
**An Investigation of Student Teachers' Engagement in
Autonomous Outside-The-Classroom Learning Activities**

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ABSTRACT

Learners' engagement in outside-the-classroom learning activities has many advantages and benefits in terms of academic performance. It has also been argued by other researchers that engagement in such activities would also provide independent, self-directed, self-regulated, and autonomous learning. 60 first year student teachers of English studying at one of the largest state universities in Turkey have participated in this study. The study aimed to investigate student teachers' engagement in autonomous outside-the-classroom learning activities. Results revealed that the student teachers engage in some of outside-the-classroom learning activities, yet they do not engage in some activities that would directly contribute to the process of becoming a self-regulated and autonomous learner. The results were discussed in line with the literature in learner autonomy and teacher education.

Keywords: outside-the-classroom learning activities, student teachers of English, learner autonomy

Introduction

Autonomy has been defined by Holec (1981, p.3) as ‘the ability to take charge of one’s own learning’. Since then, even this definition has been widely discussed by researchers and scholars and the concept of autonomy has become one of the most popular issues in language teaching (Balçıkanlı, 2010; Benson, 2007; Little, 2007). Learner autonomy depends on the learners’ ability, skills, and courage to make decisions related to their own learning (Chan, 2001). Littlewood (1999) put forward that autonomy is an ultimate and indisputable goal for every learner because of the fact that no learner can live with the existence of a teacher throughout his or her lifetime. This is closely related to being a self-directed learner as well (Lee, 1998).

Being a self-directed and autonomous learner requires learners to take responsibility for their own learning, monitor their own progress and their techniques and strategies that they employ in the process of learning, critically assess themselves on how they are doing in the process and journey of learning and developing themselves, and take an active role for their own learning (Lee, 1998). Pierson (1996) talked about Hong Kong Chinese learners who were passive, dependent, and unable to take initiative. He argued that these learners have no intention and desire to take their learning outside the classroom and they would like their learning to be limited to what they learn in the classroom. Lee (1998) indicated that this type of learner may not be very successful in learning a foreign language because success in learning a foreign language heavily depends on taking learning outside the classroom and engaging in learning activities individually outside the classroom. Thomson (1996) conveyed that language learning is a life-long journey and limiting this journey to classrooms is a fatal error. It has been argued by many researchers and scholars that making learners aware of this reality and encouraging and training them to engage in outside-the-classroom learning activities in the process of foreign language learning is of great significance because only in this way, can they

improve their language skills and make their learning more meaningful.

Lee (1998) proposed some factors that might be considered as prerequisites in order to develop self-directed learning or autonomy: voluntariness, learner choice, flexibility, teacher support, and peer support. First of all, she argued that voluntariness is a pre-requisite for self-directed learning because learners who are forced to engage in self-directed learning programs or activities will not be as successful as the ones who volunteered. Secondly, she indicated that learner choice is significant for autonomous and self-directed learning because as Holec (1981) pointed out, autonomous learners are the ones who make decisions in learning, including setting objectives, defining contents and progressions, selecting methods and techniques, monitoring the procedure, and evaluating the outcome of learning. This also includes learners' ability to work at their own pace. Thirdly, flexibility is an important factor in terms of being a self-directed learner. Flexibility means that learners can have different options based on their needs and interests and they can choose or change these options at their leisure. Fourthly, she argued that teacher support is the natural outcome of self-directed learning because teacher support is necessary in establishing a rapport with students, which will make the process of guiding and training learners in self-directed learning easy and meaningful. Finally, peer support is also a vital commodity for fostering autonomy and self-directed learning. Dam (1995, p.1) stated that learner autonomy and self-directed learning is 'a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a socially responsible person.'

