LANGUAGE TEACHER AUTONOMY IN TURKISH EFL CONTEXT: RELATIONS WITH TEACHERS' AUTONOMY AND JOB SATISFACTION LEVELS

By

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ABSTRACT

International reports suggest that teacher autonomy is diminishing across the world. With a centralized education system, Turkish teachers have the lowest level of professional independence in the education system and their students have the lowest level of English proficiency among many countries. Despite the important role that teachers play in their students' success, there is a scarcity of research on language teachers' autonomy and their job satisfaction in the field of foreign or second language (L2) instruction. Given that, this study aims to investigate the relationships between English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' actual and desired levels of autonomy and their job satisfaction in Turkey. A total of 102 EFL teachers working in public schools completed teacher autonomy scales about their actual and desired control discipline, curriculum, classroom environment, assessment, pedagogy, and professional development. They also rated their job satisfaction and expressed their opinion regarding their autonomy and job satisfaction in teaching English. Findings showed that the teachers' actual autonomy levels were significantly lower than their desired levels across all possible areas of control. The highest discrepancy between actual and desired teacher autonomy was present in the areas of classroom environment and curriculum. Surprisingly, teacher autonomy levels were not significantly related to job satisfaction. Qualitative data partially supported the findings, showing that teachers want more control over curricula. In addition, external factors, such as curriculum, classroom environment, and salary, and internal factors, such as self-evaluation, the joy of teaching, and student motivation, were linked to the levels of teacher autonomy and job satisfaction. The study discusses implications for improving teacher autonomy and job satisfaction in EFL contexts in Turkey and across the world as well.

Keywords: Teacher Autonomy, Job Satisfaction, EFL Teacher, Learner Autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

Many psychological factors relating to the teaching profession and solutions to the problems of today's schools revolve around a common notion called "teacher autonomy" (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). In spite of its importance in teachers' decisions on whether to stay in or leave the teaching profession, it appears that there is less effort globally to increase teachers' sense of control over their working conditions. Research reveals that teacher autonomy is diminishing because of substantial changes to the education system, specifically high-stakes exams (Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006; Sparks & Markus, 2015; Strong & Yoshida, 2014; Walker, 2016). Parallel with the research, international reports repeatedly demonstrate that Turkish teachers believe they have less autonomy than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries do (OECD, 2011, 2013, 2016). However, more research is necessary before concluding that greater perceived teacher autonomy is a panacea for improved student learning. Therefore, studying teacher autonomy can be a beneficial starting point for understanding student learning in educational settings, especially in English language teaching and learning in Turkey, which is one of the most problematic areas of education (Khalil, 2018). This study was conducted

to investigate the relationship between teacher autonomy and job satisfaction in the Turkish education system.

1. Literature Review

The literature on teacher autonomy reveals numerous definitions of the concept, and it is difficult to reach a consensus on the definition because of its ambiguity (Pearson & Moomaw, 2006; Rudolph, 2006; Smith, 2003). The concept of teacher autonomy has changed considerably from early works to recent studies. It has evolved from the belief in freedom, isolation from the others, and sole teaching discretion to collegial collaboration in decision-making about teaching (Pearson & Moomaw, 2006; Smith, 2003). Several researchers have investigated that evolution (Archbald & Porter, 1994; Friedman, 1999). Some have focused on the dimensions of teacher autonomy, such as psychological and political (Strong & Yoshida, 2014). Accepting a much broader framework with common elements of teacher autonomy on the areas of operation, a research team (LaCoe, 2006; Rudolph, 2006) collected several items from the best-known teacher autonomy scales (e.g., Friedman, 1999; Pearson & Hall, 1993; Pearson & Moomaw, 2006; Strong & Yoshida, 2014) and decomposed teacher autonomy under five areas of exercise: a) discipline (control over in-class discipline issues), b) professional development (free to attend in-service training), c) assessment (control over student assessment policies), d) pedagogy (freedom to choose teaching methodology), and e) curriculum (control over curricula). In spite of this decomposition, the term "teacher autonomy" is still indefinite as each definition advocates one dimension or two dimensions while excluding the others (Smith, 2003).

