finally, Little ("Learner") introduced a psychological aspect and argued that autonomy encompasses the ability to engage in critical thinking, make decisions, and take independent actions. Still, it is Holec's definition which is the most frequently cited in the literature.

Autonomous learners have the ability to assume responsibility for their own learning by establishing learning objectives and devising strategies to accomplish them. They must also engage in reflective thinking regarding their learning, choose appropriate sources, and evaluate their own progress (Chan). Little ("Language") explains that learner autonomy is mostly linked to adult education and self-access learning systems, and it entails taking independent action. The idea of learner autonomy gained attention in the language teaching domain, in part, due to the emergence of learner-centred educational theories. Therefore, the notion has been widely acknowledged as a crucial factor in facilitating a productive language acquisition process, linked to both classroom-based (Dam) and independent learning (Benson). On the other hand, the growing number of older adults interested in continuing education in later years has led to an increased scientific interest in Foreign Language Geragogy. Indeed, the popularity of learning foreign languages in late adulthood has grown, following the dissemination of research on the positive physical, psychological, and cognitive effects of foreign language learning (Ramírez-Gómez, "Critical") and upon recommendations made by the World Health Organization (WHO), which highlighted health benefits associated with learning in later life. This has also sparked a significant interest in further research in the field of applied linguistics in the process of learning English by older adults.

It should be noted that in this study, older adult learners are healthy EFL learners who are at the age of sixty and older and are either retired or semi-retired and do not require nursing assistance.

2. Literature review

2.1. Learners' readiness for autonomous learning

Research on learner autonomy has suggested that cultural and educational scenarios can influence the way learner autonomy is perceived and practiced (Yıldırım). Hence, as also suggested by Cotteral, it is imperative to accurately ascertain learners' readiness to take responsibility for their own learning prior to any intervention or developing and modifying instructional materials and exercises to promote student autonomy in a language classroom.

Several studies have been conducted to measure learners' readiness for autonomy so far in various educational contexts. For example, in a study conducted by Koçak, the objective was to determine the readiness of students enrolled in an

English language preparatory school at a private university in Turkey to engage in autonomous language learning. The study's findings revealed that a significant proportion of the students exhibited higher levels of motivation. Another finding was that the students exhibited a propensity to employ certain metacognitive strategies, such as self-monitoring and self-evaluation. Furthermore, the learners perceived the teacher as being primarily accountable for most of the duties involved in their own learning process. Likewise, a significant proportion of students exhibited a tendency to engage in extracurricular activities aiming at enhancing their English proficiency. There was no significant difference in the sense of responsibility and the frequency of performing out-of-class activities in English based on the respondents' gender and major field. However, there was a difference based on their proficiency level. Language learners at the intermediate level were more inclined to engage in extracurricular activities, whereas their sense of responsibility did not vary depending on their degree of competence.

Karabıyık, in turn, examined Turkish university students' readiness for autonomous learning and its connection to their learning culture. The goal was to determine whether students' attitudes towards autonomous learning were influenced by their cultural learning patterns or if they could be attributed to differences in their educational backgrounds and experiences. A significant correlation was found between the participants' learning culture and their readiness for learner autonomy. This showed that the level of exposure to autonomous education in high schools where the participants studied, influenced their subsequent attitudes and actions towards learner autonomy. The results also suggest that it is imperative to consider learners' prior learning experiences, including their learning culture, as well as other individual aspects, before learner autonomy is fostered.

Yıldırım conducted a study with the purpose of determining the level of readiness for learner autonomy among Turkish EFL learners at the university level. The study examined the viewpoints of 103 learners regarding the responsibilities of teachers and learners, their beliefs about their own ability to act independently, and the frequency at which they engage in autonomous language learning activities. The findings showed that learners were willing to take responsibility in various aspects of the language acquisition process.

With an emphasis on teaching English, Alrabai evaluated Saudi students' readiness for independent and autonomous learning as well. The results validated the comparatively limited readiness of Saudi EFL learners for self-directed learning. The learners exhibited a diminished sense of responsibility, while reporting a moderate level of proficiency and enthusiasm in acquiring English language skills. A significant proportion of participants indicated limited engagement in self-directed activities, displaying a notable reliance on teachers and a small degree of autonomy. Although the participants had a decent understanding of the concept of learner autonomy and its requirements, their responses indicated that their autonomy was limited.