Benson (1997) put forward that three versions of autonomy exist: technical version of autonomy, psychological version of autonomy, and political version of autonomy. He indicated that technical version of autonomy is about the learner's own actions and implementations in learning a language outside the classroom and without the intervention of a teacher. Secondly, he explained psychological version of autonomy in terms of capacity. By the

term capacity, he means abilities and attitudes of the learner to take more responsibility for his or her own learning and to make the decisions individually and independently related to his or her own learning. Political version of autonomy was defined by Benson as the control over the content and delivery methods of education. It might be argued that engaging in outside-the-classroom learning activities is closely related to the first two versions of autonomy as well.

Engaging in outside-the-classroom learning activities is mainly associated with the principles of autonomous learning and self-directed learning, as was mentioned and explained above. It might be associated with another issue in the field of foreign language teaching: good language learners and strategy training. As the number of studies increases on learning strategies and learner autonomy, researchers have realized that training learners in order to make them effective users of learning strategies contributes enormously to the process of making them autonomous learners (Brown, 2014; Oxford, 1996; Yang, 1998; Wenden, 1991). In the last three decades, researchers have been looking for answers to spot the characteristics of good language learners, so that less successful learners can apply these characteristics (Wharton, 2000). Researchers discovered that when appropriate learning strategies are employed, this led to success in general language proficiency and improvement of language skills (Wharton, 2000).

Outside-the-classroom activities are closely related to the learning strategies and learners need to be aware of these activities first in order to apply them in their lives outside the classroom. This study has investigated student teachers' engagement in outside-the-classroom activities without implementing a learning strategy training program. However, it will be suggested that training learners and also student teachers in learning strategy use and engaging in outside-the-classroom activities is very significant not only for fostering autonomy among them and making them independent and autonomous learners, but also for improving their language proficiency and language

skills. Chan (2001) indicated that learners' engagement in outside-the-classroom activities is directly and closely related to learner autonomy, which means that as learners engage in various outside-the-classroom activities frequently, they can be considered as autonomous learners. Rubin (1975, p.44) listed the general characteristics of good language learners: 'a personal learning style', 'a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language', 'technical know-how about how to tackle a language', 'willingness to use the language in real communication', and 'strategies for testing and revision of hypotheses about the Target Language'. Rivers (2001) argued that these characteristics of good language learners are also characteristics of self-directed language learners. Therefore, it can be argued that learners' engagement in outside-the-classroom activities is closely associated with learner autonomy.

Reinders (2010) proposed a pedagogical model for fostering autonomy in language classrooms. He argued that many approaches have been offered for fostering autonomy in language classrooms and he divided these approaches into two: specialist approaches and general approaches. Specialist approaches involve activities and practices that are deliberately performed to foster autonomy in language classrooms. For specialist approaches, he came up with learner training, strategy instruction, self-access, language advising or language counseling, and specific tools. According to Reinders, learner training involves specific or short courses that are specifically designed in order to train learners and make them aware of the skills and activities that they can engage in outside the classroom independently.

Culturally, students in Turkey tend to depend on their teachers in terms of learning and this limits their vision and capacity to improve themselves socially and academically. Studying only for the sake of passing the exams and doing only what the teacher says is the habit of many Turkish students and this situation is not compatible with the principles of the concept of autonomy. Hence, investigating student teachers' engagement in outside-the-classroom learning activities would give an idea

about the learning and studying habits of the future teachers and their possible future teaching practices.

The concept of autonomy is investigated mostly with either EFL/ESL teachers or EFL/ESL learners. However, studies with student teachers of English are scarce (Yildirim, 2013; Öztürk, 2019; Putra & Iswara, 2019), especially concerning the autonomous outside-the-classroom learning activities. This study will fill a gap in terms of revealing student teachers' engagement in autonomous outside-the-classroom learning activities.