Although teacher autonomy has long been a topic of interest in the general education domain, it has a short history in the field of L2 education and has not received the scholarly attention it deserves in that field (Benson, 2007, 2013; Jiménez Raya & Vieira, 2015; Lamb, 2008). As one of the first researchers to tackle this subject, Little (1995, 2000) studied the relationship between teacher autonomy and the development of learner autonomy in L2 education. According to Little (2000, p. 45), "It is unreasonable to expect teachers to foster the growth of autonomy in their learners if they themselves do not know what it is to be an autonomous learner". There is a tendency to link teacher autonomy with learner autonomy concepts, such as freedom from external control, capacity for self-directed learning, and responsibility for making a choice in the field (Benson, 2000; Little, 1995; Pennycook, 1997; Smith, 2000). Many definitions of teacher autonomy have derived from the learner autonomy definitions (e.g., Aoki, 2002; Benson, 2000; Little, 1995, 2000; Smith, 2000, 2003; Thavenius, 1999). While some definitions describe an autonomous teacher as someone who can help learners become autonomous (Thavenius, 1999), others accept it as someone who can exploit his or her professional skills autonomously in determining the initiatives he or she takes in the classroom (Little, 2000). In spite of the focus difference in definitions and lack of agreement on the single definition, there is a consensus on the concept that there is a close relationship between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy. In other words, teacher autonomy is a prerequisite for the development of learner autonomy in L2 literature (Balcikanli, 2009; Benson, 2013; Benson, & Huang, 2008; Camilleri, 1997; Jiménez Raya & Veira, 2015; Little, 1995, 2000; Nakata, 2011). However, as it has been in the general education domain, teacher autonomy should be dealt with through a much broader framework in the L2 field. Consequently, the notion of language teacher autonomy should not be restricted to a professional capacity to foster learner autonomy and in-class activities or language-related issues. Instead, it should be accepted as a workplace construct within and outside the language classrooms (Khalil, 2018). Then, it should be understood that while there is a relationship between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy, these two terms are not identical, as teacher autonomy is about instructor professionalism and learner autonomy is about student learning (Jiménez Raya & Vieira, 2015).

Gradually expanding research has demonstrated that teacher autonomy has been linked to the instructors' decisions to remain in the teaching profession along with many other factors, such as teachers' motivation, occupational stress (i.e., burnout), professionalism, and job

satisfaction (Pearson, & Moomaw, 2005; Prichard & Moore, 2016; Ramos, 2006; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009, 2011; Webb et al., 2004). Among these factors, job satisfaction is the most popular subject in literature about teacher autonomy, and is simply defined as "teachers' affective reactions to their work or to their teaching role" (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011, p. 1030). Job satisfaction is also associated with a number of educational factors, such as teaching performance, teacher psychological well-being and fulfillment, teacher stress, burnout, and students' performance (Afshar & Doosti, 2016; Jepson & Forrest, 2006; Michaelowa, 2002; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009, 2011, 2014; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2000). It is also important because, in their bidirectional relationship, when teachers feel autonomy-support in their educational settings, they become more satisfied with their jobs and work efficiently, which in turn relates to education quality and teacher autonomy (Reeve, 2012). Although these two concepts were often studied together, there is recent interest in understanding the relationship between the two in Turkey's general education domain (see Çolak, Altınkurt, & Yılmaz, 2017). However, there is no research about job satisfaction levels among language teachers in Turkey or about what they need to be autonomous. As Benson (2007, 2013) proposed, teacher autonomy has not yet been widely investigated and remains a fertile area for research, especially so for L2 instruction. There is a scarcity of research on language teacher autonomy in the Turkish education system (see Khalil, 2018). The literature mainly reflects the pre-service teachers' viewpoints on language teacher autonomy in Turkey (Balçıkanlı, 2010; Sert, 2006; Üstünoğlu, 2009). There is also one study on the enhancement of in-service language teachers' autonomy through keeping reflective journals (Genç, 2010). In the sole literature about in-service language teachers' autonomy satisfaction, Khalil (2018) investigates the concept in Turkish state public schools with a broader perspective comprising four areas of teaching: teaching and assessment, school management, professional development, and curriculum development. In her mixed-method study, Khalil found that the concept was shaped by a number of factors, such as geopolitical context, compliance and accountability, school culture, and teacher collegiality mechanisms. She identified several factors hindering teachers' autonomy in teaching and assessment: high-stakes exams, directives asking teachers to follow the curriculum, the use of centrally prescribed textbooks, and the avoidance of supplementary materials for teaching. Teachers' roles in school management vary from one campus to another in Turkish state schools. Khalil found there is a lack of communication between the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and the teachers about the content of their professional development, and as a result, the teachers are reluctant to attend MoNE-organized training. She added that the teachers have a limited role in curriculum development as they believe their views and reports have not been considered by MoNE officials. Khalil (2018) concluded that teacher autonomy is valued by MoNE—despite the preconceived notion of lack of autonomy in the Turkish education system—and that a centralized education system does not automatically mean the opposition to teacher autonomy.

