REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
ÇUKUROVA UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING DEPARTMENT

SELF-DIRECTED ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS' LEARNING PRACTICES BEYOND THE CLASSROOM IN A TURKISH HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Tuba TÜRKEL

Ph.D. DISSERTATION

ADANA / 2024

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ABSTRACT

SELF-DIRECTED ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS' LEARNING PRACTICES BEYOND THE CLASSROOM IN A TURKISH HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Tuba TÜRKEL

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This study aimed to explore the language learning practices of self-directed language learners beyond the classroom in a Turkish tertiary context. Specifically, this inquiry set out to investigate why learners engage in diverse language learning practices beyond the classroom, drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice and social class concept with a sociological perspective. To this end, this research employed an embedded single case study design by taking self-directed language learners as a case and focusing on sub-units of nine self-directed language learners with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and language learning profiles. It was carried out in an English Language Teaching Department of a Turkish state university. The data of this research was collected through (a) Learner Background Survey, (b) Learner Autobiography, (c) Initial Unstructured Interviews, (d) Semi-structured Interviews, (e) Photo-elicitation Interviews, and (f) External Informant Interviews.

The analysis of the gathered data revealed the complex, dynamic, and multilayered characteristics of self-directed language learning beyond the classroom by illustrating how these practices are deeply influenced by learners' social class, shaped by the interaction between their habitus (i.e., dispositions and inclinations), capital (i.e., power in economic, cultural, social, and symbolic form), and the fields (i.e., social spaces, such as education) they participate in. Consequently, SDLL was not merely an individual attribute but also a product of broader structural and cultural conditions. The findings also shed light on the role of social actors shaping an individual's educational and language learning journeys, such as teachers, peers, parents, siblings, extended family members, acquaintances, and, notably, policymakers. Furthermore, the findings emphasized the

disparities among language learners, as well as the resilience and agency demonstrated by disadvantaged learners facing constraining circumstances. Based on the findings, this study offers pedagogical implications and future research directions.

Keywords: Self-directed language learning, social class, foreign language, learning beyond the classroom, case study

ÖZET

TÜRKİYE'DE ÖZ YÖNETİMLİ BİÇİMDE İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRENEN ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN SINIF DIŞINDAKİ ÖĞRENME UYGULAMALARININ ARAŞTIRILMASI: SOSYOLOJİK BİR BAKIŞ

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Bu çalışma, yükseköğretim düzeyinde, öz yönetimli biçimde dil öğrenenlerin, sınıf dışındaki dil öğrenme uygulamalarını araştırmayı amaçlamıştır. Bu araştırma, öğrencilerin sınıf dışındaki çeşitli İngilizce dil öğrenme uygulamalarına neden katıldıklarını anlamak için Bourdieu'nun pratik teorisi ve sosyal sınıf kavramından sosyolojik bir bakış açısıyla yararlanmıştır. Bu amaçla, araştırmada, Türkiye'deki bir yükseköğretim kurumundaki, öz yönetimli biçimde dil öğrenenleri bir durum olarak ele alan ve farklı sosyoekonomik geçmişlere ve dil öğrenme uygulamalarına sahip dokuz dil öğrenenini alt birimler olarak inceleyen iç içe geçmiş tek durum deseni kullanılmıştır. Araştırma, Türkiye'de bir devlet üniversitesinin İngilizce Öğretmenliği Bölümü'nde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler, (a) Öğrenen Geçmişi Anketi, (b) Öğrenen Otobiyografisi, (c) Ön Yapılandırılmamış Görüşmeler, (d) Yarı Yapılandırılmış Görüşmeler, (e) Fotoğraf Bazlı Görüşmeleri ve (f) Dış Paydaş Görüşmeleri aracılığıyla toplanmıştır.

Araştırmanın sonuçları, sınıf dışındaki öz yönetimli dil öğrenmenin farklı bileşenlerden etkilenen karmaşık, dinamik ve çok katmanlı olduğunu ortaya koymuş ve bu uygulamaların, öğrencilerin habitusları (eğilimleri ve yatkınlıkları), sermayeleri (ekonomik, kültürel, sosyal ve sembolik formdaki güçleri) ve içinde bulundukları alanlar (eğitim alanı gibi sosyal mekânlar) arasındaki etkileşimle nasıl derinlemesine şekillendiğini göstermiştir. Dolayısıyla, öz yönetimli dil öğrenme sadece bireysel bir nitelik değil, aynı zamanda daha geniş yapısal ve kültürel koşulların bir ürünü olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Araştırmadan elde edilen bulgular, bireylerin eğitim ve dil öğrenme yolculuklarını şekillendiren öğretmenler, akranlar, ebeveynler, kardeşler, geniş aile üyeleri, tanıdıklar ve özellikle de eğitim politikalarını şekillendiren bireyler gibi sosyal

aktörlerin rolüne de ışık tutmuştur. Ayrıca, bulgular Türkiye'deki yabancı dil öğrenenler arasındaki eşitsizlikleri vurgulamış ve zorlayıcı koşullarla karşı karşıya olan dezavantajlı öğrencilerin gösterdiği direnç ve özerkliği ortaya koymuştur. Araştırmanın yabancı dil öğretimine ve gelecekte yapılabilecek araştırmalara yönelik yol gösterici bir nitelik taşıdığı ifade edilebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öz yönetimli dil öğrenme, sosyal sınıf, yabancı dil, sınıf dışı öğrenme, durum çalışması

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ABBREVIATIONS

CoHE: Council of Turkish Higher Education

EFL: English as a foreign language

ELT: English language teaching

EPI: English proficiency index

IDLE: Informal digital learning of English

IPA: International Phonetics Alphabet

LBC: Learning beyond the classroom

SAC: Self-access center

SES: Socioeconomic status

SDL: Self-directed learning

SDLL: Self-directed language learning

SEGE: Socioeconomic Development Index by the Turkish Ministry of Industry and Technology

TUIK: Turkish Statistical Institute

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"No technology has ever in itself helped anyone learn anything."

Marie-Josi Gremmo & Philip Riley

1.0. Introduction

This chapter elaborates on the background of the study by focusing on the importance of self-directed language learning (SDLL) in language education, the status of English in Türkiye, and the relationship between social class and SDLL. It continues with the significance of this study, the theoretical framework and the purpose of the study including research questions.

1.1. Background to the Study

1.1.1. Self-directed Language Learning

Self-directed learning (SDL) is defined as a process in which learners take the initiative for their own learning based on their own learning needs and styles, know how to identify learning materials, and evaluate their learning with or without others' guidance (Knowles, 1975). SDL and learner autonomy are similar concepts used interchangeably in the literature (Benson, 2011a). Nevertheless, it is difficult to explain the difference between these two notions. However, it would not be incorrect to conceptualize the difference as learner autonomy refers to the capacity to take control of one's own learning (Benson, 2011a); on the other hand, SDL refers to the learning incidents where learners can practice this capacity (Ozer & Yükselir, 2021).

Self-direction and autonomy first emerged in adult education in the 1970s, and various factors led to the emergence and development of these two interrelated notions (Gremmo & Riley, 1995). Developments in education (e.g., Freire, 1972; Holec, 1979; Rogers, 1972) and psychology (e.g., Ausubel, 1968; Bruner, 1966) have addressed the meaning and value of personal experience and underlined the importance of being an active agent in learning. There has been a focus shift from teacher-directedness to learner-centeredness in education. With the social turn in linguistics, language has also been viewed as a pragmatic and social tool for communication. The communicative approach

in language education emphasized learning a language for self-expression and, in turn, addressed the development of learner autonomy in language classes (Halliday, 1973). Another factor behind the fact that autonomy and self-direction have become an educational ideal was the emphasis on minority rights (Gremmo & Riley, 1995). In 1971, The Council of Europe established a language project for migrant workers (i.e., CRAPEL) and Henri Holec, the director of the project, introduced learner autonomy as one of the key concepts of the project and defined it as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (1981, p. 3). This project has been influential in the spread of autonomy and SDL in the educational research domain to a great extent.

Technological developments have also contributed to the demand for foreign language learning. Rapid technological changes in the 21st century undoubtedly increased the need for life-long learning skills, such as self-direction, goal commitment, and autonomy. With technological advancements, language learners are not, anymore, confined to the four walls of classrooms and go on learning beyond the classroom (Richard, 2015). Technology, especially the internet, has provided learners with various language learning materials and offered different mediums in which learners study whatever, wherever, and whenever they wish in line with their needs and learning styles (Reinders & White, 2016). However, as Gremmo and Riley (1995, p. 160) indicated, "no technology has ever in itself helped anyone learn anything." To make use of the affordances technology offers, learners need to have the capacity to manage their learning using technology, and they are supposed to make informed decisions about the resources they use. Thus, autonomy and SDL have become critical abilities for the learners of this digital age. Especially with the COVID-19 pandemic (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021), the importance of SDL has been reaffirmed, and self-direction has turned out to be a must in learners' lives.

1.1.2. Status of English in Türkiye

Over the past few decades, English, as a lingua franca, has become increasingly prevalent in everyday and professional life in Türkiye for various reasons. First and foremost, Türkiye is a large country that is often referred to as a bridge, physically and culturally, between Europe and Asia. Türkiye's geographical location in close proximity to the Middle East, Northern Africa, and Russia gives the country a geopolitically and strategically significant role in the international arena (Selvi, 2011). Second, being the

18th largest economy in the world (TWB, 2023), Türkiye has become a major participant in international business, especially since the 1980s with the establishment of neoliberal policies in Türkiye. To maintain international communication and business, English has become a prerequisite to have a high-paying and prestigious job in the job market (Di Paolo & Tansel, 2015). Contributing 11 % to the country's GDP, the tourism sector in Türkiye is also a vital component of the economy. Türkiye is a popular touristic destination thanks to its deep-rooted cultural and historical heritage and seaside resorts along its Aegean and Mediterranean Sea coasts. Recently, health tourism has also become a growing market as Türkiye has become famous for its relatively affordable but high-quality plastic surgery and hair transplants (Gür-Omay & Cengiz, 2013). Türkiye's interaction and involvement in international politics, business, and tourism have fostered a yet increasing prevalence of English.