Literature Review

Chan (2001) conducted a study with 20 second-year language major students. She aimed to shed light on the participants' beliefs related to autonomous learning and at the same time to see to what extent the participants were able to learn autonomously. She also wanted to investigate if autonomous learning could take place among Hong Kong university students and if so, to what extent that could be. She added that in the context and environment in which she conducted the study, being independent, self-directed, or being an autonomous learner was not necessary, and it was not encouraged by teachers. The participants of the study were asked questions related to the concept of autonomy and it was shown that they generally had misperceptions of the concept of autonomy. Results of the study revealed that the learners might be considered as autonomous in some ways: they have clear goals about their learning, and they are aware of their learning styles and individual preferences. Moreover, Chan (2001) argued that the study also showed that the learners had a natural desire for self-directed learning and they were ready to take part in autonomous learning activities with the guidance of the teacher at the beginning and then progressed by themselves. She also put forward that if learners are encouraged and trained to engage in learning activities outside the classroom, they would become autonomous learners.

Spratt, Humphreys, and Chan (2002) conducted a study with 508 college students studying at nine different departments

in Hong Kong. They aimed to explore the relationship between autonomy and motivation in language learning. Moreover, they also wanted to explore if the participants of the study at that university were ready for autonomous learning and autonomous learning activities. They administered a questionnaire to the participants and this questionnaire was made up of four sections. The fourth section of this questionnaire is the tool for this study as well. This section is designed to shed light on learners' engagement in outside and inside the classroom learning activities. The authors of the study indicated that the activities in this section of the questionnaire are in line with the principles of autonomous language learning and autonomous language learners. The results that the authors gained from this section of the questionnaire (in which the researcher of this paper is interested) showed that out of 22 activities, only 10 were widely implemented by the participants and the rest of the activities were implemented less by the participants. The researchers indicated that from these results it can be suggested that learners should be encouraged to practice activities that they normally do and with which they are familiar. The participants were also interviewed in order to find out the reasons why they did not practice more than half of the activities. The participants disclosed that they lacked motivation, or they did not have enough time to engage in these activities. Based on these results, the researchers argued that motivation precedes autonomy according to these students and that teachers have a responsibility for encouraging and motivating students to engage in learning activities inside and outside the classroom in order to become autonomous, self-directed, and independent learners.

Castellano, Mynard, and Rubesch (2011) conducted an action research with 29 college students in Japan to investigate the language learning opportunities that the self-access learning center provides for language learners. The researchers indicated that the self-access learning center has technology-based language learning tools from which students would benefit. The participants of the study visited the self-access learning center

every week one to three times. The role of self-access learning centers has been discussed for a long time. They were very famous and common in the 1970s and several universities have also opened self-access language learning centers since the 1990s. Benson (2011) indicated that self-access language learning centers were used by teachers to foster autonomy. Students go to self-access language learning centers and learn new information and most of the time they go there of their own volition. This is a clear example of engaging in outside-the-classroom learning activities and autonomous learner behavior. Castellano et al. (2011)'s study revealed that self-access learning centers benefit learners in terms of being autonomous learners and they provide good language learning opportunities. However, they put forward that there are some things that need to be improved in the self-access language learning centers: learners' awareness should be raised about technology-based language learning tools in the self-access language learning center, learners need to be given appropriate support and training for exploiting the benefits and advantages of the self-access language learning center, and materials in the center need to be developed and more appropriate, pedagogic, and quality materials should be added.

Cotterall (1999) conducted a study with 131 learners of English studying at three different English language courses at a university in New Zealand to investigate the participants' language learning beliefs. The researcher used a questionnaire which had 90 items, and the questionnaire was divided into four parts and six variables. She aimed to explore the beliefs of the learners about the factors that were discussed in SLA literature. The questionnaire had different parts and variables related to the beliefs of the learners about the factors that would affect learner autonomy and language learning. One of the parts of the questionnaire focused on 'important strategies' that the learners employ. These strategies are considered important and necessary in learning a language autonomously and successfully. The results revealed that the majority of the participants were aware of how to ask for help, to explain why they need to learn English,

identify their strengths and weaknesses in learning a language, they were able to plan their learning, find ways of practicing the language, and set their language learning goals. However, they were not really capable of checking their learning progress and checking their work to spot mistakes.