Although autonomy is accepted as one of three innate needs in current motivation theory and self-determination theory (see Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017), it must be supported by the social milieu, and autonomy has contextual characteristics (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Consequently, each context can affect teacher autonomy, and every setting should be researched for better understating of the concept. As the context for this study, Turkey has highly centralized governance, and decisions about the education system and management are steered at state schools by MoNE, except tertiary institutions (OECD, 2013). In spite of advances in language education policies in the Turkish education system (MoNE, 2012, 2015), Turkey often falls behind many European countries in foreign language education, and language education is always a controversial subject in Turkey (British Council, 2016; British Council & TEPAV, 2013). Therefore, the present study investigates language teacher autonomy in the Turkish EFL context where there is an over-centralized education system, and negative perceptions about language education are prevalent. Because of the difficulty of describing autonomy, a working definition of language teacher autonomy was framed as the basis of

the study by making use of several researchers' viewpoints (Aoki, 2002; Benson, 2013; Friedman, 1999; Khalil, 2018; Pearson & Hall, 1993; Rudolph, 2006; Smith & Erdoğan, 2008). Therefore, a broad multi-dimensional definition of language teacher autonomy is accepted here, with the study conceptualizing language teacher autonomy as the teachers' freedom to control the teaching profession and their active involvement in making decisions about their professional development. Then, the role of teachers in teaching methodology, curriculum, assessment, student discipline, and professional development would be researched under language teacher autonomy. It is also noteworthy that autonomy is an innate universal need for intrinsic motivation to work, and an autonomously satisfied individual displays better performance and adjustment in the work environment (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004; Deci & Ryan, 2014). Bearing in mind the link between autonomy and job satisfaction, this study aims to contribute to the improvement of literature about language teacher education and the quality of English language teaching in Turkey with its specific focus on autonomy and job satisfaction of in-service teachers.

2. Purpose of the Present Study

Given that, this study aims to research the discrepancy between EFL teachers' actual autonomy and desired autonomy, and to investigate the relationship between language teacher autonomy and job satisfaction in Turkey. The following research questions guided the study:

- Is there any difference between Turkish EFL teachers' levels of actual and desired autonomy? If so, in which aspects of teacher autonomy?
- What are the relationships among Turkish EFL teachers' actual autonomy, desired autonomy, and job satisfaction in Turkish EFL contexts?
- What are the beliefs of Turkish EFL teachers regarding autonomy and job satisfaction in Turkish EFL contexts?

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

A concurrent triangulation design from the mixed-methods research was adopted in this study. The design is outlined in Figure 1.

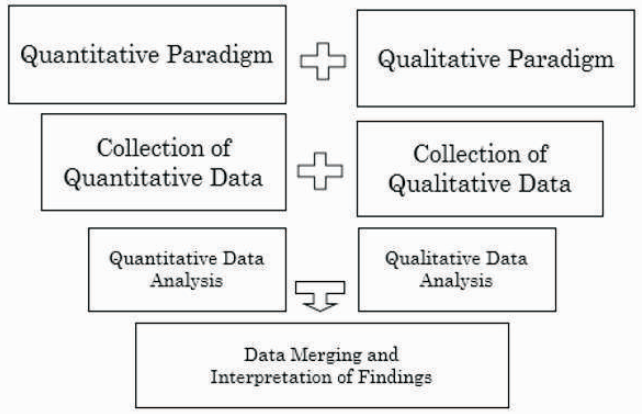


Figure 1. Research Design

According to Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, and Hanson (2003), in this design, researchers concurrently collect both quantitative and qualitative data to best handle the research problem, and then merge the data to put forward the relationships among the variables in the interpretation stage. This design helps researchers to cross-validate or corroborate findings reached from both the data (Hanson, Creswell, Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). Given that, in the present study, the researcher combined the numeric and verbal data to understand the relationships between teacher autonomy and job satisfaction in EFL contexts.

3.2 The Context of Research

The study was conducted in Turkey, where MoNE governs the compulsory education. The Turkish education system has three different periods: kindergarten, compulsory school, and university. According to the latest legislation on the compulsory education in 2012 (4+4+4 Education System), the education system is divided into three equal periods; in other words, four years for primary school, four years for middle school, and four years for high school education. English language education officially starts in the second year of primary education, and the students have at least two hours of English class in their education. In spite of the developments in the education system and the aim of the English education curricula to produce students who are able to communicate effectively in the target language in daily life (MoNE, 2017), Turkish students leave the compulsory education with a limited level of English proficiency (British Council & TEPAV, 2013; Demirpolat, 2015).