Like in many other English as a foreign language (EFL) countries, English is associated with prestige, high educational background, high status, and sophistication in Türkiye (Arik, 2020). Various studies showed that Turkish people have positive attitudes toward English, and many students and adults are motivated to learn English for instrumental gains (Eraldemir Tuyan & Serindag, 2019; Genç & Aydın, 2017; Kızıltepe, 2000). However, Türkiye is a demographically, culturally, economically, and politically diverse country. People hold diverse perceptions of English depending on their age and educational, geographical, professional, and political backgrounds, which influence their achievement in English as well (Arik, 2020). Over the last three decades, many radical reforms in English language teaching policies and rigorous investments have been made in language education to enhance students' English proficiency levels (Kirkgoz, 2007). However, the sociopolitical and economic policies since the 1980s have created immense inequalities in education in Türkiye (Rutz & Balkan, 2015). Particularly focusing on the status of English in Türkiye and investigating language education in public and private schools over different levels of education (i.e., primary, secondary, higher education), Doğançay-Aktuna and Kılzıltepe (2005) underlined the "great disparity between the quality and quantity of English language teaching that different strata of the society can have access to" (p. 262) and highlighted the role of socioeconomic status in English learning in Türkiye, which also aligns with the results of national (e.g., university entrance exam) and international exams (e.g., PISA) (Bellibaş, 2016).

According to the results of the EF English Proficiency Index (EPI) (2023), Türkiye is in the category of a low proficiency level in English and lags behind the

developed countries by being ranked 34 out of 35 European countries and 66 out of 113 countries. However, the disparities between regions and cities are visible when closely examined. Language learners from economically developed regions (i.e., Aegean, Marmara, Central Anatolia) and cities (e.g., Antalya, Ankara and İzmir) outperformed the ones from underdeveloped regions (i.e., Eastern Anatolia and Southeastern Anatolia) of Türkiye with a significant performance gap (EPI, 2023). Gumus and Atalmış (2012) also confirm the disparities between the regions and explain the situation in terms of such factors as average parental education and literacy, parental occupation, sibling size, access to educational resources and institutions, and physical infrastructure, which causes the unbalanced distribution of cultural, educational, and economic resources among those regions. Particularly, Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia mostly comprise rural settlements, and the students deal with adverse conditions, such as limited resources and insufficient educational initiatives due to constraining social, cultural, and economic conditions (Dinçer & Seferoğlu, 2020).

Similarly, the nationwide analysis of the British Council and TEPAV (2013) on English learning and teaching at Turkish state schools also indicated that students' English proficiency and their communicative language skills do not meet the norm and explained this result with low parental income, which directly affects not only on the quality of the school but also the possession of books at home, learners' access to technology, and their exposure to English. Thus, English learning in Türkiye is a privilege given to a particular stratum of Turkish society with higher socioeconomic status. This situation causes the social reproduction of inequalities through education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

According to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, social class is the foundation of the culture embodied in individuals and it is central in their relationship to education. Because some social class habituses comprise the recognized cultural capital by the school (i.e., the dominant culture), the individuals with this type of habitus are privileged in educational fields because they already possess the related combination of capitals (Harker, 1984). Thus, social class causes reproduction in education, leading to inequalities among students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Even though Bourdieu did not specifically address English language learning, his theory has been found to be applicable to second language acquisition (Block, 2012; 2014; Darvin & Norton, 2023; Vandrick, 2014).

1.1.3. Social Class and Self-directed Language Learning

Drawing on Bourdieu's social class concept, Block (2012) outlined the key dimensions of social class as property, wealth, occupation, place of residence, education, social networking, consumption patterns, symbolic behavior, and spatial relations. The construct of social class is an under-research construct in SLA research, and it "references a set social practices, and questions of access and agency are foregrounded" (Butler, Sayer, & Huang, 2018, p. 2). Block's (2012) prominent work invited SLA researchers to investigate the critical place of social class to "understand how and why learners orient to and engage with second language learning processes in the ways that they do" (p. 195). In 2018, System published a special issue named "Social Class/Socioeconomic Status and Young Learners of English as a Global Language" and the findings from different contexts all over the world showed how relevant it is in the field of language learning and contributed to the limited knowledge providing future directions (e.g., Huang, Chang, & Niu, 2018; Kuchah, 2018; Murphy, 2018; Song, 2018). However, even though social class provides a more in-depth understanding of the socioeconomic background of the language learner, the concept of socioeconomic status (SES) measured through parental income, educational level, and occupation has attracted more attention in the previous literature. Recently, many other researchers attempted to investigate the role of SES in English language learning and found a positive correlation between SES and language learning achievement, language learning motivation, language learning strategies, SDLL, and technology use for language learning (e.g., Ghorbani & Golparvar, 2020; Huang et al., 2018; Iwaniec, 2020; Kormos & Kiddle, 2013; Lee & Lee, 2023; Shin & So, 2018).

For example, in a longitudinal study, Butler and Le (2018) confirmed the critical role of parents' income and educational level. The parents' SES affected their expectations and beliefs towards their children's success. While higher SES parents believed in their children's potential to learn English and adjusted themselves according to the needs of the children by taking an autonomous parenting style, lower SES parents lowered their expectations over time. Because of the exam-driven education system in China leading to social stratification at schools, parents might have felt that their children have fewer learning opportunities at school. Moreover, because of their financial situation, it might be difficult for them to create opportunities outside the school, such as private tutoring or language schools. Another study by Huang and colleagues (2018) revealed that higher SES children have more exposure to English since early childhood

and through various experiences related to English, such as traveling abroad. Liu and Chiang (2019) revealed that students' English learning motivation is strongly related to their family background and reflects class-based privileges and marginalization which leads to educational inequality, particularly significant in student performance in English tests. Similarly, working on the motivation of learners, Iwaniec (2020) also highlighted SES and particularly the parental education level on the beliefs, behaviors, and values comprising learners' habitus even in a relatively well-developed European country, Poland, and added that school location is also a significant factor on learner motivation. However, school location is closely related to SES because well-educated parents generally live and work in urban areas rather than rural areas. Another factor about the rural/urban divide affecting learners' motivation could be the English learning opportunities of the regions, but this study does not give a detailed picture of the situation.

Two recent studies attempted to model the relationship between learners' socioeconomic background and language learning achievement in a CALL environment using SDLL as an overarching framework (Ghorbani & Golparvar, 2020; Lee & Lee, 2023). Because technology plays a significant role in enhancing access to the target language beyond the classroom and provides many SDL opportunities, learners have the freedom and choice to manifest their autonomy (Benson, 2011a; Lai, 2019; Reinders & Hubbard, 2013; Reinders & White, 2016). However, a recent scoping review on SDLL conducted by Morris and Rohs (2023) revealed that a significant number of learners lack digital literacy and need guidance to use digital technologies for their SDLL. Therefore, this situation underscores the crucial role of parents and teachers in providing technology support besides other support mechanisms to facilitate SDLL with technology (Işık & Balçikanli, 2020). In addition, Mustafa and colleagues (2019) emphasized that early childhood experiences play a crucial role in children's cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral skills which lay the foundation for SDLL. In an earlier study, Lai, Zhu, and Gong (2015) also revealed the role of parents in shaping learners' SDLL outside the classroom. Corroborating with the findings of an earlier meta-analysis by Scherer and Siddiq (2019) that digital literacy and learners' technology perceptions for learning are closely related and shaped by their SES, previous research revealed that those learners with higher SES are more privileged in SDLL with technology due to their higher digital literacy, more positive technology perception, better access to technological and non-technological language learning resources (Ghorbani & Golparvar, 2020; Lee & Lee, 2023).

Drawing on these two studies, among others, Zhang and Liu (2023) investigated the relationship between the learner background and informal digital learning of English (IDLE) beyond the classroom through a questionnaire of 1080 Chinese university EFL learners and an interview of 9 survey participants and attempted to provide a thorough and holistic view of language learning experiences. The socioeconomic background of the learners, considering the regions they come from, family income, access to digital devices, rural-urban divide, and support from others, was revealed as a significant factor shaping learners' IDLE practices. Besides socioeconomic background, the results showed that the variance in the practices of EFL learners can be explained by taking into consideration a variety of other factors, such as the learners' gender, university (key and ordinary), majors (English and non-English), ethnicity, L1, and proficiency level. Additionally, shedding light on the situatedness of IDLE, the qualitative findings further highlighted how learners of various dispositions and aspirations differentiated in their learning in specific settings. For example, studying at the same university, two interviewees, Grady, and Web, had different motivational orientations and imagined identities. Grady was a gamer and engaged in IDLE practices for fun while playing games within an international gamer community. Learning English through games was not his first and foremost aim but to use English as a communication tool. On the other hand, Web aimed to attend to M. Ed. and engaged in IDLE practices meticulously to be a member of the TESOL community. He invested a significant amount of time and effort to develop his speaking and writing skills in English. Given that, the researchers emphasized the investigation of individual learners' context of learning and imagined identities which was not the main focus of the paper and could be examined in relation to the learner's socioeconomic background or social class in a broader sense.

1.2. Significance of the study

This study aims to explore how self-directed language learners navigate their language learning beyond the classroom and how they utilize the affordances available to them, with a specific focus on the impact of their social class positioning. Social class influences learners' access to individual, social, technological, economic, cultural, and physical resources, and learners need to strategically coordinate those resources at hand to construct a language learning environment (Block, 2012; Murray, 2017; Palfreyman, 2014). Learners exert agency in their SDLL by engaging with different affordances

offered by their social and material contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). Moreover, one's individual life experiences, shaped by social class habitus and specific historical events like COVID-19 pandemic, play a significant role in learners' SDLL (Guo & Lee, 2023). On the other hand, any learning practice could also be in interaction with different learning or non-learning fields because the learners transfer what they acquire or accumulate in one setting to another (Murray, 2018). So, one's learning practices could result from an intersection of various factors and need to be examined across settings (Godwin-Jones, 2019; Murray, 2017; 2018). Given that, to profile language learners' learning practices and their learning context, it is essential to take a holistic approach to get an in-depth understanding of this complex phenomenon by taking social class into consideration.

However, the current focus of related research is mainly on the description of language learners' learning practices in isolation or in relation to a few variables, such as age and gender (Haidari et al., 2019), socioeconomic status (Ghorpani & Golpavar, 2020; Lee & Lee, 2023), and the use of self-access centers (Hsieh & Hsieh, 2019). For example, a significant amount of research has been invested in figuring out what technological resources the self-directed learners use for their learning or how frequently they use them for learning purposes (e.g., Dincer, 2020; Jurkovič, 2019; Kuznetsova & Soomro, 2019). However, this research domain calls for delving deeper into the analysis of this type of learning, which is still an uncharted terrain compared to in-class language learning (Chik, Aoki, & Smith, 2018; Lai, 2017; Reinders & Benson, 2017). With this aim in mind, this study makes a significant contribution to the research domain, which has sought to profile language learners' learning beyond the classroom (see Dincer & Işık, 2022; Lai & Gu, 2011; Lai, Hu, & Lyu, 2018, Xodabande, 2018).