Tayjasanant and Suraratdecha conducted a study to investigate perceptions of Thai teachers and learners on autonomous learning in the context of Thai learning culture. The aim was to assess the readiness of both groups for autonomous learning. The findings revealed that educators and learners share favourable attitudes towards self-directed learning. However, the results suggest that the examination system, students' reliance on teachers, and lack of understanding from families and surrounding communities pose challenges for both groups in attaining a significant level of autonomy.

Lin and Reinders, in turn, examined the beliefs, practices, and readiness for autonomy of 668 students and 182 professors in the college English course. Using a triangulated methodology, they discovered that both students and teachers exhibited mental but not technical or behavioural readiness for autonomy. The obstacles to fostering autonomy in Chinese colleges appear to be mostly related to pedagogy rather than cultural barriers.

In their study, Cirocki, Anam, and Retnaningdyah investigated how Indonesian secondary school students understood the concept of learner autonomy, assessed their level of motivation to learn English, and evaluated their preparedness to engage as independent learners in the teaching-learning process. The results indicated that a large number of students lacked knowledge on the concept of learner autonomy. Furthermore, their enthusiasm to study English was very low and they often lacked the necessary abilities and competences to be independent learners.

Kartal and Balçikanlı investigated the culture of learning among student instructors in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) and their readiness to become independent learners, as well as their ability to encourage learner autonomy among their students in Turkey. The evidence suggests that learner autonomy was not promoted in educational settings that the participants knew before. Nevertheless, they expressed their willingness to assume some responsibility for their own language acquisition and engage in more self-directed activities beyond the confines of the classroom.

2.2. Older adults and EFL learning

Older adults are people at the age of approximately sixty and over, as described by Ramírez-Gómez (*Language*) in her studies on foreign language geragogy. According to the WHO, population ageing happens at a quicker rate than before and, until 2050, the percentage of the global population aged over sixty will almost double, increasing from 12% to 22% (2022), which has created a need for nations to adopt a comprehensive strategy to ensure well-being of their ageing population. So far, researchers have highlighted the advantages of studying foreign languages for older adults at the psychological, affective, social, and cognitive levels, including improvements in cognition, prevention of dementia, and increased physical and social activity (Klimova and Kuca; Ramírez-Gómez, *Language*). However,

research on foreign language education in this age group indicates that while older adults have strong motivation and ample time to learn new languages, they may also have limitations in the cognitive or physical abilities necessary to learn a foreign language. Another problem is the lack of appropriate teaching methodologies and materials (Jaroszewska; Noyan and Aşik; Słowik, "Developing"). As a result, the benefits of late life FL learning might only be visible when correct methodology, activities and materials are selected or adjusted to the needs, characteristics, strengths or weaknesses of older adults, otherwise it might generate negative attitudes and frustration (Ramírez-Gómez, *Language*). On top of that, Singleton and Ryan claim that as individuals grow older, there is a decrease in vision and auditory acuity leading to significant impairments, which might negatively impact older adults' capacity to acquire a second language, particularly in regard to comprehending the oral input. Likewise, some researchers asserted that older adults might experience age-related cognitive, psychological, and physical changes that are not experienced by younger adults, such as decline in working memory capacity, encoding and remembering new information, processing speed, and attention (Scott; Hakuta, Bialystok, and Wiley). Thus, their fading memory and delayed reflexes can hinder the foreign language learning process. Finally, according to Ramírez-Gómez (*Language*) and Słowik ("Adult"), older people bring their past learning experiences to the class, which may differ from those of younger generations.

McElree and Dyer, on the other hand, argued that aging does not always result in a decline in working memory capacity, but is instead more closely related to processing speed impairment. It has also been suggested that both experience and training can enhance working memory capacity, perhaps aiding older adults in learning a second language (Singleton). Therefore, according to the current considerations on age, success or failure in second language acquisition cannot be determined primarily by age since it is also impacted by numerous cognitive, social, and psychological factors (Singleton and Leśniewska).

In terms of learner autonomy, on the other hand, one of the rare studies that focused on older adult learners' autonomous learning practices was conducted by Schiller, Dorner, and Szabó. The authors' aim was to monitor and enhance independent learning behaviours of people in this age group. The findings indicate that older persons are highly motivated to learn a new language autonomously due to its benefits for their understanding and speaking skills. Additionally, the constructs of self-awareness in learning and metacognitive knowledge were recognized as crucial elements for engaging in self-study practice. Older adults' learning behaviours were consistently influenced by cognitive stimulation, sustained learner motivation, and specific self-relating components. The utilization of cognitive- and memory-enhancing learning strategies, along with technology-supported learning resources, were concluded to have a significant impact on the practice of independent learning.