To become an EFL teacher in state schools in Turkey, candidates are required to enroll in and graduate from the department of English Language Teaching at either a state or private university after their high school graduation. Candidates who hold a diploma from other English language-related branches—such as English Language and Literature or English Translation and Interpreting—can work as a language teacher only after they finish a one-year pedagogic certificate training program. After higher education graduation, candidates must pass a teacher appointment examination (also known as KPSS) and undergo an appointment interview exam. The candidates who collect enough points from these steps may work in any state school across Turkey, based on their preference list.

3.3 Participants

Participants in this study consist of 102 EFL teachers (72 females, 30 males) who were working at different levels of state schools in Turkey. Their ages range from 21 to 48 years old (M=29.77, SD=5.71). They were recruited using a snowball sampling strategy. An online survey including demographic questions, scales, and open-ended questions was distributed with the help of EFL teachers to other colleagues. Forty-seven of the total participants (29 female, 18 male) also responded to the open-ended questions. Demographic details—including the participants' education level and job experience level—in the quantitative and qualitative data sections are shown in Table 1.

As shown in table, characteristics reveal that a high majority of the participants work at high schools and have a few years of teaching experience in both groups of data.

		Quantitative (Scales)		Qualitative (Written Response)	
Participants		N	%	N	%
The education level they teach	Primary School	25	24.5	9	19.1
	Middle School	33	32.4	12	25.5
	High School	44	43.1	26	55.3
Job Experience Level	1 to 5 years	52	51.0	27	57.4
	6 to 10 years	30	29.4	9	19.1
	11 to 11+ years	20	19.6	11	23.4

Note: The total frequencies were 102 and 47, respectively. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Table 1. Participants' Level that they Teach and Job Experience

3.4 Instruments

The instruments of the study are a collection of quantitative measures (i.e., teacher autonomy scales and job satisfaction scale) and a qualitative measure (i.e., an open-ended question). Details about the instruments are, respectively, as follows:

3.4.1 Teacher Autonomy Scales

Teacher autonomy scales are two different scales: actual teacher autonomy and desired teacher autonomy. The scales were developed by a research team (LaCoe, 2006; Rudolph, 2006) based on a number of best-known scales (e.g., Friedman, 1999; Pearson & Hall, 1993). In this study, a slightly adapted version of actual teacher autonomy scales, with 20 items, and desired teacher autonomy scales, with 21 items, were used from the work of Rudolph (2006). Each scale had six dimensions and included five-point Likert items (i.e., 1.00=Never, 2.00=Rarely, 3.00=Sometimes, 4.00=Often, 5.00=Always). While actual teacher autonomy scales included the sentences in simple present tense (i.e., "I am free to decorate my classroom as I choose"), desired teacher autonomy scales included sentences with the modal verb "should," (i.e., "Teachers should decide how their classrooms are decorated"). All items in the scales have acceptable Cronbach's alphas (that is, $\alpha = .95$ for actual autonomy and $\alpha = .89$ for desired autonomy). Further details regarding six dimensions of the scales are as follows:

1. Discipline: Four items are for in-class actual disciplinary procedures ($\alpha = .71$). A sample item is "I determine the consequences of negative student behavior in my classroom". Three items are for preferred discipline procedures ($\alpha = .71$). A sample item is "Teachers should have the authority to set their own student discipline policies".

2. Curriculum: Four items are about the teacher's actual role in the curriculum ($\alpha = .69$). A sample item is "I choose the curriculum materials I use in my classroom". Four items are about the desired role in the curriculum ($\alpha = .82$). A sample item is "Teachers should be able to decide what curriculum to teach".

3. Classroom Environment: Three items are for the teacher's actual role in shaping the classroom environment (α = .70). A sample item is "I arrange my classroom as I see fit". Five items are for the desired classroom environment (α = .87). A sample item is "Teachers should decide how their classrooms are decorated".

4. Assessment: Three items are about the teacher's actual role in assessment (α = .70). A sample item is "I decide how to assess what my students know". Three items are about the desired assessment. A sample item is "Teachers should determine how frequently to assess their students" (α = .80).

5. Pedagogy: Four items are about the teacher's actual role in choosing pedagogy and methodology (α = .70). A sample item is "I select the teaching methods and strategies that I use with my students". Three items are for desired pedagogy (α=.82). A sample item is "Teachers should be free to choose from a variety of teaching strategies".