Despite its significance in language learning, the social class of self-directed learners, a concept consisting of complex and dynamic components, has been an underrepresented learner factor in the previous literature on learning beyond the classroom (LBC). Only a limited number of studies have explicitly explored the connections between social class and language learning motivation and achievement (i.e., Diouani, 2023; Iwaniec, 2020). However, few studies specifically investigated its critical role in learning beyond the classroom which depends, to a great extent, on factors, such as learners' access to language learning affordances outside the classroom, their motivation, self-regulation skills, and self-efficacy among others (Ghorbani & Golparvar, 2020; Lee & Lee, 2023; Zhang & Liu, 2023). The previous research revealed a positive

correlation between learners' SES and the aforementioned factors affecting SDLL. In other words, higher SES learners tend to demonstrate higher levels of effort and self-efficacy, employ more efficient learning strategies, and exhibit mastery goal orientation (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013; Shin & So, 2018). However, some research findings acquired by mixed methods highlighted that the correlations might not reflect the complex nature of English learning as a foreign language, which is a complex site where a plethora of factors and conditions are intertwined dynamically, shaping language learning practices in the era of globalization and digitalization (Zhang & Liu, 2023).

Given that, putting the social class of the learners at the center of the investigation, this study contributes to the understanding of the nature of SDLL among learners with contrasting social positions who already achieved a certain proficiency level by self-directing their language learning due to various reasons, such as low-quality education at school, and interest in learning languages or online use of English. Despite the general tendency in the previous research measuring socioeconomic background as SES limiting to the concept to parental income, occupation, and educational level (e.g., Butler & Le, 2018; Huang et al, 2018), this study employs a theoretical perspective taking into account the micro and macro structures of the social context (Diouani, 2023; Sayer, 2018). Additionally, this study did not take self-directed language learners as a homogeneous group of learners as opposed to the mainstream SLA research, which has, to a great extent, relied on the mean score and assumed that the score represents the whole population. This line of research overlooks the diversity and idiosyncratic behaviors among the learners and the complexity and dynamism of the learning phenomenon by taking a reductionist approach (Chan, Dörnyei, & Henry, 2015; Dörnyei, 2014). Thus, as social scientists, it is necessary to examine learners as individuals and use a methodology appropriate for examining a multidimensional and dynamic learning system (Murray, 2017). Especially for language learning beyond the classroom in this digital age, "there is a great range of diversity- in environment, intentionality, interest, structure, duration" (Chik, 2018, p. 76). In line with this argument, this study adopted a case study design and yielded rich data from multiple overlapping resources to better understand this phenomenon within and across individual learners (Yin, 2003). Thus, this study is also methodologically significant for the research domain.

This study also sought to find out why learners engage in particular language learning practices. In other words, this study aims to find out the logic behind why learners learn in the way they currently do. To this end, Bourdieu's sociological

framework is proposed to interpret and conceptualize the learning practices with a holistic perspective. Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) "habitus", "capital", and "field" constructs were implemented to explore the individual and contextual factors and conditions that shape language learners' learning practices. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice and Block's prominent work on SLA in relation to social class, it examines the interplay between learners' different levels of capital possession (i.e., economic, cultural, and social capital) in their learning trajectories by carefully examining the key dimensions of social class defined by Block (2012). It emphasizes the vital role of class-inscribed habitus in diverse practices of self-directed English language learners beyond the classroom and addresses the inequalities among the actors of the linguistic competition within a Turkish context which is a culturally, economically, and politically diverse context. This sociological perspective provided a rigorous way to understand such a complex phenomenon of language learning and a fresh lens for the current literature. In other words, this study is significant with its sociological and epistemological lens for our current understanding of the nature of SDLL because this lens focuses both on the individual's understanding of and the social and cultural contexts of SDLL.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

1.3.1. Bourdieu's Theory of Practice and Social Class

Social class is a useful "thinking tool" to understand the social roots of self-directed English language learning beyond the classroom by questioning the inequalities among language learners with contrasting social positionings (Block, 2012). This study employs Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice and social class concept which combines Marx's class analysis rooted in economic relations and Weber's conception of social status built on property, prestige, and power (Block, 2012). Bourdieu built his theory of social class upon three important constructs which are *habitus, capital,* and *field*, which explained the social class as a combination of habitus and possession of the forms of capital in interaction with fields (Bourdieu, 1986).

Pierre Bourdieu is a sociologist whose main concern was to understand how people interact sociologically. As a product of his exhaustive theoretical and empirical work, Bourdieu's theory of practice is a theoretical model of social practice (Jenkins, 1992). To understand this theory, we need to first understand his epistemological critique of social research in which he argued against "the absurd opposition between individual

and society" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 31). Challenging the artificial dichotomy of subjectivism and objectivism in social sciences, Bourdieu (1977) viewed practice not only as a subjective act but a social one encompassing "social and cultural relations, systems and structures" (Beckman, 2015, p. 57). He claimed that social scientists should take into account the dialectical relationship between objective structures of the society and subjective meaning-making of the individual to understand the human practice fully. To this end, he introduced three constructs serving as a methodological and theoretical toolbox for understanding human practice: habitus, field, and capital. He provided a formulation of how human practices happen: [(Habitus)(Capital)]+Field=Practice (Bourdieu, 1984). As seen in the formulation, all three constructs act in an interdependent manner. A particular practice is structured due to the interaction between an individual's habitus and their accumulated capital within a particular field.

Field

Bourdieu (1998) defines a field as a "structured social space" rather than a physical space, such as education. "Each field has its own distinctive logic of practice" (Grenfell 2012, p. 68) and comprises particular rules and systems, shared beliefs, and social relationships. Fields are systems with power dynamics, and there is constant power inequivalence in any field. Each individual brings their own power to the field, which determines their social positioning in that specific field. People constantly make an effort to maximize their position and compete to gain access to the stakes or resources (i.e., capital) to take over the power, just like in a game field (Jenkins, 1992).

Individuals interact with various fields in their lives, and each field influences the individual to some degree. The field has the power to shape habitus and affects the way individuals accumulate capital. In other words, individuals constantly adopt to the requirements of the field as they struggle for power (Block, 2012). Thus, to understand individuals' practices, we should carefully examine the social spaces individuals are involved. Examining this space contributes to our understanding of how and why people do something in the way they do (Beckman, Apps, Bennett, & Lockyer, 2018).

Habitus

Bourdieu (1990) described habitus as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations" (p. 53). With

this definition, Bourdieu (1977) meant that habitus is the "history turned into nature", shaped by one's history or past experiences and shaping their present and possibly future practices as well (p. 78). Bourdieu (1977) argues that

> …in each of us, in varying proportions, there is part of yesterday's man; it is yesterday's man who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result. Yet we do not sense this man of the past, because he is inveterate in us; he makes up the unconscious part of ourselves." (p. 79)

Thus, we, as human beings, are not necessarily conscious of the history coded into our practices. As the internalized knowledge, habitus manifests as an individual's skills, proficiencies, and competencies. Therefore, one's linguistic competence and language learning practices are products of this internalized knowledge (Shin, 2014). It enables individuals to comprehend what is happening in their environment and to anticipate future events, thereby positioning them to achieve specific goals or purposes (Webb, 2012). In other words, habitus provides individuals with a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 76), where speakers develop an instinctive sense of how they may achieve social and economic gains through their linguistic and educational investments. In this sense, practices are not random; they are informed by a deep, often unconscious, understanding of the social world that has been built over time and shapes their thoughts, aspirations, perceptions, judgments, behaviors and interactions (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Bourdieu (1977) explains habitus as being "objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted" (p. 95) which indicates that habitus is a product of an individual's physical and social conditions, reflecting the social position in which it was formed. In other words, habitus is a manifestation of social class that influences how individuals perceive and engage with the world around them, and how they navigate the social and cultural contexts in which they are embedded. Thus, it is the embodiment of objective structures (e.g., social experiences, socioeconomic status, personal circumstances or professions) in individuals' subjective way of being and as a sum of dispositions, inclinations, tendencies, or propensities (Jourdain & Naulin, 2011; Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). Thus, the habitus is the underlying structure of social practices, and it shapes how individuals think, act, feel, speak, perceive the world, or even move their bodies.

Another characteristic of habitus is being "an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 95) which means that they are developed rather than innate. Thus, while habitus affects individuals' decisions or investments in the educational arena, it is continuously being shaped by the social world or the realities of the fields the learners interact with. Additionally, even though it might be understood as the product of one's history, it is also responsive to the present. With its evolving nature, habitus could be transformed. Habitus is something that is always evolving and with the impact of the social world, it could be transformed. Additionally, habitus can also be collective as well as individualistic (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). It is "a system of shared social dispositions and cognitive structures which generates perceptions, appreciations and actions" (Bourdieu 1988, p. 279). Thus, dispositions and tendencies that are owned individually can be shared by a group of people with a shared history or common conditions, which might lead to shared or common practices.

Capital

Capital is the resources individuals hold to be efficient and to take over the power within the fields they are involved in. An individual's "relative position in a field is dependent on his/her material and symbolic capital relative to other participants' symbolic capital" (Block, 2012, p. 192). The value of the capital differs across fields and is determined or recognized by the individuals in each field. Given that, capital is simply power that takes various forms, such as economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Economic capital, considered "at the root of all the other types of capital" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 24), refers to resources directly convertible to money and wealth. Economic capital may be institutionalized in the form of property rights. Cultural capital refers to educational qualifications, knowledge, and skills. Existing in three forms, cultural capital in the embodied state is the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body (i.e., habitus); in the objectified state, the form of cultural goods and material objects, such as pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, and machines; and in the institutionalized state, academic qualifications and degrees. Social capital refers to the ownership of social networks and connections. Symbolic capital, on the other hand, encompasses any form of capital that is socially recognized and valued by the dominant class within a field, which is defined as a social arena where individuals compete against

each other by accumulating various forms of capital to take a better position (Bourdieu, 1986).

The notion of capital (1990) is the underlying reason for the power inequity among a group of people within a field. How people accumulate capital depends on the structure of the field, their positions among the people, and the habitus by which they have arrived in the field. Thus, habitus is one of the key concepts to examine when we seek to understand why people put so much effort and are motivated to maximize their capital, just like in the case of language learning.