2.3. Research aim and questions

As shown in the review of the previous studies above, most of the relevant research on learner autonomy concentrated on individuals who were either high school or university students. Given the importance of learners' awareness concerning benefits and principles of autonomy before implementing a syllabus promoting it in class, as well as the scarcity of studies exploring older adult EFL learners' views on learner autonomy, research in this field appears relevant. Thus, this study aims to investigate older adult learners' views on teacher and student responsibilities in English classes, decision-making abilities, motivation level, and actual autonomous behaviours in order to measure their readiness to take charge of their own FL learning. In this context, the present research has attempted to answer the following research questions (RQs).

RQ1. What are older adult EFL learners' views on teachers' responsibilities in English classes?

RQ2. What are older adult EFL learners' views on students' responsibilities in English learning?

RQ3. What are older adult EFL learners' decision-making abilities?

RQ4. To what extent do older adult EFL learners feel motivated to learn English?

RQ5. What are older adult EFL learners' autonomous behaviours while learning English?

3. Methodology

This study utilized an explanatory mixed-method approach, involving the triangulation of data gathering. Triangulation is necessary to verify the accuracy of information provided in a questionnaire. Hence, supplementary interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the current study.

3.1. Participants and setting

The research was conducted with senior learners participating in English courses organized by Kadikoy Public Education Centre in Istanbul. This centre offers English courses at the CEFR A1, A2, B1, and B2 levels annually, serving primarily learners aged between forty and ninety. A modified version of the questionnaire was shared in the institution's WhatsApp group and learners aged sixty and above were specifically requested to fill it in. Consequently, the researcher was able to obtain seventy-three responses from this group within a span of three weeks. Excluding the replies which did not match the requirements, sixty-five questionnaire forms were collected, which was followed by interviews with eight participants. Table 1 shows the demographics.

Table 1: Participants

Age	60–69	54 (83.1%)
	70–79	10 (15.4%)
	80–86	1 (1.5%)
Gender	Female	58 (89.2%)
	Male	7 (10.8%)
Degree of diploma	Middle school	3 (4.6%)
	High school	14 (21.6%)
	Vocational school	7 (10.8%)
	Bachelor's	34 (52.3%)
	Master's	6 (9.2%)
	PhD	1 (1.5%)
Years of learning English	0–5	45 (69.2%)
	5–10	9 (13.9%)
	10–15	2 (3.1%)
	15–20	1 (1.5%)
	20+	8 (12.3%)

3.2. Data collection

The study utilized a mixed-method design in which data were obtained from the Learner Autonomy Readiness Scale, involving five sections, and the following interviews. The first part explored students' demographics (Table 1). Four further sections were based on Chan, Spratt, and Humphreys' questionnaire which was selected as Deci and Ryan, Holec, and Littlewood, prominent autonomy researchers, influenced its design.

The questionnaire initially had four sections and fifty-two questions. The participants were required to indicate their agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from "not at all" to "completely". Two qualified Turkish EFL instructors evaluated the translation of the items and their correspondence to the study goal. The revised version was also evaluated by two older adult EFL learners for the items' clarity and applicability for this age group. After administering the questionnaire, eight volunteers were interviewed online to analyse the constructs in detail.

The interview primarily consisted of eight questions, with one or two questions allocated for each section (see Appendix). They were also scrutinized by a pair of experts and two EFL students above the age of sixty, to ensure their appropriateness and clarity. The interviews were conducted via Zoom with each session lasting between twenty and twenty-five minutes.

3.3. Data analysis

SPSS, a statistical software package, was used to compute descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages, for participant responses in each component individually. Follow-up interviews were conducted using Zoom and subsequently transcribed. This allowed the researcher to analyse learners' responses alongside the questionnaire data.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Older adult EFL learners' views on teachers' responsibilities in learning English

The second part of the questionnaire included items exploring learners' views on teachers' and learners' own responsibilities, addressing RQ1 and RQ2. The answers were expected to reveal whether the participants were ready to take responsibility for learning, or whether they relied on their teachers. Table 2 shows older adult learners' views on the role of their teachers in EFL classes.

As can be seen in Table 2, most of the learners believed that teachers are "mainly" or "completely" responsible for carrying out all the aforementioned actions, especially for those related to methodological concerns. Furthermore, it was seen that thirty-eight (58.4%) learners selected the options "mainly" and "completely" in the item "deciding what you learn outside of class" and twenty-nine (43.7%) others chose the same options for the item "making sure you make progress outside of class", which shows that the majority of the learners attribute the responsibility to their teachers even for their out-of-class learning activities. Taking into account these results, it is evident that older adult learners rely on teachers for decisions concerning their learning, especially when it comes to deciding what and how to do in class.