Richards (2015) examined some of the available opportunities and resources to support out-of-class learning and he listed some of these resources that learners can use in order to learn English independently and autonomously. The out-of-class resources available for developing communicative skills are listed by the researcher: chat rooms, self-access centers, interviews with native speakers, language villages, digital games, listening logs, online resources such as TED Talks, social media, e-mediated tandem learning, using Voicethread, public service announcement videos, TV series, internet television, and extensive viewing. These are all modern, technological, and up-to-date available resources that learners can use and engage in outside the classroom and in this way, they will not only be able to improve their language skills (especially listening and speaking), but also learn autonomously and independently.

Zimmerman (2002) wrote an overview of the subject of self-regulated learning. Self-regulated learning was simply defined as students regulating their own learning. He explained that self-regulated learning is about learners' ability and capacity to deal successfully with goal setting, time management, learning strategies, self-evaluation, self-attributions, seeking help or information, and self-efficacy during the process of learning. He offered a model that explains the phases of self-regulated learning: forethought phase, performance phase, and self-reflection phase. He argued that the performance phase includes imagery, self-instruction, attention focusing, task strategies, self-recording, and self-experimentation. It can be seen that engaging in outside-the-classroom learning activities is also related to self-regulated learning and it is directly associated with the performance phase of Zimmerman's model. Zimmerman (2002) argued that a huge body of studies proved the positive impact of self-regulated

learning and learners' implementation of self-regulatory processes on academic achievement.

Aim and Importance of the Study

This study aims to explore first year student teachers' engagement in outside-the-classroom learning activities. Engagement in outside-the-classroom learning activities in learning a language is vital in terms of being an independent, self-directed, self-regulated, and autonomous learner. It has been discussed by many researchers that learners first need to be aware of these activities and then they need to be trained appropriately and pedagogically in order to engage in these activities successfully. This study was conducted with student teachers of English because their awareness and engagement in these outside-the-classroom learning activities is of great significance. If student teachers are aware of these activities and they employ them regularly and appropriately, then they will train their future students in this way. Moreover, studies on student teachers' engagement in autonomous outside-the-classroom learning activities and its relationship with autonomy are very limited, at least to the researcher's best knowledge. Therefore, it is important to explore the student teachers' engagement in outside-the-classroom learning activities to see if they are independent, self-directed, and self-regulated learners.

The following research questions will be investigated in this study:

1. Do the student teachers of English engage in outside-the-classroom learning activities?
2. Which activities are most and least engaged in by the student teachers of English?

Methodology

Participants

The participants of the study were 60 first year student teachers of English studying at one of the largest state universities in Turkey. 34 of the participants are female and 26 of the

participants are male. The ages of the participants ranged between 18 and 22. Turkish was the native language of all the participants.

Student teachers in Turkey enroll in faculties of education (school of education). These faculties operate with the sole purpose of training future educators and teachers. The faculties embody separate departments according to the subject of teaching such as English language teaching (ELT) department, department of mathematics teaching, department of chemistry teaching etc. All of these departments at faculties of education have common courses, which are related to pedagogy and teaching e.g., educational psychology, principles and methods of teaching, classroom management, special teaching methods etc. In addition, each department have their own special courses related to the subject in its curriculum. The teaching lasts four to five years in these departments. During the final year, student teachers go to public or private schools to observe classes of in-service teachers and to practice teaching. The students take a high-stake exam after high school in order to enroll at universities. All of the students take the same exam and the exam measures students' knowledge in Turkish language, math, physics, chemistry, biology, history, geography, and philosophy. Those students who want to enroll in foreign language departments take two different exams. In the first exam, they are expected to solve only basic math and basic Turkish language problems. The second exam is the English exam that has 80 questions. This exam does not measure students' productive skills and listening skills. It focuses on the structure of English language. Student teachers of English take this exam and according to their scores, they enroll at different ELT departments in different cities of Turkey.