Bourdieu's three notions provide a framework to examine and understand social class in a variety of settings because social class is a multidimensional and complex construct going beyond the traditional conceptualization of SES including only income, occupation, and education level. As Block (2012) indicated, there are other factors related to capital possession that constitute the construct of social class. These are listed as property (i.e.., material possessions, such as housing or electronic equipment), wealth (i.e., financial properties, such as money), occupation (i.e., type of work, such as blue-collar manual labor vs. white-collar knowledge-based labor, or service sector jobs vs. manual jobs), place of residence (i.e., the type of neighborhood, such as poor, working class, or middle class), education (i.e., the educational level attained), social networking (i.e., social relations with other people), consumption patterns (i.e., the types of brands people buy or consume, such as preferring healthy and organic food vs buying cheap products), symbolic behavior (i.e., bodily movements, clothing, the types of pastime activities, the way an individual speaks) and spatial relations (i.e., living conditions or spatial conditions, such as traveling abroad or possession of a bedroom) (Block, 2012). These factors have an intertwined relationship between them and the researchers should take a holistic perspective to classify people according to their social class. For example, one might have a high income thanks to manual work even though they did not attain a high level of education. A careful examination of capital possessions is needed while deciding on an individual's social position (Block, 2012).

Given the components of social class, a learner's social class is closely related to their educational life and their language learning practices. For example, some children start language learning more prepared or more privileged than others, thanks to their social positioning. Children coming from households where educated parents with linguistic capital consume online English content or speak English in their daily lives can be exposed to English from the early phases of their lives (Butler & Le, 2018). In this

case, their habitus gives them the feeling that they are supposed to learn English sooner or later in their lives. Another child might have received English instruction before they attended English classes at school because the family has the kind of cultural capital prioritized at school and sent their children to private language courses or instructed their kids themselves. On the other hand, a child coming from a lower-class family with lower-educated parents and low cultural and social capital might have access to English at later ages as long as the school provides them with an English education (Liu & Darvin, 2024). Thus, there can be great disparities between children coming from higher-class and lower-class households.

1.3.2. Language Learning Beyond the Classroom

Over the last three decades, many researchers in the field of applied linguistics and TESOL have shifted their focus toward language learning beyond the traditional classrooms (e.g., Benson & Reinders, 2011; Dizon, 2023; Lai, 2013, 2015, 2019; Lai & Gu, 2011; Lai & Zheng, 2018; Nguyen & Stracke 2021; Reinders & Benson, 2017; Reinders & White, 2017). This shift aligns with a broader recognition of the importance of SDL in the context of language acquisition. Thanks to the advancements of modern technology enabling learners to have greater accessibility and mobility, "today's learners are not as dependent on classroom-based learning and teaching as they used to be" as Richards (2009, p. 9) indicated while elaborating on the changing face of TESOL.

The widespread availability of the internet and mobile devices facilitates a rich, diverse array of online content that enables learners from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds to support their language learning and serves their language development (e.g., Godwin-Jones, 2018; Tao & Gao, 2022; Tao, Xu & Gao, 2024). For example, learners can be exposed to authentic language use in real-time contexts, which is essential for developing pragmatic and communicative competence (Godwin-Jones, 2018). They engage in blended learning environments, where formal and informal learning contexts intersect (Nguyen & Stracke, 2021). Extending their classroom learning, learners can keep learning outside the classroom and personalize their learning by meeting their individual learning needs which might not be addressed in the classroom. Moreover, learners can use a range of mobile apps, social media, and digital games for their learning and support the development of language skills interactively. Particularly, social media platforms and online communities can play a significant role for learners to

engage in language practice and cultural exchange (Chik, 2014; Lai, 2015a; Nguyen & Stracke, 2021). Learners can participate in those affinity spaces where they interact with native speakers and other learners, share resources, and receive feedback, which fosters a sense of community and collaborative learning (Collins & Halverson, 2010; Godwin-Jones, 2020). These interactions not only enhance linguistic skills but also contribute to intercultural competence, which is increasingly important in our globalized world (Byram, 2021).

The landscape of language learning has been significantly transformed, and there is an increasing emphasis on learning beyond traditional classrooms. Recent research suggests that successful language learners are the ones who keep learning outside the classroom (Inayati, Sanjani, Jayanti, Gao, & Nguyen, 2024). Referring to the significance of learning beyond the classroom, Benson (2011b) proposed a comprehensive framework covering the aspects of language learning beyond the classroom. It offers a comprehensive perspective on how language learning can occur outside formal educational settings. This framework is essential for understanding the diversity of SDLL practices among learners. He proposed four distinct dimensions to analyze learning beyond the classroom with a holistic perspective: location, formality, pedagogy, and locus of control. The first dimension, location, refers to the place and time of the learning, which can take place inside or outside the classroom or in a self-access center. The second dimension, formality, is related to the qualifications and the degree learning practices structured by educational institutions. The third dimension, pedagogy, refers to the degree of teaching involved and the educational processes that take place. The last dimension, locus of control, refers to the degree of control perceived by the learner on their learning or the control of others on the learners' learning. However, Reinders & Benson (2017) argued that this framework is still a rudimentary one and in need of further investigation. They addressed potential dimensions to add to this framework, such as "MEDIATION, or the resources used in learning (teaching and learning materials, authentic texts, technologies, etc.); SOCIALITY, or the social relationships and networks involved in the learning process; MODALITY, or the learning practices engaged in (e.g., language study, or language use: reading, listening, spoken or written interaction); and a LINGUISTIC dimension, concerned with the language skills and levels of language competence involved in LBC." (p. 563).

In terms of pedagogy involved in the LBC, Benson (2011b) identified three distinct learner practices outside the classroom: self-instructed, self-directed naturalistic,

and naturalistic. Self-instructed learning and naturalistic learning represented two ends of a pedagogical continuum. Self-instructive learning involves deliberate efforts by learners to improve their language skills through structured activities and resources. This type of learning is characterized by the use of language learning materials designed for language development, such as textbooks, language learning software, online language courses, and other educational resources. In this learning, learners have a concrete learning agenda behind their learning practices by following a planned schedule or a plan to achieve specific learning goals. Most importantly, they actively seek out and engage with learning opportunities aligned with their learning objectives. On the other end of the continuum, naturalistic learning occurs in more informal and unstructured contexts. This type of learning is characterized by engagement in real-life activities in everyday situations, such as social interactions, work environments, or leisure activities. Learning occurs incidentally as a byproduct of the engagement with those mentioned activities. However, the learner has no intention to learn the language while doing these activities which means low pedagogic intentionality as opposed to self-instruction. Between the two ends of this continuum, there are also language learning practices described as self-directed naturalistic learning in which learners actively seek out and engage in real-life activities where the target language is used, with the specific intention of improving their language skills. This learning approach involves real-life activities and interaction with a level of the intentionality of learning and self-direction. For example, learners might choose to watch movies, listen to music, participate in social events, or engage in online communities with the specific goal of enhancing their language skills. This approach seamlessly integrates language learning with everyday activities. Learners might practice the language while shopping, traveling, or socializing, thereby reinforcing their skills in practical, real-world contexts. Benson's (2011b) framework highlights that learners often navigate between these two modes of learning, depending on various factors, such as their goals, resources, and contexts. The continuum acknowledges the fluid and dynamic nature of language learning beyond the classroom.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

Bourdieu's theory of practice is a well-suited theory to explain why language learners engage in particular SDLL practices. For example, the learner might have the motivation to learn or have the agency to exercise autonomy as a part of their habitus;

however, the social and cultural structures give the room for exercising their agency. On the other hand, the context might require the learner to be more self-directed to survive in an education system. Zeng (2018) is a good example of how the theory of practice can be used to explain language learning practices. The study showed that learners engaged in exam-oriented language learning practices outside of the classroom due to the exam-oriented education in China. Because the instruction at school was not adequate to be successful in the exam, they had to study beyond the classroom to maximize their position in the education field. Another example could be inferred from the discourses of digitalization in education. Despite the discourse of equal access to educational digital resources, the competition at the global scale has turned to be more competitive and it has become a must for learners to acquire the required skills for life-long learning (i.e., self-directedness) to survive in this global system or they would fail at the end (Eynon & Malmberg, 2021). Thus, research focusing just on agency or self-directedness as an individual attribute and neglecting the social structure and conditions is doomed to fail to reflect reality.

Taking a holistic approach to examining micro and macro structures of society, Diouani (2023) investigated the interplay between social class and English language learning drawing on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. The study revealed that EFL learners' motivation was partly influenced by their objectified cultural capital (i.e., their access to language learning materials and other material learning objects), their proficiency was explained by their investment in learning, shaped by their digital technology access and learner agency. Additionally, the digital language learning practices of language learners have the potential to transform their lives and regardless of their social class, the use of technology fosters their language learning. Even the language learners with disadvantaging conditions, such as low parental education and poor living conditions, their access to technological devices, Wi-Fi, and study desk transformed their language learning practices. They managed to achieve a high proficiency level in the target language.

Taking Benson's (2011b) framework into consideration, language learning practices initiated by the learners themselves beyond the classroom will be investigated across varying academic and social contexts in this current study. Rather than narrating the individual practices with reference to each dimension, the conditions underlying the situatedness or diversity of these practices will be examined by drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) theory of practices, which comprises "habitus, capital, and field" concepts. By

using the formulation of Bourdieu as a “thinking tool” in this study, self-directed language learners’ learning practices are conceptualized as social human practices produced by learners’ habitus and their accumulated capital in interaction with education and other fields. This study intends to conceptualize the individual, physical, and social dimensions of practice and context. Thus, this study will attempt to examine these practices by focusing on the subjective reality of the individuals in interaction with the objective structures of the social and cultural milieu the individuals live in. In other words, this study will view self-directed learners as persons in context and also context inscribed in persons and examine their practices with such a Bordieuan perspective. Given that this research project addresses the following research questions:

1. How do self-directed language learners learn English beyond the classroom?
2. What factors or interactions of factors seem to account for the different learning trajectories and practices, particularly those that demonstrate contrasts?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature elaborating on self-directed learning and learning beyond the classroom (LBC). It presents previous research studies that are closely aligned with the scope and objectives of the current study. Following this review, the chapter delves into the various factors and conditions that influence LBC, which form a key aspect of this research. These factors are explored in two categories: individual factors and conditions, and social/contextual factors and conditions, offering a holistic view of what shapes learning beyond formal educational settings. This literature review contributes to identifying gaps or areas of focus that the current study aims to address.