Similarly, during the subsequent interviews, the majority of participants expressed their preference especially for in-class language learning facilitated by a teacher. Regarding the implementation of learning and teaching activities, teachers were expected to assume the role of "leaders" in the classroom. They were required to monitor learners' progress, curate activities and resources, and determine their specific needs as exemplified in the comment made by Participant 1 (P1) who states that

> [t]eachers are responsible for choosing materials and activities, assessing student progress, and determining the appropriate amount of time to allocate for each activity. The teacher should have primary control over all aspects of teaching and learning. The multitude of problems we face and the need to monitor their development divert individuals of our generation from acquiring knowledge (sixty-one years old).

Table 2: Views on teacher responsibilities

Teacher responsibilities	Not at all	A little	Some	Mainly	Completely
1. Make sure you make progress during lessons	0 (0 %)	3 (4.5%)	15 (22.7%)	33 (50%)	14 (21.2%)
2. Make sure you make progress outside class	5 (7.6%)	10 (15.2%)	21 (31.8%)	23 (34.8%)	6 (9.1%)
3. Stimulate your interest in learning English	0 (0%)	2 (3%)	11 (16.7%)	39 (59.1%)	13 (19.7%)
4. Identify your weaknesses in English	1 (1.5%)	3 (4.5%)	8 (12.1%)	40 (60.6%)	13 (19.7%)
5. Make you work harder	0 (0%)	5 (7.6%)	19 (28.8%)	31 (47%)	10 (15.2%)
6. Decide the objectives of your English course	0 (0%)	2 (3%)	12 (18.2%)	33 (50%)	18 (27.3%)
7. Decide what you should learn next in your English lessons	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10 (15.2%)	36 (54.5%)	19 (28.8%)
8. Choose what activities to use to learn English in your English lessons	0 (0%)	1 (1.5%)	11 (16.7%)	31 (47%)	22 (33.3%)
9. Decide how long to spend on each activity	0 (0%)	1 (1.5%)	13 (20%)	27 (41.5%)	4 (36.9%)
10. Choose what materials to use to learn English in your English lessons	0 (0%)	3 (4.5%)	9 (13.8%)	33 (50%)	20 (30.8%)
11. Evaluate your learning	0 (0%)	1 (1.5%)	12 (18.5%)	36 (54.5%)	16 (24.2%)
12. Evaluate your course	0 (0%)	5 (7.7%)	10 (15.4%)	40 (61.5%)	10 (15.4%)
13. Decide what you learn outside class	3 (4.6%)	11 (16.9%)	13 (20%)	29 (44.6%)	9 (13.8%)

P1 suggests that when methodology is not appropriate for older adult learners, it might generate frustration or a self-defeating attitude, which is in line with the finding of Ramírez-Gómez (*Language*). In addition, considering that most students in this age group had been exposed to traditional teaching methods, such as the grammar translation method, during their early years of education, these findings validate the notion that these students carry their previous learning experiences into their current educational systems (Ramírez-Gómez, *Language*; Słowik, "Adult").

Some of the participants emphasized the importance of the proficiency level and experience in language learning. Accordingly, having teacher control is especially important for beginner level students or those who do not have any language learning experience, as shown in the following statement from participant P2:

> As language level and experience of the student increase, it becomes possible for him to learn a language on his own. For example, what I have learned in the past comes out while I am trying to learn a language. I combine the information from the past with the present. This is not the same with those who have just started to learn a language. I think it is very difficult for them to learn a language without teacher guidance (sixty-two years old).

In fact, the level of autonomy might be affected by the language level of the learner more than their age; however, according to Benson, measuring autonomy in language learning may be problematic because FL has many grammatical constructions that one needs to handle and define separately and the stages of autonomy depend on linguistic and communicative demands of particular tasks, thus trying to correlate the level of autonomy and language proficiency might be a mistake. The results show that intermediate learners performed more out-of-class activities autonomously, which corroborates Koçak's findings, however, Koçak's study concerned university students. Therefore, when both age and level factors are considered simultaneously, it can be inferred that especially beginner level learners in this age group need to be given more teacher assistance in order to develop autonomy in language learning, but age of the learner and the linguistic and communicative demands of the tasks might still be of importance.

4.2. Older adult EFL learners' views on their responsibilities in learning English

To answer RQ2, the participants were required to assess the elements listed in the learner responsibilities section of the questionnaire in relation to their own skills and traits. Thus, Table 3 presents a summary of the data on learners' views on their own responsibilities in learning a foreign language.