6. Professional Development: Two items are about the teacher's actual professional development (α=.71). A sample item is "I decide whether and what in-service courses to take". Three items are for the desired professional development (α=.72). A sample item is "Teachers should be able to choose what in-service training to attend".

3.4.2 Job Satisfaction Scale

It is an overall construct about how much the teachers feel satisfaction or enjoyment in doing their job. The scale had three items with a 5-point scale and was developed by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009). The original Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.71. The Cronbach's alpha of the adapted scale was found to be 0.80, and the items were as follow: "All things considered, how much do you enjoy working as a language teacher in Turkey?", "If you could choose an occupation today, would you choose to be a language teacher in Turkey?," and "Have you ever thought about leaving your teaching profession?".

3.4.3 The Open-ended Written Interview Question

To gain a deeper understanding of the relationships between teacher autonomy and job satisfaction, an open-ended question was given to the teachers. The teachers gave their written answers about these two constructs. The question was: "How do you feel about a) your autonomy and b) job satisfaction in your context in general? Please explain your answer in detail".

3.5 Data Collection and Analyses

The data were collected via an online survey. In the first round, the scale link was shared with the EFL teachers working at the state schools, and the EFL teachers who responded to the link were asked to distribute the scale via their peer WhatsApp groups created by their school administrators and colleagues. Within four months, 102 teachers took the survey and completed all of the items on the scales, and of these, 67 participants answered the open-ended question.

Quantitative data from 102 participants were analyzed with SPSS 21.0. First, the normality check was computed, and the data were found to be normally distributed. After the normality check, some preliminary analyses were conducted to determine whether there were differences among the groups provided in the demographic questions. According to the difference in variance analyses, the groups did not differ in terms of the education level they teach and their length of teaching experience. For the main analyses, paired sample t-tests were computed to identify differences across actual teacher autonomy and desired teacher autonomy, and also teacher autonomy dimensions. Later, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was conducted to examine the relationships among the variables—actual teacher autonomy, desired teacher autonomy, and job satisfaction.

For the qualitative data analysis, a thematic analysis was done to understand the factors playing a role in the EFL learners' opinions about teacher autonomy and job satisfaction. First, among 67 answers, 20 very short answers, such as "Bad, Ok, Good" without explanation were omitted from the data, and 47 valid answers with long explanations were prepared for the analysis. Then, the participant responses were systematically analyzed for the repeated statements and placed into more specific categories to reach more abstract and general outcomes by the

researcher. Extracts from the students' responses to the written question were also presented with the findings.

4. Results

4.1 Difference between Turkish EFL Teachers' Levels of Actual and Desired Teacher Autonomy

Firstly, descriptive statistics showed that the EFL teachers mostly agreed with the items of the actual and desired autonomies (Min. M > 3.23, SD= 1.27). Later, means were computed for the main variables, and a paired sample t-test was performed to test the difference between actual and desired teacher autonomy. The analysis showed that teachers experienced an average level of autonomy (M = 3.86, SD = 0.58) and wanted significant control over their teaching profession. They reported lower actual teacher autonomy levels than desired teacher autonomy (M = 4.48, SD = 0.52; t(101) = -11.251, p = 0.000, d = 1.13). Their actual teacher autonomy levels differed significantly with large effect size (i.e., 0.2 = small, 0.5 = medium and 0.8 = large; Cohen, 1988).

As the levels differed from each other, multiple paired sample t-tests were computed to find differences in the aspects of teacher autonomy. As six paired tests were conducted at the same time, the Type I error rate was increased in the analyses and Bonferroni corrections (that is, the original alpha is divided by the number of multiple tests) were needed to correct the increase in the error rate. Then, the Bonferroni-corrected p-value (0.05/6) was accepted as $\alpha = 0.008$ for the tests. The findings are presented in Table 2 as follows:

Variables	Groups	M	SD	Md	t	p
Discipline	Actual Desired	3.92 4.25	.66 .68	-0.32	-4.095	0.000
Curriculum	Actual Desired	3.58 4.38	.84 .58	-0.80	-8.994	0.000
Classroom Environment	Actual Desired	3.84 4.65	.88 .52	-0.81	-9.142	0.000
Assessment	Actual Desired	3.99 4.55	.70 .56	-0.56	-7,562	0.000
Pedagogy	Actual Desired	4.08 4.59	.69 .60	-0.50	-7.268	0.000
Professional Development	Actual Desired	3.63 4.39	.82 .64	-0.75	-8.746	0.000

Note. Md= Mean difference, p < .008 level.