2.1. Self-directed Learning

As a critical competence to adapt appropriately to our rapidly changing world (Morris, 2019), SDL refers to the learning process driven by the learners' initiative for their own learning, in which learners diagnose their learning needs, set their learning goals, identify their human and material resources, implement learning strategies, and monitor and evaluate their learning progress with or without asking for the help of others (Knowles, 1975). This foundation regards SDL as a learning process requiring learners to be autonomous and responsible for their own learning and a concrete reflection of human agency. At the same time, SDL does not occur in a social and contextual vacuum, but it depends highly on "a learner's sense of agency involving their belief systems, and the control parameters of motivation, affect, metacognitive/self-regulatory skills, as well as actual abilities and the affordances, actual and perceived, in specific settings" (Mercer, 2011, p. 435). Moreover, this type of learning has a collective feature in that learners are in interaction with others to collaborate, ask for help, or just get inspired across various settings (Morris, 2019). Therefore, despite the general tendency of the researchers to take this phenomenon as a property of the individual, self-directed learning is a sociocultural construct that happens within a social milieu regarding the possibilities and resources of the learner across different settings. In other words, it is constructed as a result of the

intertwined relationship between individual learners' agency and society at large (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001).

Self-direction is one of the most important competencies in the 21st century to develop through formal schooling from the early stages of life because SDL competence enables individuals to adapt to change, especially in this fast-developing and rapidly changing age of technology. In recent years, the world has experienced a sudden change in social contextual conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted the need to adapt to the changes that demand novel and fast responses (Morris & König, 2020). The European Commission (2018) also emphasized the crucial place of learning how to learn during children's formal education by indicating that "Individuals should be able to identify and set goals, motivate themselves, and develop resilience and confidence to pursue and succeed at learning throughout their lives" (p. 10). In this respect, learners should enter adulthood with SDL competence.

As in other educational research domains, the language learning literature has placed a strong emphasis on the place of SDL (Cheng & Lee, 2018; Haidari, Yelken, & Akay, 2019; Lai, 2019) and found that there is a positive relationship between self-direction and academic success (Dincer, 2020; Ozer & Yükselir, 2021; Şakrak-Ekin & Balçıkanlı, 2019). Self-directedness is considered one of the predictors of successful language learning (Işık & Dincer, 2021). Despite its significance, SDLL beyond the classroom is still an underrepresented field of inquiry when compared to the investigation of in-class learning. The reason behind that could be its complex and hard to observe nature (Reinders & Benson, 2017).

2.2. Learning Beyond the Classroom

Benson's (2011b) framework of LBC inspired a wide array of empirical studies across various contexts and considerable research has focused on learners' qualities and their practices outside the classroom to understand the nature of this type of learning (e.g., Cheng & Lee, 2018; Hiromi, 2021; Lai, 2015a; 2015b; Lai, Wang, Li, & Hu, 2016). This body of LBC research can be divided into two subareas (Guo & Lee, 2023): (a) LBC offline and online, which includes Informal Language Learning, Extramural English, Recreational Language Learning and SDLL (e.g., Chik & Ho, 2017; Dressman & Sadler, 2020; Kocatepe, 2017; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016) and (b) LBC online, which encompasses Online Informal Learning of English (OILE), Informal Digital Learning of

English (IDLE); Out-of-class Autonomous Language Learning with Technology; CALL in the digital wilds (e.g., Sockett 2014; Lai, 2017; Lai & Gu, 2011; Lee & Xie, 2023; Sauro & Zourou, 2019; Zhang & Liu, 2023). The former area of research focuses on both online and offline learning environments with or without deliberate intention of learning, while the latter focuses exclusively on language learning in online environments.

Several empirical studies of LBC are worth noting here. Chun Lai has made significant contributions to the understanding of SDLL beyond the classroom, particularly focusing on the role of technology over two decades. One of the prominent studies in this field by her was Lai and Gu (2011), which investigated university students' use of technology outside the classroom to self-direct their language learning in Hong Kong and revealed that these language learners were actively engaged in the use of technology. Particularly, the study findings shed light on the diversity of technology use among the learners and in the aspects of language. More importantly, it figured out the factors that influenced their strategic use of technology in language learning, such as their digital literacy, autonomy level to use those useful technologies, intercultural competence, and learning beliefs.

Similar to Lai and Gu (2011), Şahin-Kızıl and Savran (2016) intended to explore the nature of SDLL with technology in a Turkish context and underlined the significance of autonomy in SDLL. The study findings showed that learners actively used technological tools to self-direct their language learning and highlighted the diversity in the use of technology in different aspects of their learning, such as for goal commitment, affective regulation, and resource regulation. Another important finding of the study is that language learners had less positive perceptions of using technology in social learning activities, as evident in other studies as well (e.g., Lai et al., 2018). In their study, gender also played a role in SDLL with technology and female learners were revealed to be more inclined to use technology for their language learning beyond the classroom as opposed to similar studies (e.g., Çelik, Arkın, & Sabriler, 2012)

Investigating English learning practices inside and outside the class in a Vietnamese context, Nguyen and Starcke (2021) emphasized the diverse nature of language learning outside the classroom, which was more flexible and self-directed rather than carefully planned and teacher-led. In their self-directed learning beyond the classroom, the language learners proactively created learning opportunities by making use of real-life activities. For instance, they worked in part-time jobs requiring the use of English, participated in some social activities enabling them to be in contact with English-

speaking people, such as international volunteering projects or speaking clubs, and turned their interests and hobbies into learning practices, such as watching a movie, reading blogs or exchanging book reviews.

Also exploring the interplay between classroom-based and beyond-the-classroom language learning, Lai (2015a) focused on the affordances that these two contexts provide and the factors that mediate learners' engagement with these affordances. The analysis of interviews with 11 language learners revealed that the learners perceive and utilize opportunities in both settings to create integrated and effective language learning experiences. They did not view these contexts in isolation but rather as complementary to each other. Moreover, this study highlighted the dispositions and abilities of the learners, such as learning needs, learning beliefs, language proficiency, abilities to make use of the resources and learning historicity. More importantly, this study emphasized the multidimensional functions of learning beyond the classroom served in language learning, such as the development of intercultural competence, identity formation, sustained motivation, high learning efficacy, and the development of a sense of community. Learning beyond the classroom did not only result in linguistic outcomes but in long-lasting and sustainable learning with varying components.

In later years, Lai and colleagues (2018) sought to further explore the nature of SDLL with technology and figured out three distinct categories of technology use and their impact on SDLL: *instruction-oriented*, *entertainment- and information-oriented*, and *social-oriented* technological experiences. Benson's (2011b) categorization of SDLL in terms of pedagogy and Lai and colleagues' technology categorization are common in many aspects and those practices are prompted by various incentives, induce contrasting learner emotions and interaction behaviors, and are affected distinctively by numerous attitudinal and support variables, which is proving its being a sociocultural construct. For example, learners using technology for entertainment- and information-oriented experiences, as in the case of naturalistic learning, are mostly focusing on their personal daily needs and interests. Learners' practices are generally meaning-focused and interactive, which might lead to incidental learning and enhance their language fluency. On the other hand, instruction-oriented technological experiences, as in the case of self-instructed learning, are the use of technology to develop specific language skills. Language learners are seriously engaged in learning activities to develop their language skills in a self-instructive manner. Another technology experience detected by Lai and colleagues (2018), social-oriented technological experiences, are the ones "to connect

with native speakers of the language and to interact with others for the purpose of daily-life communication and social exchange" (p. 9). According to Benson's (2011b) framework, self-directed naturalistic and naturalistic learners can engage in these types of activities. Many learners create naturalistic learning situations as in the case of entertainment- and information-oriented technological experiences and use those situations as instances of language learning, which is called self-directed naturalistic learning. Learners focus on communication and entertainment and at the same time learn from these practices (Benson, 2011b).

Drawing on Benson's (2011b) framework, Kocatepe (2017) focused on SDLL practices of a group of tertiary-level female Emirati EFL learners. Collecting data with learner surveys, learner journals and semi-structured interviews, Kocatepe (2017) highlighted the crucial role of language learning in the participants' lives. With varying degrees of learning intentionality, language learners engaged in SDLL practices, such as watching TV shows and movies, learning with curriculum-oriented material resources, interacting with people in English across different settings, using the Internet for audio/video resources, and reading novels, graded readers, blogs and other digital texts. Many learners believed that integrating everyday life activities with their language learning was beneficial for their language development. While enjoying a leisure activity, it was possible for the learners to turn this activity into a learning environment thanks to their access to technology and their digital literacy. This study also highlighted that self-direction or autonomy was not a fixed attribute but a flexible and complex one. Each student moved along the continuum of SDLL and they engaged with different resources and adopted different identities across different times and spaces.

Another study at the tertiary level was by Hsieh and Hsieh (2019), which investigated SDLL in relation to the use of a self-access center (SAC) in Taiwan. This study offered insights into our understanding of the dynamics of SDLL among English language learners and underlined the role of teacher support, availability of resources, and motivation in terms of the learners' exercise of autonomy. In helping learners navigate their SDL paths, teacher guidance was crucial for learners to develop and sustain their autonomy. On the other hand, Hsieh and Hsieh (2019) underscored the importance of providing adequate and diverse learning materials and tools to support SDLL. Another significant finding was that the school curriculum and academic requirements played a significant role in motivating learners to continue their language learning outside the classroom, which highlights the importance of policies of language institutions in SDLL.

The last key finding was the seamless extension of in-class learning into SAC activities. This bridging of formal classroom instruction and SDL in the SAC highlighted the interconnected nature of these learning environments. It showed that learners who were motivated in class carried that motivation into their out-of-class learning activities.

Drawing on earlier studies that explored the nature of SDLL with technology in a more general sense, recent studies have delved into the role of specific apps and online platforms, such as social media, online streaming platforms, and online communities in facilitating SDLL (e.g., Black, 2005; Hamat & Hassan, 2019; Hiromi, 2021; Isbell, 2018; Sauro, 2019; Wang & Chen, 2020) due to the increasing amount of content and appealing opportunities via those apps and platforms (Reinders, Lai, & Sundqvist, 2022; Sockett, 2014). These studies provide detailed insights into how individual technologies are leveraged by language learners to enhance their learning experiences.