The data presented in Table 3 clearly indicate that the majority agreed that students and teachers are equally responsible for most of the listed activities. Nevertheless, there is a tendency for certain items to be seen as responsibilities of learners more than teachers. Furthermore, when examining the prevalence of responses indicating "not at all", particularly in relation to features of methodology (items 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10), it may be concluded that participants perceive their teacher as having a greater level of responsibility for their language learning process.

The subsequent interviews corroborated the individuals' perspectives as shown in the data yielded from the questionnaires. Most of the interviewees expressed the opinion that the instructor should create an English class curriculum that enables learners to easily understand and comply with their instructions and especially learners with very low motivation require guidance from teachers. According to P4,

> The teacher must be the leader in the class and show the way in learning a language and as students, we should follow that way. It requires a great passion for someone to do something they don't know how to do. Otherwise, you will lose the student. The student needs someone to increase his interest for something. This is especially true for those who have low motivation in learning English (sixty-five years old).

Table 3: Views on learners' responsibilities in learning English

Learner responsibilities	Not at all	A little	Some	Mainly	Completely
1. Make sure you make progress during lessons	0 (0%)	4 (6.2%)	16 (4.6%)	27 (41.5%)	18 (27.7%)
2. Make sure you make progress outside class	1 (1.5%)	8 (12.3%)	15 (23.1%)	31 (47.7%)	10 (15.4%)
3. Stimulate your interest in learning English	0 (0%)	4 (6.2%)	21 (32.3%)	36 (55.4%)	4 (6.2%)
4. Identify your weaknesses in English	1 (1.5%)	4 (6.2%)	28 (43.1%)	23 (35.4%)	9 (13.8%)
5. Make you work harder	0 (0%)	3 (4.6%)	14 (21.5%)	33 (50%)	15 (23.1%)
6. Decide the objectives of your English course	4 (6.2%)	11 (16.9%)	28 (43.1%)	21 (32.3%)	1 (1.5%)
7. Decide what you should learn next in your English lessons	4 (6.2%)	11 (16.9%)	28 (43.1%)	21 (32.3%)	1 (1.5%)
8. Choose what activities to use to learn English in your English lessons	5 (7.7%)	14 (21.5%)	31 (47.7%)	14 (21.5%)	1 (1.5%)
9. Decide how long to spend on each activity	8 (12.3%)	12 (18.5%)	31 (47.7%)	12 (18.5%)	2 (3.1%)
10. Choose what materials to use to learn English in your English lessons	7 (10.8%)	16 (24.6%)	32 (49.2%)	9 (13.8%)	1 (1.5%)
11. Evaluate your learning	2 (3.1%)	9 (13.8%)	31 (47.7%)	21 (32.3%)	2 (3.1%)
12. Evaluate your course	1 (1.5%)	7 (10.8%)	20 (30.8%)	34 (52.3%)	3 (4.6%)
13. Decide what you learn outside class	2 (3.1%)	8 (12.3%)	18 (27.7%	30 (46.2%)	7 (10.8%)

In contrast, P2 presented a divergent perspective on the learning process of those who possess extensive experience in learning English and have a high proficiency in the language. According to this respondent, the learners should have the capacity to make decisions regarding their education during various stages of their development:

> Our teachers are usually younger than us. They cannot understand the difficulties we have regarding learning and retention. Supposing that they are aware of it, they cannot know without experience. As older adults, we understand each other better. In this case, it would be better for us to guide the lessons. Teachers may initiate an activity, then we can work in groups and do what we have to do (sixty-two years old).

In fact, the importance of self-awareness and metacognitive knowledge is usually emphasized in self-study practice. As suggested by Schiller, Dorner, and Szabó, the learning behaviour of older persons is consistently affected by cognitive

stimulation, continuous learner motivation, and unique self-relating components, which might explain the differences in terms of autonomous behaviours among older adults.