Table 2. Comparison of Actual and Desired Teacher Autonomy Variables

The table reveals that six aspects of actual and desired teacher autonomy significantly differed from each other ($p \leq 0.008$). While the most substantial difference in means occurred in a classroom environment and curriculum variables ($Md \geq 0.80$), discipline aspect had the lowest difference (Md = 0.32). The results in a general sense suggest that the teachers want a great amount of autonomy in all aspects of teacher autonomy.

4.2. Relationships among Turkish EFL Teachers' Actual Teacher Autonomy, Desired Teacher Autonomy, and Job Satisfaction

Following the t-test analyses, a correlation analysis was conducted to see the relationships between the variables.

Table 3 illustrates only one significant correlation between the variables, and there is a significant positive correlation between actual and desired teacher autonomy [$r(102)=.49$, $r^2 = .24$, $p< .01$]. According to the L2 discipline correlation benchmarks (r = .25 Small; r = .40 Medium; r=.60 High) of Plonsky and Oswald (2014), there is a moderate effect size between the actual teacher autonomy and desired teacher autonomy, and the actual teacher autonomy level in the EFL setting, accounting for 24% of the variance in desired teacher autonomy or vice versa. However, job satisfaction did not correlate with any of the variables (p > .05).

4.3. Reasons for Teacher Autonomy and Job Satisfaction Beliefs

The open-ended question asked about the EFL instructors' teacher autonomy and job satisfaction in their context. Emerging themes and categories from the responses are shown in Figure 2.

According to the figure, two themes and eight categories under these themes were extracted from the responses. The teachers (n = 21) are mostly pleased with being an

Variables	M	SD	α	1	2	3
1-Actual Teacher Autonomy	3.86	0.58	0.89	-		
2-Desired Teacher Autonomy	4.48	0.52	0.95	0.49**	-	
3-Job Satisfaction	3.88	1.01	0.80	0.15	0.06	-

Note. **p < .01 level.

Table 3. Correlations among Main Variables



Figure 2. Factors Playing a Role in Teacher Autonomy and Job Satisfaction

English teacher in spite of the difficulties, and internal factors are important in their feelings. Although they feel autonomous and are satisfied with their jobs, they complained about a number of external factors. External factors are related to matters that are out of the teachers' control as well as external sources of motivation. Internal factors are many abstract elements and are related to intrinsic motivation. It appears that the external factors are associated with negative aspects that hinder or lower the level of teacher autonomy and job satisfaction; internal factors positively influence and increase the levels of the variables. In other words, when the external factors are diminished and the internal factors are raised, the teachers experience high teacher autonomy and much job satisfaction in their contexts.

Regarding external factors, the teachers said these factors made them feel less autonomous and more unsatisfied with their working conditions. Among these factors, the teachers complained strongly about the arranged curriculum by MoNE. This dissatisfaction is due mainly to the fact that the teachers must finish the curriculum on time, leaving inadequate opportunities to employ teaching activities other than grammar and reading exercises in class. On this issue, a teacher said, "I want to use different teaching methods or techniques, but it is impossible to do that with the curriculum". Similarly, another respondent added, "All curriculum is restricted and arranged before. That is not useful through the terms". National education policies such as compulsory use of prearranged MoNE books have created negative feelings about their teaching context.

Regarding the books, a teacher said, "The books published by MoNE really detract from being useful in teaching and learning English. But I have to use them". Regarding the high pressure from the education system, another teacher responded, "I am not satisfied with my job because we—as English teachers—aren't free when teaching and I think the language teaching in our country isn't enough and needs to be changed immediately. Otherwise, due to all the failures, we [teachers] are held responsible by the system".

The classroom environment—which includes disinterested students and students who misbehave—is another factor that demotivates the teachers. Said one responding teacher, "I am not satisfied with my job because there is always chaos inside the classroom and there are serious disciplinary problems that I cannot (manage)". Another added that "student motivation is low; they resist to follow the lesson and to participate, which ends in misbehavior in the classroom. Although I would consider myself as an autonomous teacher in general, facing a class which I can't manage due to misbehavior makes me feel helpless and as if I have no control at all as a teacher".

Salary is cited as another major complaint of teachers. Supporting this finding, a teacher said, "The salary that I take is not enough to live on, either. I work a lot, but I get nothing when compared to other people with different occupations". Highlighting the low salary rates, a teacher said, "Unfortunately, teachers don't earn much enough. If they satisfy us about the salaries, we can enjoyably do our job".