For example, Wang and Chen (2020) explored how language learners used YouTube for their SDLL as "an important source of information and entertainment for the young generation these days" (p. 11). Their study uncovered various ways in which learners utilized YouTube for English language learning and emphasized the platform's dual role in education and entertainment. Some learners actively used YouTube to access English teaching videos. Other learners focused on content related to their interests and hobbies, such as music videos, vlogs, and tutorials. This type of content contributed to their English learning motivation by creating meaningful and enjoyable contexts for language use. Moreover, in this study, YouTube was found to be a platform where learners can learn about other cultures and increase their cultural awareness. The study showed that while watching YouTube videos, most learners did not engage in active practices, such as taking notes or leaving comments. This study provided insights into the nature of language learning practices done on this platform and is important for our understanding of the role of YouTube in SDLL of English learners because platforms like YouTube can effectively combine entertainment with education, providing learners with enjoyable yet educational content which can result in increased motivation to learn English.

In another study focusing on learning a foreign language on YouTube, Hiromi (2021) offered insights into the use of YouTube as a personalized learning space and a self-instruction tool. The focal participant utilized this platform to pass a high-stakes Korean exam and exerted agency across different stages of a language learning process to create and restructure her contextual conditions. For example, she used the language

experts on YouTube to overcome her constraints like lacking a language teacher or access to native speakers in her learning process. She used this platform effectively in line with learning goals and needs thanks to her digital literacy in her SDLL. This study emphasized the role of agency, digital literacy, and metacognitive abilities, such as identifying learning needs, setting goals, planning learning, and using learning strategies in one's learning.

2.3. Factors and Conditions Affecting LBC

Recent systematic and scoping reviews have identified an array of factors and variables affecting and shaping language learners' engagement with English beyond the classroom and detected the gaps in the LBC research as well as future research directions (e.g., Chong & Reinders, 2022; Dizon, 2023; Godwin-Jones, 2020; Guo & Lee, 2023; Inayati et al., 2024; Soyoof, Reynolds, Vazquez-Calvo, & McLay, 2023). Most previous studies have concentrated on individual-level factors, such as age, gender, personality, and perceptual, attitudinal, and affective factors. A significant amount of research has also examined the classroom environment, particularly how teachers and peers impact LBC. Another strand of research was related to the use of social media, online communities, and online platforms shaping their LBC. The literature also addresses broader environmental, social, and contextual factors like family background, living conditions, cultural norms, educational policies, and learners' life histories and experiences. This section reviews the factors and conditions influencing SDLL practices by highlighting the complexity and situatedness of the LBC.

2.3.1. Individual Factors and Conditions

2.3.1.1. Demographic Variables

Demographic variables, such as age and gender, have been identified as potential variables that could affect LBC and learners' SDLL practices in online and offline spaces. Researchers investigated the relationship between age and learners' SDLL (e.g., Chik, 2014; Lamb & Arisandy, 2020; Lyrigkou, 2019). For instance, while younger people engaged in more social and recreational technological activities (Lamb & Arisandy, 2020), older learners demonstrated a higher motivation and more positive perception of using technology (Lee, Yeung, & Ip, 2017). Rezai and colleagues (2024) also suggested

that the learners' age plays a vital role in their selection of technology and their perception of SDLL. For example, while younger learners are attracted to informal digital learning of English resources for their language learning, older learners expect to self-direct language learning in a more structured and conventional manner.

Research findings related to gender produced conflicting results. Two studies in the Turkish context (Ozer & Yükselir, 2023; Şahrak-Ekin & Balçıkanlı, 2019) suggested that gender plays a role in the exercise of learner autonomy and females engage in SDLL more than male students due to such potential reasons as differences in physical and emotional maturity, and cultural values giving more responsibilities to females. As opposed to the two studies, Kırmızı and Kıraç (2018) found that males exhibit higher readiness for SDLL. Green and Oxford (1995) indicated that female learners use more learning strategies that might result in more success in language learning. Varol and Yılmaz (2010) also put forward that female learners are more open to trying new things and doing their homework, which affects their more successful SDLL. Moreover, Sundqvist and Sylven (2014) found differences between girls' and boys' gaming preferences, which also impacted their SDLL with technology practices. However, Haidari and colleagues (2019) revealed that gender and age did not have an impact on language learners' SDLL beyond the classroom. Additionally, Bıyıklı (2023) found that gender did not have a significant effect on English language achievement.

2.3.1.2. Personality

A wide range of research in the field of LBC was conducted in relation to the personality of language learners including such variables as personal beliefs, interests, curiosity, locus of control, mindsets, and risk-taking (Guo & Lee, 2023; Rezai, Soyoof, & Reynolds, 2024). First of all, many studies showed that language learners actively create language learning opportunities based on their personal interests (Lai, Chen, Wang, & Qi, 2024; Nguyen & Stracke, 2021; Trinder, 2017; Vazquez-Calvo, Zhang, Pascual, & Cassany, 2019). By exploring language resources that match their interests and beliefs, English learners can become more engaged and motivated, which might result in enhanced learning outcomes (Rezai et al., 2024). For instance, Nguyen and Stracke (2021) revealed that English learners engage in various SDLL practices with technology centered around their interests and hobbies outside the classroom. In other words, the learners used technology for entertainment by watching movies, listening to music,

reading online magazines and newspapers, and for socialization by social networking, reading and writing blogs, and engaging in online forums. In this way, learners immersed themselves in online English-speaking communities and this naturalistic interaction with the English language created language learning opportunities for learners outside the classroom. Thus, learners' entertainment practices evolved into learning practices incidentally or intentionally.

Lai and colleagues (2024) conducted a recent research study and extended their scope by exploring the variety of learners' English learning practices using technology and examining the impact of two constructs: *interest* and *self-regulation*. Drawing on limited research into the construct of interest, the study defined interest as "interest in English learning (subject matter with personal interest) and interest in using English to pursue personal interest (the integration of subject matter with personal interest)" (Lai et al., p. 14). The findings highlighted that interest and self-regulation are prominent factors shaping language learners' SDLL practices with technology. Therefore, learners should be supported through pedagogical strategies that address both their self-regulation skills and personal interests simultaneously. Particularly, the study underscored the significance of personal interests, in addition to the subject matter interest and self-regulation, which are the two constructs more extensively researched in the previous research. Thus, the study suggested a nuanced approach to the investigation of the interplay of various sociocultural elements and settings related to learners' personal interests governed by curiosity, interest, and intrinsic motivation for self-development. Additionally, the researchers urged practitioners to incorporate learners' personal and professional interests in their teaching by raising their awareness of the potential connections.

Learner beliefs are defined as "the opinions and ideas that learners have about the task of learning a second/foreign language" (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2006, p. 1). According to Lai (2019), learner beliefs not only shape the learners' SDLL practices with technology but also influence the nature of learners' selective technology use and interaction with technological resources. The study findings showed that different belief dimensions influenced different aspects of learners' technological experiences. For example, their tolerance of ambiguity and long-term orientation affected their choice of technological resources, and the primacy of accuracy and sequential approach to language learning impacted their interaction with technological resources. Supporting and increasing learners' tolerance of ambiguity alone might enhance students' possibility to incorporate authentic language use experiences into SDLL but might not enhance the situation of

those who prioritize accuracy to turn authentic experiences into practice sessions. Thus, it is suggested by Lai (2019) that learners should be supported holistically by their teachers considering different dimensions of their learning beliefs. Additionally, this study also suggested that learner beliefs and their interaction with SDLL and technology use are shaped and mediated by a variety of factors and conditions, such as motivation, agency, learner interest, proficiency level, support in the technological experience, language use contexts and affordances of technological resources, which needs to be taken into consideration when teachers seek to foster their students' SDLL with technology.

Another factor found in the previous literature was the learners' curiosity, defined as a reaction to uncertainty and ambiguity (Morris, 2019). Curiosity to learn a foreign language, different cultures, and technological tools might lead to and shape learners' SDLL experiences in online and offline spaces (Chang et al., 2013; Genc & Aydın, 2017; Lai et al., 2024; Wu & Tarc, 2021). For example, a learner who is curious about foreign cultures has a higher likelihood to engage in using platforms, including an international community, to communicate with foreigners or watch English videos showing different cultures and lifestyles. In addition to curiosity, an individual's internal drive for self-improvement also might play as a significant motivational factor in their SDLL practices. SDL empowers learners to pursue their goals and individual interests in the process of self-improvement (Lai et al., 2024). To this end, individuals might invest in foreign language learning to gain cultural capital by utilizing their symbolic, material, and social resources in this procedure (Darvin & Norton, 2023; Lai et al., 2024; Zhang & Liu, 2023).

Some studies also showed that students with different learning mindsets, expectations, and beliefs had different attitudes toward SDLL practices (Kozar & Sweller, 2014; Lamb & Arisandy, 2020; Scholz & Schulze, 2017; Wrigglesworth & Harvor, 2018). For example, Lamb and Arisandry (2020) showed that young metropolitan Indonesians preferred entertainment-oriented and self- instruction-oriented activities rather than social-oriented activities using English online. This preference might stem from a belief that online social communication in English is awkward and even risky, and this belief led them to focus predominantly on receptive skills rather than actively working on their production skills. In another research study, Kozar and Sweller (2014) focused on a less commonly researched group of learners who took private language tutoring in Russia. Their findings showed that learners often sought private online tutors for specific purposes, such as work-related needs or preparation for examinations. A

particularly interesting finding was that those studying for an exam tended to describe their ideal teachers with such adjectives as “strict” and “demanding,” which reflects a desire for a highly structured and disciplined learning environment. On the other hand, those studying for work-related purposes expected a “result-providing” instructor, which indicates a focus on practical outcomes and efficiency in their learning process. These studies highlight how learners’ mindsets and goals shape both their choice of learning activities and their expectations from educational support.

2.3.1.3. Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is another factor found to be essential in learners’ SDLL with technology (Hiromi, 2021). It is defined as the ability to use digital tools “to generate, distribute, collect and administer information and communicate in real-time” (Reddy, Sharma, & Chaudhary, 2020, p. 65). Students with higher levels of digital literacy are better positioned to make use of digital technologies to enhance their foreign language learning, including English (Lai & Gu, 2011; Lai & Zheng, 2018, Rezai et al., 2024). Previous research has shown that students with advanced language skills and digital literacy are not only more aware of useful technological tools but also more proficient in employing them within integrated IDLE environments. Furthermore, these students are likely to demonstrate greater autonomy in their learning. Digital literacy empowers language learners to engage in effective SDLL (Hiromi, 2021; Lai et al., 2018). They can identify and choose the pace and style of their learning suitable for them by utilizing appropriate digital resources, such as language learning apps, online courses, and interactive platforms, to supplement their classroom learning (Lai & Zheng, 2018). These studies highlighted the importance of integrating digital literacy training into language education programs. By equipping students with the necessary digital skills, educators can enhance their students’ ability to leverage technology for their language learning.