4.3. Older adult EFL learners' decision-making abilities

To assess the readiness of older adult learners for learner autonomy, the questionnaire incorporated a third section that specifically addressed their decision-making ability investigated in RQ3. The responses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Views of decision-making abilities

Decision-making abilities	Very poor	Poor	OK	Good	Very good
14. Choosing learning activities in class	3 (4.6%)	15 (23.1%)	29 (44.6%)	16 (24.6%)	2 (3.1%)
15. Choosing learning activities outside class	2 (3.1%)	23 (35.4%)	25 (38.5%)	13 (20%)	2 (3.1%)
16. Choosing learning objectives in class	2 (3.1%)	14 (21.5%)	33 (50.8%)	13 (20%)	2 (4.6%)
17. Choosing learning objectives outside class	2 (3.1%)	22 (33.8%)	23 (35.4%)	17 (26.2%)	1 (1.5%)
18. Choosing learning materials in class	4 (6.2%)	18 (27.7%)	28 (43.1%)	13 (20%)	2 (3.1%)
19. Choosing learning materials outside class	6 (9.2%)	21 (32.3%)	21 (32.3%)	15 (23.1%)	2 (3.1%)
20. Evaluating your learning	3 (4.6%)	13 (20 %)	26 (40%)	20 (30.8%)	3 (4.6%)
21. Evaluating your course	2 (3.1%)	14 (21.5%)	22 (33.8%)	21 (32.3%)	5 (7.7%)
22. Identifying your weaknesses in English	4 (6.2%)	15 (23.1%)	22 (33.8%)	17 (26.2%)	7 (10.8%)
23. Deciding what you should learn next in your English lessons	6 (9.2%)	21 (32.3%)	19 (29.2%)	14 (21.5%)	5 (7.7%)
24. Deciding how long to spend in each activity	3 (4.6%)	29 (44.6%)	17 (26.2%)	12 (18.5%)	4 (6.2%)

By merging "very poor" and "poor" responses, as well as the "good" and "very good" alternatives, the data indicate an almost equal distribution in frequency across most items. Seeing that most participants selected the "OK" option in performing most of the activities provided on the list, it can be inferred that

older people feel moderate self-confidence in their decision-making abilities when given an opportunity. Also, it can be understood that these learners might have a greater difficulty in making selections with respect to methodological issues. Considering the sum of "very poor" and "poor" responses in the table, almost half of the learners appear to have low confidence in deciding what to learn next in English lessons (41.5%), "choosing learning materials outside the class" (41.5%), or "deciding how long to spend in each activity" (49.2%). However, when taking the high numbers of "OK" and "good" responses into account, it can be claimed that older learners might have higher self-confidence in their decision-making abilities for methodological concerns than most of the younger adults, who did not seem ready for autonomous learning in previous studies.

The results of the follow-up interviews, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of the proficiency level and experience, providing further support for Ramírez-Gómez's (*Language*) assertion of the significance of previous learning experiences. P1, who identified herself as an intermediate English speaker, claimed to be proficient in nearly all of these tasks with the following statement:

> At A1 level, I did not feel skilled enough to perform these exercises. Nevertheless, I am at intermediate level and believe that I can accomplish nearly all of these tasks. I have a good understanding of how to perform language tasks due to my learning experience (sixty-one years old).

P1's comments seem to stay in line with Koçak's findings concluding that intermediate students have a higher tendency to learn outside the class, highlighting the correlation between the level of proficiency and autonomous learning behaviours.

4.4. Older adult EFL learners' views regarding their motivation level to learn English

To answer the RQ4, section 4 prompted the respondents to assess their level of motivation for learning English, as having high motivation and willingness to learn a foreign language are considered as signs of being autonomous in language learning.

The results presented in Table 5 reveal that 92.2% ($n = 60$) of the participants identified themselves as "highly motivated", "well motivated" or "motivated" to learn English. Seeing that none of them claimed to be "not at all motivated", it can be inferred that the majority of the learners had sufficient motivation, which is a vital component of being an autonomous learner.

During the interviews, the researcher inquired about the learners' assessment of their motivation level and the underlying reasons for choosing to learn English. This was done to ascertain their willingness to learn English. The findings have corroborated the questionnaire results and helped to establish that older persons acquire English language skills because of their intrinsic desire to learn a new language. Several individuals provided justifications, such as the necessity to communicate with foreigners, related to the presence of relatives or friends living

abroad, travelling, and the desire to enhance their memory, as shown in the following excerpt from P7:

> My son resides in London and is married to a Polish woman. I require to establish communication with his spouse. Furthermore, I have observed a decline in the strength of my recall. It is advisable to acquire a new language in order to reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease (sixty-nine years old).

The results are in parallel with the study by Schiller, Dorner, and Szabó in terms of participants' high motivation to learn a foreign language, which might refer that these individuals appear ready for autonomous learning, or they can be prepared for it with guidance and support from teachers.