The participating student teachers in this study were at the same department and university and their scores on the university entrance exam were very close to each other. Taking this into account and the fact that they were all first year student teachers, their English proficiency was also very close to each other because before starting the first year, student teachers enrolled at an

English preparatory school and they all left the preparatory school with a B2 level, according to the CEFR framework.

Data collection instrument

The data collection instrument used in this study is the fourth section of the four-sections questionnaire, developed by Spratt, Humphreys, and Chan (2002). The researchers developed this questionnaire to investigate the relationship between autonomy and motivation and which comes first. The first three sections of the questionnaire aimed to show students' motivational level to be an autonomous learner and their views related to the concept of autonomy. This study also aimed to investigate student teachers' engagement in outside-the-classroom learning activities. Thus, only the fourth section of the questionnaire was administered to the participants. The fourth section "explored the actual activities students engaged in inside or outside the classroom which could be thought of as manifestations of autonomous language learning behavior" (Spratt, Humphreys, & Chan, 2002, p. 249), which is the main aim of this study. The developers piloted the whole questionnaire (all the four sections). The fourth section of this questionnaire was used in this study without any changes and it was administered to the participants.

Data analysis

The data of the study was analyzed with SPSS 21 statistical software program. The mean and the standard deviation of each item was calculated and reported. The most and least engaged outside-the-classroom activities by the participants were investigated and analyzed.

Results

Considering the first research question, i.e. whether the student teachers of English engage in autonomous outside-the-classroom learning activities, statistical analysis of the responses of the participants showed that student teachers engage in autonomous outside-the-classroom learning activities. Yet, as it

will be seen in Table 1 and 2, the participating student teachers mostly engage in activities that require the use of technological gadgets and the internet. Their level of engagement in more traditional outside-the-classroom learning activities such as reading books on their own, going to see teacher about work etc. is considerably low. It can be argued that this is expected of these millennial learners since they were born in this age of high-tech gadgets and the internet. However, the best-case scenario for these student teachers is that they engage in activities in both categories (traditional and technology-based) because they are the future teachers of English and their activities would foster autonomy among their learners in the future.

Considering the second research question, the results revealed that the student teachers of English who participated in this study are generally engaged in outside-the-classroom autonomous learning activities, but it was shown that the activities that are directly related to self-regulated learning and improving communication skills are little practiced by the participants. The activities that the student teachers of English are mostly engaged in can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. *Activities that the student teachers mostly engaged in*

Activity Number	Activity	Mean	Std. Deviation
11	Listen to English songs	3,88	.415
16	Watch English movies	3,73	.482
5	Read English notices around you	3,56	.647
9	Watch English TV programs	3,50	.791
3	Note down new words/meanings	3,45	.699
8	Read books/magazines in English	3,28	.761
18	Use the Internet in English	3,21	.738

The activities that the student teachers of English are mostly engaged in are the ones that we expect them to engage in today because of the widespread use of internet and technology. It would be helpful to note that this questionnaire was developed in 2002, which was 16 years ago and the internet was not as ubiquitous as it is now, social media, digital tools, and technological gadgets such as smart phones, tablets, laptops etc.

did not exist at that time. The researchers who developed this questionnaire administered it to the participants in Hong Kong.

These activities (watching English movies, watching English TV programs, reading English notices around, and using the internet in English) might have been easier to access in Hong Kong at that time, but these activities were not easy to access in Turkey at that time. However, in today's context (living with cutting-edge technologies and the internet at its peak), we would at least expect that the student teachers of English would engage in these activities. Nonetheless, it can be seen from these results that the student teachers of English participating in this study engaged in these outside-the-classroom autonomous learning activities and it can be inferred that they were autonomous to some extent and they knew some of the tools that they can use to improve their English and learn independently and autonomously. It was mentioned repeatedly by researchers in previous studies that learners need to be aware of the principals and strategies that they can employ in order to become independent and autonomous learners. After that, teacher and peer support is necessary to activate these strategies within the learner. Finally, learners need to be able to reflect on their progress and self-assess their learning and performance critically. From these results, it is apparent that the student teachers of English participating in this study were aware of some of these outside-the-classroom autonomous learning activities or strategies and they were engaging in some of them regularly. Outside-the-classroom autonomous learning activities that the student teachers of English least engaged in can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. *Activities that the student teachers least engaged in*