The last external factor concerns the workplace conditions, specifically, colleagues and administrators in the school. Emphasizing poor workplace atmosphere, a teacher responded, "I think teacher autonomy at state schools firstly depends on your colleagues because mostly we [teachers] share the same classes and we must apply the same assessment tools for the time. But here [at school], there is less cooperation with my colleagues."

When considering internal factors, these mostly concern self-related ideas, the joy of teaching, and motivated students. The teachers focused on their positive self-images and their motivation to teach English. A teacher who believes she is good at teaching English responded, "I feel happy in the classroom. I always try to develop my

teaching techniques." Highlighting the relationship between job satisfaction and student achievement, a teacher said, "Job satisfaction is important because it has a direct impact on students' achievement. A teacher who is satisfied with her job tends to be motivated. I feel very motivated about my job, and I determine my approaches freely". Another category is the joy of teaching. On this issue, a teacher responded, "Spiritually, teaching something new to others is motivating for me". Another teacher added that although she is a novice in her first professional year of teaching English, she said, "I love teaching and being an English teacher much". The final factor is student motivation. On this issue, a teacher responded, "I have good students, and I feel better. Teaching in language classrooms is more enjoyable and satisfying with motivated students".

5. Discussion

This present study examined language teachers' autonomy and its relationship to job satisfaction in the Turkish EFL context. First, the teachers' actual and desired levels of autonomy were assessed, and it was determined that the teachers have experienced a moderate degree of autonomy in the education system and desire much more autonomy as a preference. It can be concluded that teachers experience autonomy in spite of Turkey's centralized education system. This finding corresponds with the result of Çolak et al. (2017), who concluded that the Turkish teachers took initiatives to experience autonomy despite the excessively centralized education system. As it has also been stated by Khalil (2018), the teachers take risks by experimenting in the classroom although it is compulsory to follow the curriculum in the Turkish context. Validating the findings of research (Çolak et al., 2017; Khalil, 2018), teachers experience a high level of autonomy in the teaching pedagogy section and limited autonomy in the curriculum and professional development categories. Çolak and colleagues (2017) stated that even though the school authority, national policies, or sometimes parents can disturb teachers' autonomy, the instructors can take the initiative while in the classroom.

Regarding the significant discrepancy between aspects of the teachers' actual autonomy and desired autonomy, the teachers want much control over their classroom environment, curriculum, and professional development. There is less discrepancy between student discipline procedures and language teaching pedagogy. Consistent with Khalil (2018), Turkish EFL teachers want more control with a curriculum focusing on the importance of teacher involvement in an educational setting. Mackenzie (2002) states that the willingness to participate in curriculum development in the teaching setting is the first step toward increasing teacher autonomy, and if the organization involves the teachers in making decisions about their future, a real learning organization can be developed. According to Öztürk (2011), this can be achieved with school-based curriculum development that emphasizes the collective decision-making of school directors, teachers, and others concerned with teaching. Professional development is also quite important. The quality of in-service training was questioned in various studies, and there is agreement about their ineffectiveness for the teachers (Khalil, 2018). According to Khalil (2018), the teachers have minimal autonomy in making decisions about the national in-service training supported by MoNE. She says that while MoNE offers teachers an option, through its survey of in-serving training, to voice specific educational needs in their subject area, the teachers do not offer suggestions as they believe their ideas will not be considered. Though MoNE provides some other opportunities—such as arranging special seminars upon request from a group of teachers and offering school-based models for the professional development of English teachers—these choices were not used effectively because of the teachers' negative views or limited knowledge about the programs. Khalil raises another point in teacher autonomy development and questions the role of language teacher agency in Turkish education system.

In terms of the relationships, existing teacher autonomy predicts desired teacher autonomy or vice versa, and these two concepts are positively correlated with each other. In other words, perception regarding an aspect of teacher autonomy can give an idea about present or desired facts of teacher autonomy. Though this finding is

expected, there is no relationship between teacher autonomy and job satisfaction; both actual teacher autonomy and desired teacher autonomy are not related to job satisfaction. They did not predict each other. This finding contradicts the expanding catalogue of research proposing that these the terms are positively correlated each other (Brunetti, 2001; Çolak et al., 2017; Koustelios et al., 2004; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011, 2014).