Table 5: Views on level of motivation for learning English

Highly motivated to learn English	9 (13.8%)
Well-motivated to learn English	32 (49.2%)
Motivated to learn English	19 (29.2%)
Slightly motivated to learn English	5 (7.7%)
Not at all motivated to learn English	0 (0%)

4.5. Older adult EFL learners' inside and outside class autonomous behaviours

The last part of the questionnaire involved items regarding autonomous behaviours in- and out-of-class. Information about self-directed activities that learners usually practice was supposed to inform whether they were ready for the autonomous learning mode. Table 6 displays the frequency and percentages of the participants' responses for the relevant items.

Based on the sum of the "sometimes" and "often" responses in Table 6, it can be concluded that the most common out-of-class activities rated by older adult EFL learners are "reading English notices around you" (76.9%), "watching English movies" (70.7%), "watching English TV programmes" (66.2%), "doing revisions not required by the teacher" (64.6%), and "doing grammar exercises" (62.4%). On the other hand, the sum of the "never" or "rarely" responses showed that engaging in activities such as "sending e-mails in English" (73.8%), "listening to English radio" (72.3), "talking to foreigners in English" (66.1%), and "practicing using English with friends" (66.1%) are among the least common activities for learning outside of formal settings among older adult EFL learners.

Similarly, in terms of in-class activities, considering the sum of the "sometimes" and "often" responses, it can be seen that the most frequent items rated by older adults are "noting down new information" (93.9%) and "asking the teacher questions when you don't understand" (87.7%). Likewise, most of the participants seemed to feel confident in "taking opportunities to speak in English" (76.9%) and

Table 6: Inside- and outside-class autonomous learning activities

Autonomous behaviours (outside class)	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
26. Do assignments which are not compulsory	6 (9.2%)	18 (27.7%)	23 (35.4%)	18 (27.7%)
27. Note down new words and their meanings	0 (0%)	11 (16.9%)	22 (33.8%)	32 (49.2%)
28. Send text messages to your friends	16 (24.6%)	19 (29.2%)	25 (38.5%)	5 (7.7%)
29. Read English notices around you	2 (3.1%)	13 (20%)	31 (47.7%)	19 (29.2%)
30. Read newspapers, books, or magazines in English	6 (9.2%)	32 (49.2%)	18 (27.7%)	9 (13.8%)
31. Send e-mails in English	26 (40%)	22 (33.8%)	14 (21.5%)	3 (4.6%)
32. Watch English TV programmes	3 (4.6%)	19 (29.2%)	31 (47.7%)	12 (18.5%)
33. Listen to English radio	23 (35.4%)	24 (36.9%)	16 (24.6%)	2 (3.1%)
34. Listen to English songs	3 (4.6%)	25 (38.5%)	22 (33.8%)	15 (23.1%)
35. Talk to foreigners in English	19 (29.2%)	24 (36.9%)	20 (30.8%)	2 (3.1%)
36. Practice using English with friends	19 (29.2%)	24 (36.9%)	20 (30.8%)	2 (3.1%)
37. Do English self-study in a group	9 (13.8%)	27 (41.5%)	27 (41.5%)	2 (3.1%)
38. Do grammar exercises	3 (4.6%)	21 (32.3%)	29 (43.9%)	12 (18.5%)
39. Watch English movies	2 (3.1%)	17 (26.2%)	27 (41.5%)	19 (29.2%)
40. Write a diary in English	29 (44.6%)	11 (16.9%)	3 (4.6%)	2 (3.1%)
41. Use the internet in English	17 (26.2%)	24 (36.9%)	18 (27.7%)	6 (9.2%)
42. Do revision not required by the teacher	6 (9.2%)	17 (26.2%)	29 (44.6%)	13 (20%)
43. Attend a self-study centre	23 (35.4%)	17 (26.2%)	17 (26.2%)	8 (12.3%)
44. Collect texts in English (e.g., articles, brochures)	13 (20%)	27 (41.5%)	18 (27.7%)	7 (10.8%)
45. Go to see your teacher about your work	12 (18.5%)	19 (29.2%)	28 (43.1%)	6 (9.2%)
Autonomous behaviours (inside class)				
46. Ask the teacher questions when you don't understand	1 (1.5%)	7 (10.8%)	27 (41.5%)	30 (46.2%)
47. Note down new information	0 (0%)	4 (6.2%)	18 (27.7%)	43 (66.2%)
48. Make suggestions to the teacher	7 (10.6%)	28 (43.1%)	28 (43.1%)	2 (3.1%)
49. Take opportunities to speak in English	1 (1.5%)	14 (21.5%)	36 (55.4%)	14 (21.5%)
50. Discuss learning problems with classmates	4 (6.2%)	14 (21.5%)	39 (60%)	8 (12.3%)

"discussing learning problems with classmates" (72.3%) in class. It seems that the only item that more than half of the participants rated for the "never" or "rarely" options was "making suggestions to the teacher" (53.7%). The fact that this is still close to the amount of those who responded as "often" and "sometimes" to this item, and that the participants marked "often" and "sometimes" at a high rate regarding other in-class autonomous learning activities might indicate readiness for the autonomous learning mode; however, the smaller percentage of participants who reported "often" and "sometimes" for their out-of-class activities compared to in-class activities may also imply that older individuals gain confidence from the teacher's presence in class.