Activity Number	Activity	Mean	Std. Deviation
17	Write a diary in English	1,61	.845
4	Write English letters to penpals	1,8	.879
20	Attend a self-study centre	1,8	.898
1	Read grammar books on own	2,01	.747
22	Go to see teacher about work	2,15	.898
19	Do revision not required by teacher	2,25	.932
21	Collect texts in English	2,35	.860

These activities, if applied successfully, would be very beneficial for the development of learners' language skills, yet they are not popular among student teachers of English. It could be argued that the reason for this situation might also be due to the sheer prevalence of internet, mobile phones, mobile applications in smart phones, and digital tools. It is apparent that the majority of these activities were not related to nor required internet use and technology use. The participants of this study were, as Prensky (2001) described, 'digital natives' and it is expected that even when they engage in outside-the-classroom autonomous learning activities, they are looking for activities that require the use of internet, technology, and mobile phones because it was found in other studies that digital natives, especially college level students, spend at least 4-6 hours online every day and they use their mobile phones between 6 and 8 hours every day (Anshari et al., 2017). However, it might be argued that the least engaged in activities would provide for more autonomous learning behaviors than the mostly engaged in outside-the-classroom autonomous learning activities.

Discussion

This study was conducted with 60 first year student teachers of English to explore their engagement in outside-the-classroom autonomous learning activities. It was confirmed by previous studies that outside-the-classroom learning activities that learners engage in have a positive impact on learners'

academic achievements and on their pathway to becoming independent, self-regulated, self-directed, and autonomous learners. These outside-the-classroom autonomous learning activities can be discussed under the term of learning strategies. Oxford (2016) indicated that strategies are the actions taken by the learner to make the process of learning easier, permanent, and meaningful and employing these strategies foster self-regulated learning. She also put forward that there is a very close relationship between learning strategies and autonomy in that autonomy contributes to use of learning strategies and the use of learning strategies promotes learner autonomy. It was also discussed in previous studies that successful language learners employ different learning strategies, and this makes them self-directed and autonomous learners. Moreover, Atkinson (1975), Chamot and Kupper (1989) argued that training learners to make them aware of the strategies and encouraging them to use the strategies improves their performance and promotes self-directed learning and learner autonomy. Therefore, it might be beneficial to look at whether student teachers of English are aware of autonomous outside-the-classroom learning activities and if they are engaged in these activities. It might be more vital for student teachers to be aware of autonomous outside-the-classroom learning activities because if they are aware of them and engaging in them regularly (because these student teachers of English are not native speakers of the language that they will teach and they also need to engage in learning activities outside the classroom so that they improve their language skills and abilities), then they will be able to encourage their future students to engage in these activities.

When the student teachers are proficient at making their future learners engage in autonomous outside-the-classroom learning activities, they will contribute to their academic performance and at the same time foster autonomy among their learners. Therefore, this study may contribute to the field in terms of discovering student teachers' awareness of autonomous

outside-the-classroom learning activities and their engagement in these activities in this context.

The results of the study revealed that the student teachers who participated in this study mostly engaged in autonomous outside-the-classroom learning activities that include technology and internet. Technology and internet have reached their peak today and children and young adults use them intensively. This might be the reason that the student teachers engaged in these kinds of activities more than others. On the other hand, the results of the study also showed that autonomous outside-the-classroom activities that the student teachers of English least engaged in are more related to principles and characteristics of self-regulated and autonomous learning. For example, it was found that the student teachers of English do not often engage in autonomous learning activities such as, going to see their teacher about work, doing revision not required by their teacher, and writing a diary in English. The participants were not engaging in activities of going to see their teacher about work and doing revision that was not required by their teacher and it is clear that these activities are closely related to self-regulated learning and learner autonomy. The reasons for this situation should be further investigated in order to shed light on the factors that lead to student teachers not engaging in such outside-the-classroom learning activities.