2.3.1.4. Proficiency Level

Proficiency level is another key learner factor shaping learners’ SDLL, even though it has not been extensively explored in the literature, yet (Golonka et al., 2014; Lai, Zhu, & Gong, 2015; Zhang & Liu, 2023). Language learners with lower levels of proficiency level might often exhibit greater motivation to improve their English skills by engaging with language learning materials outside the classroom compared to their

higher-level counterparts. This is possibly due to a stronger perceived need to enhance their language capabilities to reach a desired level of competence. As learners' English proficiency increases, their SDLL practices tend to become less structured, particularly in contexts, such as learning English through gaming. For lower-proficiency learners, gaming might initially be a highly structured activity with a clear focus on improving language skills. However, as their proficiency grows, the explicit language learning aspect of gaming often diminishes. Instead, the gaming experience becomes more about enjoying the game itself, with language learning becoming a more incidental and less visible component of their interaction with English (Zhang & Liu, 2023). This finding could indicate that English learners with higher proficiency levels might integrate English into their daily lives or entertainment activities by using English as a tool for communication rather than the primary focus of their practices. In other words, for more proficient learners, English may be seamlessly woven into various aspects of their lives, demonstrating a more natural and holistic approach to LBC, which may reflect their comfort with the language due to their attained language level.

2.3.1.5. Learner Agency

Learners' SDLL practices are highly dependent on their sense of learner agency as well as other factors (Lyrigkou, 2019; Mercer, 2011; Palfreyman, 2014). Learner agency refers to individuals' socioculturally mediated capacity to take necessary actions often stemming from their ability to deliberate and make choices (Ahern, 2001; Huang & Benson, 2013). Duff (2012) further defines agency as the "ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals leading, potentially, to personal social transformation" (p. 417). Larsen-Freeman (2019) highlighted the developmental nature of agency by indicating that agency is not a capacity we possess but is "achieved by an individual, orienting to different affordances of social and material worlds" (p. 73).

Emphasizing the critical role of agency in LBC, Lyrigkou (2019) showed that the students lacked agency and tended to rely heavily on their teachers, even in their out-of-class learning activities, which negatively impacted their investment in their language learning. The possible reason behind the lack of agency and effort was attributed to the participants' young age, as they were teenagers. Additionally, this study also underlined the possible influence of the sociocultural environment of the context -Greece- where

society places great importance on the status of the teachers, which might have shaped learners' beliefs and perceptions of an ideal educational approach, in turn, shaped their SDLL outside the classroom. Overall, this study showed that agency is critical to make use of the affordances of technological tools effectively while learning outside the classroom, where learners need to self-direct their language learning practices by making decisions aligned with their needs and preferences. Learners need to exert their agency by choosing learning practices relevant to their learning goals, such as watching TV shows or movies to learn daily life expressions, listening to podcasts to improve their listening skills, or playing games in English.

Besides leveraging the affordances of a particular learning context, learner agency is also significant for our understanding of how learners navigate and overcome constraints within a given context. By focusing on agency, researchers can critically examine and question the dynamics of actual language learning and teaching situations (Huang, 2011). Several studies have shown how learner agency empowered individuals to overcome structural conditions that limit their opportunities to use and learn English in foreign language settings (e.g., Hiromi, 2021; Kocatepe, 2017). Hiromi (2021) emphasized the role of learner agency in overcoming human and material resource constraints in the context of learning Korean for an exam. Jass, the participant, demonstrated agency by seeking guidance on preparing for the Korean exam because she lacked knowledge of others in her immediate surroundings to ask for help. She utilized digital tools, particularly YouTube, to connect with the exam experts who shared their knowledge and resources for language learning. Moreover, to overcome the learning material limitations, she self-instructed herself with free online resources, especially YouTube videos. Through this self-directed effort, Jass effectively navigated the constraints of her learning context, accessing valuable information and support that would have otherwise been unavailable to her. Overall, the two aforementioned studies illustrate the critical importance of learner agency not only in making the most of available resources but also in finding innovative ways to overcome obstacles in challenging learning environments. They also show that learner agency is not just a property of the learner, but it emerges from the interactions of multiple factors, such as sociocultural environment, maturity, access to resources, and digital literacy (Hiromi, 2021; Lyrigkou, 2019).

2.3.1.6. Resilience

In close relation to learner agency, the resilience of learners might also play a significant role in SDLL beyond the classroom, even though it has not been a widely recognized factor in SDLL research. It is defined as an individual's capacity for positive adaptation to overcome recurring adversities like poverty (Chu et al., 2024; Çelik, 2017). In terms of language learning, resilient individuals are the ones who are "able to grapple with pressure and bounce back from setbacks in language learning practices." (Chu et al., 2024, p. 6). Kim, and associates (2018) explored 27 Korean learners' learning resilience in their EFL learning. The findings showed that learners' resilience is shaped by several components as emotional and academic support, emotional regulation, clear learning goals, and tenacity. For example, their families' emotional support and encouragement or their teachers' and peers' academic support influenced learners' resilience despite adverse conditions. Resilient learners had the capacity for emotional regulation, detected negative emotions, and managed them effectively to maintain high resilience levels. Additionally, they had clear learning goals and demonstrated tenacity, which is "the ability to continue learning even when demotivated or disappointed." (Kim et al., p. 62). Given that, resilience is closely related to learners' SDLL beyond the classroom, particularly in EFL contexts, where learners receive minimal supervision outside the classroom and are required to keep their language learning motivation high despite the demotivating conditions (Teimouri, Plonsky, & Tabandeh 2022).

In a recent study, Lee and Xie (2023) explored the notion of grit with other affective variables, such as L2 motivation, L2 enjoyment, and L2 anxiety in the context of IDLE. Similar to resilience, the notion of grit is composed of two sub-notions: "perseverance of effort," which is defined as "an ability to sustain long-term efforts despite adversity or setbacks," and consistency of interests designed as "the ability to sustain long-term interest in the face of challenges or failures" (pp. 555-556). This study revealed five distinct IDLE profiles, labeled as (1) Minimal, (2) Gaming-Entertainment, (3) Entertainment, (4) Maximal, and (5) Entertainment-socializing IDLE learners and four different IDLE activity types as "gaming-, entertainment-, English learning-, and socializing-oriented IDLE" (p. 561), which differed from the previous research classifying the IDLE practices into form-focused activities, receptive activities, and productive activities (e.g., Lee & Kim, 2014). The findings showed significant differences between the five IDLE groups and all affective variables. Compared to the

learners in profiles 1, 2, and 3, Maximal IDLE learners and Entertainment-socializing IDLE learners had vivid ideal selves, a higher sense of enjoyment, less anxiety, and demonstrated more grit. Even though this study contributed to our understanding of the nature of IDLE practices in relation to affective variables, it fails to provide a detailed description of resilience or in other words grit in learners' SDLL practices.

2.3.1.7. Motivation and Investment

Motivation has long been recognized as one of the key individual factors in language learning and teaching research. It is widely accepted that self-directed language learners are inherently motivated, as motivation is considered a prerequisite for independent learning (Huang & Benson, 2013). On the other hand, as Ushioda (2011) indicates, the act of exercising autonomy, such as in the case of SDLL, can further serve to enhance motivation. This creates a reciprocal relationship between motivation and SDLL, where each reinforces the other. In the literature, motivation, and investment are often seen as closely related constructs, though they serve different but complementary roles. While motivation focuses primarily on the internal processes of cognition and affect that drive learners, investment emphasizes the external social dynamics that influence language learning (Darvin & Norton, 2023). Therefore, while researchers dealing with motivation mainly aim to understand individual learner differences by examining cognitive and emotional factors, researchers dealing with investment explore the interplay between power, identity, and learning across various times and contexts.

Language learners invest in a foreign language because they aspire that this language will provide them with power in a material or symbolic form that might increase the value of their cultural capital and social power. This investment is motivated by the potential for better opportunities and better social positionings, whether in personal, professional, or academic realms (Darvin & Norton, 2023). Drawing on Duff's (2012) investment definition, which is "the degree to which people actively put symbolic, material and other resources into their language learning based on a kind of cost-benefit assessment, and in light of their desires and hopes" (p. 8), Wu (2017) explored the role of imagined identities of three language learners over a period of time. The findings showed that limited imagined identities, such as seeing themselves merely as good students within institutional settings, invested less in developing communicative language skills. These learners focused primarily on the language skills valued in their test-oriented learning

environments, which limited their broader language development. On the other hand, learners who later developed stronger imagined identities, such as becoming proficient English users or English teachers, invested more in a wider range of language learning activities both within and outside the classroom. For example, they worked on their listening and speaking skills to develop their communicative language skills. This study highlighted the complex and interconnected relationship between identity and investment, demonstrating how shifts in imagined identities can lead to deeper and more diverse engagement in language learning.

Unlike traditional achievement motivation theories, which primarily emphasize performance, engagement, and outcomes of choices made, contemporary motivation research recognizes motivation as dynamic and emergent. Motivation results from the complex interplay between internal, social, and contextual factors. This perspective frames motivation as value-driven and identity-oriented, closely linked to how learners perceive themselves and envision their future possibilities (Ushioda, 2011). In line with this, Dörnyei (2005, 2009) introduced the "L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS)", a conceptual framework that highlights the role of the ideal self, referring to the characteristics and aspirations learners wish to attain. This concept is akin to Norton's notion of imagined identities (Darvin & Norton, 2023). The difference Darvin and Norton (2019) signify is that "while the ideal self is linked to the learner's imagination of self as a proficient user of the L2, imagined identities refer to a wider range of identity options (e.g., as a citizen, as a professional, as a writer, etc.) that are part of different 'imagined communities'" (p. 5). Based on their imagined identities, language learners might invest in their language learning both within and beyond the classroom by engaging in SDLL practices.

Additionally, Dörnyei (2009) introduces the concept of "ought-to self," which encompasses the expectations placed on learners by significant social actors, such as parents or teachers. This construct could be a significant predictor of one's investment in foreign language learning as individuals often strive to meet these expectations (Liu, Zhang, & Zhang, 2024). L2MSS posits that when a learner's ideal or ought-to self is related to the target language, they are more motivated or invested to learn it due to their desire to bridge the gap between their present actual self and their envisioned future self they aspire to achieve.