It should be noted that these divergent findings should be interpreted carefully. The teaching profession is a public service, offering job security and a steady income even during times of economic crisis. While many developed countries, particularly in North America and Australia, encounter difficulty in recruiting teachers, teaching is an attractive career in economically growing countries like Turkey, where there is intense competition in teacher recruitment (Kılıc, Watt, & Richardson, 2012). The main extrinsic motivation sources for choosing teaching are stable salary, light workload, long holidays, and job security significant. These are significant factors in Turkey, as MoNE supports legal protection for teachers in comparison to those in the private sector (Aksu, Demir, Daloglu, Yildirim, & Kiraz, 2010; Kılıc et al., 2010; Saban, 2003). Research also shows that because many students entering the teaching profession come from low-income and low-education families (e.g., Aksu et al., 2012; Demirbolat, 2006; Kılıc et al., 2010), these families are likely to affect teachers' career choices because of the steady income. Adding together all of these factors, it is easy to understand why current language teachers are likely to remain in the teaching profession even though they experience less autonomy or job satisfaction than they would like. Like Maslow's hierarchy (see Maslow, 1970), low but steady income might be much more important for language teachers than being autonomous or accomplishing self-actualization, which can be accepted as a higher need. It should also be noted that Esfandiari and Kamali (2016)—who also found a conflicting result (that is, a weak negative correlation between teacher autonomy and job satisfaction)—suggested that a limited sample size of the study might have caused such a relationship between these two variables.

In conjunction with the literature (Çolak et al., 2017; Dinham & Scott, 1998; Ghenghesh, 2013; Kelchtermans, 2013; Khalil, 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011), qualitative findings demonstrated that both internal and external factors play a significant role in feelings about their teaching and how teachers see themselves as professionals. While internal factors can be the intrinsic sources of motivation in the teaching profession, external factors are mostly about negative perceptions, and they might hinder teacher autonomy and job satisfaction. The teachers who had positive perceptions about their autonomy and job satisfaction highlighted the importance of gratification of the teaching profession. They reported that having motivated students and seeing them learn helps compensate for all the difficulties and makes teachers happy. However, many teachers complained about pre-determined curriculum, restricting national policies, demotivating classroom environment, meager salary, and other school-related factors such as demotivating colleagues and limited cooperation with colleagues. These results are in parallel to the findings of Khalil (2018). The teachers still complained about their limited role in developing curriculum, the formalities of bureaucracy, limited cooperation between colleagues, and so forth. With the recent developments in the Turkish education system and the 2023 Vision Strategy of Education in Turkey, teachers have had significant opportunity to practice autonomy both inside and outside the classroom. However, there is a communication problem between teachers and MoNE. As stated by Khalil (2018), the system allows language teachers to become involved in school management, provide feedback about curriculum development, tailor their teaching and assessment procedures, attend professional development programs, and increase teacher collaboration with a number of teams and committees in their schools. However, the real practices paint a different picture, and all of these mechanisms are not adequately practiced in the education system. Therefore, Khalil questions whether existence of opportunities together with the individual capacity actually results in teacher autonomy in some contexts.

Conclusion

Considering the study findings, the quantitative results coincide with the qualitative at some degree, and the qualitative findings corroborate the numerical data. In spite of the developments in the education system, EFL teachers do not practice autonomy at the desired level, experience a moderate level of job satisfaction, and see their perceptions influenced by similar internal and external factors. In this respect, this study suggests that both language educators and MoNE authorities in the education system help the teachers become aware of their potentials and increase teacher agency for active involvement in the dimensions of teacher autonomy. By valuing the importance of autonomy in an educational setting and endorsing autonomy-supportive learning contexts in the pre-service teacher education, language educators can help to raise autonomously engaged language teachers who are ready to create spaces even in the centralized education systems. Bearing in mind the poor communication between the teachers and MoNE, the authorities should consider new ways to increase interaction and genuine collaboration among all educational actors.

Although this research unveils some perspectives about teacher autonomy and job satisfaction in the Turkish EFL setting, it is not without limitations. With its limited focus on the real practices regarding teacher autonomy and job satisfaction in the qualitative part, the study lacks concrete suggestions for repairing the poor relationship between teacher autonomy and job satisfaction in the future. Therefore, further research and long-term projects are needed to reach a thorough understanding of the interfaces between EFL teacher autonomy and job satisfaction. Notably, the EFL teachers' reluctance and limited agency in constructively supporting the education system should be researched in an in-depth way using a variety of data sources such as field observation, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. Last not the least, similar studies with extended scopes on the topic can contribute to the development of this unexplored terrain in the L2 education field, and might help educators understand EFL learners' limited language proficiency.

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