As has been mentioned, engaging in autonomous outside-the-classroom learning activities improves not only learners' academic achievements and performance, but also contribute to the process of becoming autonomous and self-regulated learners. Therefore, as the student teachers of English or EFL/ESL learners engage in such activities, they have a golden opportunity to improve their language skills and abilities. However, it was found in this study that the participants do not engage in activities that are related to improving communication skills such as talking to foreigners and practicing English with friends. These activities would improve their speaking skills dramatically if they engaged in them properly and successfully. Again, it would be helpful to

investigate the reasons why these student teachers of English do not engage in such activities which would be very beneficial to them. It can again be argued that giving students comprehensive, appropriate, and pedagogic training to encourage them to use the learning strategies, outside-the-classroom learning activities, and principles of autonomous learning would be very beneficial for learners', especially student teachers', academic performance and future profession.

It was mentioned in previous sections that the participants of the study are dedicated users of internet, technology, and especially mobile phones. For example, nowadays there are many online opportunities through websites and digital tools to talk to native speakers of English online and to participate with them in live chat online. It is possible that these student teachers are not aware of these digital tools and other useful resources and opportunities that they can take advantage of, although they use the internet and technological gadgets all the time. At this point, it might be suggested that they receive training either through a special course designed only for these purposes and integrated into the curriculum or they receive the proper training at a certain time during their education. Internet and digital tools offer very beneficial and enjoyable material for EFL/ESL learners and it is believed that if the student teachers are fully aware of these tools, they would gladly be using them regularly since they are digital natives and they are keen users of technology and the internet.

Finally, the results of this study might have some suggestions for ELT departments and teacher education programs that student teachers should be trained and educated in learning strategies, autonomous outside-the-classroom learning activities, and autonomous learning behaviors and strategies in general. In this way, they will be fully aware of the opportunities that they can use to make their learning meaningful and colorful and at the same time improve themselves professionally. They will undoubtedly become better teachers in the future in this way.

Conclusion

This study was conducted with 60 student teachers of English studying at one of the largest state universities in Turkey. The study aimed to explore the student teachers' engagement in autonomous outside-the-classroom learning activities. The results of the study yielded interesting outcomes in that the student teachers of English are engaging in some of the outside-the-classroom learning activities, yet they are not fully aware of the benefits of other important and beneficial activities, which would make them more independent, self-directed, self-regulated, and autonomous learners and at the same time would improve their communication skills in English language. The results of the study were discussed in terms of the place of technology and the internet in education and from the perspective of teacher education.

Limitations of the Study

This study incorporated only a quantitative data collection instrument, and this is the limitation of the study. An interview with some of the participants would help the researcher to gain deeper understanding of student teachers' engagement in outside-the-classroom learning activities. Moreover, a similar questionnaire could be developed by the researcher in order to gauge the results that are contextually more relevant. The researcher administered Spratt, Humphreys, and Chan's (2002) questionnaire with the belief that this questionnaire was validated, and the items are still very much related to the specific context of this descriptive study. It was thought that this questionnaire would be appropriate for this descriptive study.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Engaging in outside-the-classroom learning activities would be a clear and visible sign of autonomous learner behavior. Hence, investigating learners' engagement in such activities extensively would help both teachers and researchers to gain a better and clearer picture of autonomous learning and autonomous learner

behaviors. Studying student teachers' engagement in outside-the-classroom learning activities would be more essential because if they are autonomous learners, then it is possible that they would foster autonomy among their learners in the future. Further studies investigating this issue might consider incorporating mixed-method research techniques with more participating student teachers of English. Moreover, researchers studying this issue might develop a special training course that would familiarize student teachers with the concept of autonomy and inform them about outside-the-classroom learning activities. The effectiveness of such training would be shown, and it would contribute to the field of study.

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