During the subsequent interviews, it was discovered that some learners engage in various in- and out-of-class activities such as following Instagram accounts regarding learning English (P1), watching YouTube videos (P1), watching movies with Turkish subtitles on Netflix (P2) and checking the Turkish equivalents of unknown words (P4), listening to the pronunciation of English words (P3), making translations (P2), reading books repeatedly so that the words can be easily recalled (P2), forming and answering questions in relation to the texts they read (P2). This indicates that older adult English learners like repeating listening and reading activities and practicing vocabulary and sentence structures, which might be associated with the difficulties they face in perceiving and retaining new words.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate Turkish older adult EFL learners' readiness for autonomous learning in terms of five aspects: (1) learning responsibilities of teachers, (2) learning responsibilities of students, (3) decision-making abilities, (4) level of motivation for learning English, (5) involvement in autonomous activities inside and outside the classroom. The findings proved that issues pertaining to older adults' readiness for learning autonomy need further investigation as in many parts of the questionnaire, the results revealed that Turkish older adult EFL learners do not appear to be well-prepared for learning on their own despite having a strong motivation to learn English, which is a clear indicator for learner autonomy. While a few individuals claimed to possess the capacity to independently make judgments about their own learning if given the chance, a significant proportion of participants expressed a sense of inability to perform tasks, particularly those related to methodological issues. Similarly, a few of them expressed the preference for being supervised by the teacher in the process of FL learning. Similarly, whereas the questionnaire indicated that teachers and students share nearly equal responsibilities for most learning activities, the follow-up interviews revealed almost the opposite of these results.

Most of the interviewees indicated that the teacher should have the authority to make decisions regarding the implementation of learning and teaching activities in the language classroom. According to their viewpoints, the teacher is expected to assume a leadership role while learners are supposed to stick to the programmes designed by the teacher. Regarding autonomous learning behaviours both inside and outside the classroom, most respondents rated activities such as watching movies and TV, doing revision or grammar exercises as highly important. On the other hand, activities that involve self-reflections, such as making suggestions to the teacher or discussing learning problems with friends, were rated as less important. In conclusion, it is possible to say that older adult EFL learners may be independent to a certain extent, but their previous learning attitudes and experiences could hinder them from feeling fully prepared for autonomous learning scenarios.

5.1. Limitations

The sample size might be considered to be a drawback, especially for the quantitative part of this research. Due to the scarcity of EFL learners aged sixty and above in Turkey, the findings may not be conducive to establishing broad generalizations. Furthermore, the questionnaire was generated using Google Forms and distributed to individuals for online completion. Given the possibility of older individuals experiencing concentration or memory challenges, as well as lacking proficiency in technology, it is expected that learners in this age bracket would want additional assistance from researchers when completing the questionnaire.

5.2. Pedagogical implications

The primary practical implication of this study is the need for well-designed instructional programmes that foster learner autonomy among older adult learners, considering their learning challenges and perceptions of autonomy in the learning process. Furthermore, doing an analysis of these findings in relation to students' language learning experience and English proficiency level is expected to produce distinct and more dependable outcomes.

Appendix

Interview Protocol

1. Have you heard of the concept of autonomous learning before? What do you think about it?

A. Views on teacher and student roles

2. Based on your answers to the survey, why do you think _____ is a responsibility of the teacher? In your opinion, what other responsibilities might the teacher have in language teaching?

3. Based on your answers to the survey, why do you think _____ is students' respon-sibility? In your opinion, what other responsibilities might the student have in language learning?

B. Views on decision making abilities

4. If given the opportunity, would you like to take on an active role in English lessons, such as planning the lesson, deciding on the materials and activities to be used, evaluating the lesson, and monitoring your own development? How good do you think you would be at applying these?

5. In the survey, you stated that you are good/bad at _____ Why do you think so?

C. Motivation

6. Why do you want to learn English?

D. Autonomous activities

7. How do you study English? What actions do you take autonomously to enhance your learn-ing? (in-class/out-of-class)

8. What difficulties do you experience while learning English? What/who would help you the most to solve these problems? Do you need support?

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