Drawing on Dörnyei's (2009) L2MSS, Yetkin and Ekin (2018) investigated the impact of L2 selves on their language learning practices in a Turkish context. The findings

revealed that while learners' L2 ideal selves ranged from moderate to high, their ought-to selves were predominantly high, underscoring the influence of societal expectations regarding English learning in Türkiye. In other words, this finding suggests that the extrinsic factors suppressed their ideal L2 selves in terms of motivational orientations. In a more recent study, Liu, Zhang, and Zhang (2024) stressed the importance of vivid and elaborate L2 ideal self in self-directed English language learning, particularly through the use of digital tools. Additionally, they showed that the L2 ideal self is also closely related to foreign language enjoyment, which contributes to learners' proactive involvement in their SDLL and acts as a mediator between the L2 ideal self and SDLL.

2.3.2. Social / Contextual Factors and Conditions

2.3.2.1. Social Factors and Conditions

A significant number of studies focused on the relationship between in-class learning and out-of-class learning, with a particular focus on the role of teachers and peers as key social actors in fostering learner autonomy for SDLL (e.g., Lai et al., 2015; Liu & Chiang, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2022; Ohashi, 2018). Lai and colleagues (2015) underlined the significant impact of teachers' guidance and support in using technological tools and resources in students' SDLL with technology. In another study, emphasizing that teachers should adopt the role of facilitator in implementing effective strategies, Nguyen and colleagues (2022) recommended that they should leverage their pedagogical knowledge to foster autonomy in their students, which will result in SDLL and proposed some practical strategies for teachers that they can recommend resources for the students' out-of-class learning or incorporate these resources into their in-class instruction, serving as role models for students' SDLL practices. Alternatively, they might assign tasks that require the use of various physical or virtual resources outside the classroom.

Recognizing the critical role of teachers in supporting SDL, Ohashi (2018) found that students who received support from their teachers on how to self-direct their LBC with or without technological tools perceived the support as highly beneficial. In addition to the influence of teachers, this study also highlighted the place of peers in supporting learners' SDLL. Students reported that hearing and discussing their classmate's SDLL practices in the classroom as a part of the curriculum was effective in enhancing their own learning outside the classroom. Moreover, interaction with peers in English, whether

through conversations or collaborative activities, can significantly improve language learning outcomes (Rezai et al., 2024).

Focusing on social actors in SDLL, the literature has underscored the influential role of family members, including parents, siblings, and relatives, in learners' SDLL practices (e.g., Choi, Kang, Cho, & Sheo, 2019; Guo & Lee, 2023; Lai et al., 2015; Seo, 2021). For example, Lai and colleagues (2015) identified the main factor shaping learners' SDLL as parents. In this study, parents came from middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds, most of whom unsurprisingly emphasized the importance of learning English as a foreign language and carefully took control of the learners' SDLL outside the classroom. They influenced the learners' learning experience in several ways, such as sharing language learning strategies, studying together, monitoring learning practices, acting as teachers, acting as gatekeepers in their children's activity selection and arrangement, and providing various learning resources in collaboration with teachers. This study showed how parents could play a very active role in their children's out-of-class English learning. Similarly, Martin (2023) revealed that parents who place importance on learning a foreign language or have the experience of learning a foreign language can significantly boost their children's motivation to learn and guide them throughout their educational journey.

In addition, Coffey (2018) highlighted parental encouragement and modeling in learning languages noting that parents who actively support and demonstrate language learning can foster a positive attitude toward learning languages in their children. Similarly, Genç and Aydın (2017) underlined the importance of parental guidance in English language learning and suggested that learners' attitudes toward English learning can be shaped by parents' past experiences and knowledge of a foreign language. Iwaniec (2020) further stressed the role of the education level of parents on learners' language learning motivation. The study revealed that students with less-educated parents, particularly those from rural areas, often exhibited lower motivation for language learning compared to their peers with more educated parents living in urban areas. This suggests that the family's socioeconomic background might play a pivotal role in shaping learners' SDLL by affecting their motivation, attitudes toward, and perceptions of language learning. Two recent studies attempted to model the relationship between learners' socioeconomic background and language learning achievement in a CALL environment using SDLL as an overarching framework (Ghorbani & Golparvar, 2020; Lee & Lee, 2023). Both studies emphasized that those learners with higher SES are more privileged

in self-directing their language learning with technology due to their higher digital literacy, more positive technology perception, and better access to technological and non-technological language learning resources.

Even though the role of siblings and relatives has not been extensively explored in the literature, recent literature has emphasized the growing recognition of these social actors in shaping learners' language learning with technology outside the classroom (Guo & Lee, 2023; Rezai et al., 2024). For example, older siblings might act as mentors and role models in their digital literacy to use technology for learning activities (Darvin & Norton, 2016). Children may learn how to play digital games from their older siblings or relatives, such as cousins, which might result in engaging in language learning practices (Chik, 2014; 2018; Guo & Lee, 2023). They can also have access to technological devices at their relatives' homes when they do not have access to them in their own homes (Beckman, 2015). Some learners also reported that they chat or email their relatives abroad to practice their language skills (Lai et al., 2015).

In the world of digital and social media, while language learners interact with online language learning resources, they are also in contact with a diverse global community of English learners, teachers, and other individuals (Balakrishnan, Teoh, Pourshafie, & Liew 2017). They interact with them through various activities, including video conversation, telephone calls, chatting or emailing on such online platforms as social media, language learning apps and websites, forums, blogs, and others (Richards, 2015). These online encounters introduce learners to a network of social actors who significantly influence their SDLL practices (Isbell, 2018; Lee & Drajati, 2019; Persico, 2019). Interacting with those people provides learners with opportunities for authentic and meaningful language use and learners focus on communication and fluency over grammatical accuracy (Sockett, 2013). For example, in Sockett's (2013) study, some learners watched TV shows together with their online friends and then engaged in discussions about the content, which helped them acquire new vocabulary and expressions in a natural context. Another learner, thanks to her interaction with her Facebook friends, started integrating native speaker expression into her own spoken and written language, enhancing her linguistic proficiency. Another learner expressed that learning with friends on social media made the process of language learning more relaxed and reduced the pressure caused by language learning. These findings highlighted the crucial role of online social actors in SDLL in transforming and shaping their language learning practices.

2.3.2.2. Contextual Factors and Conditions

Going beyond the individual social actors having a direct influence on learners' SDLL practices, the literature has also recognized the importance of broader sociocultural factors in shaping learners' SDLL practices. These factors include the status of English as an international language, the pace of technological advancements, available infrastructure, the extent of technology adoption, cultural norms and beliefs, and the educational systems and policies of a society (Guo & Lee, 2023). For example, as a result of globalization and digitalization, language learners seek to develop what is known as an international posture, which is "a tendency to relate oneself to an international community rather than specific L2 groups" (Yashima, 2009, p. 145). Those individuals are interested in world affairs and other cultures, and they are willing to travel abroad and interact with others from diverse backgrounds. For these learners, motivation to study English is often driven by the aspiration to become global citizens and legitimate members of an international community (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013). In a more recent study, Zheng, Lu, and Ren (2019) expanded the concept of international posture by revealing that some self-directed language learners go beyond the idea of an English-only international community. Instead, they imagine themselves as members of a multilingual global community, where English is just one of many languages facilitating international communication. This perspective highlights the evolving nature of language learning in an increasingly interconnected world.

Lamb (2012) revealed that there was a significant motivational difference between students coming from rural and urban regions in terms of their language learning. For instance, learners from metropolitan and urban areas demonstrated more positive attitudes toward learning English outside of school and sought an international posture, probably because they had more contact with the outer world thanks to their greater access to the internet, international media, and opportunities to interact with people from different cultures. On the other hand, the individuals in rural areas demonstrated less of an international posture and had difficulty in envisioning themselves with a future English-speaking self. This disparity can be attributed to several factors. For example, this may be due to their fewer opportunities to engage with the global community, both digitally and in daily life resulting from inadequate technological infrastructure, lower levels of digital literacy, and infrequent use of digital tools. Another reason could be the status of English in rural contexts. The role of English proficiency in these contexts is often limited

because of minimal international interaction within their immediate environment. For example, in their recent study, Liu and Darvin (2024) recruited a participant, Andy, from a rural area in China who had access to English as a school subject in the 6th grade, which was a later age compared to his urban peers. Due to his lack of interaction with the global online communities, his exposure to English was just limited to classroom learning which was dominantly exam-oriented. His motivation to learn English was instrumental, far from an international posture, to be successful in the university entrance exam, and his practices focused on the language areas the exam prioritized, which immensely lacked communicative competence.

As Rezai and colleagues (2024) also showed a similar dynamic in the Iranian context, English is associated with economic and employment benefits. English proficiency is often considered a valuable skill for securing and advancing in careers, especially in fields like business, tourism, and academia. Thus, language learners pursue English language proficiency diligently to meet the demands of job requirements and the expectations of proficiency exams, which in turn shapes their language learning practices. This economic motivation underscores the instrumental value of English in non-English speaking regions, where language learning is not just an academic pursuit but a strategic move for career advancement.

As also evident in both studies above, exam-oriented language education policies prioritizing specific aspects of language learning, particularly language forms, such as grammar, have an impact on language learners' in-class learning as well as SDLL practices outside the classroom. The influence of the Chinese education system on out-of-class learning has been well documented in the literature (e.g., Butler & Le, 2018; Zhao, 2023). The research showed that methods like grammar translation and audio-lingual techniques dominate the curriculum. English classes in China frequently involve activities centered around grammar exercises, translation tasks, and filling out worksheets, which reflects a strong emphasis on mastering grammatical structures rather than fostering communicative competence (Lai et al., 2015). Similarly, in Türkiye, policies set by the Higher Education Institution and the Ministry of Education focus on preparing students for proficiency exams. English teaching in Türkiye often centers around grammar use, reading comprehension, and writing skills at the expense of speaking and listening abilities. This narrow focus has a significant impact on learners' autonomy and their SDLL practices which limit their opportunities to engage in more holistic and communicative language learning experiences outside the classroom (Cakici,

2017; Şakrak-Ekin & Balçıkanlı, 2019). Thus, the educational policies in a particular society could also be considered an important contextual factor in SDLL research, which was categorized as macro-system factors from an ecological perspective by Guo and Lee (2023). In other words, a society's sociocultural, political, historical, and economic realities need to be taken into consideration while seeking to understand the nature of SDLL practices outside the classroom (Iwaniec, 2020).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.0. Introduction

The design and methods of this study have been carefully considered to address the issues identified in the literature review. As discussed in Chapter Two, there is a need for empirical research that delves into the participants' SDLL practices by moving beyond mere description to achieve a deeper understanding related to the nature of these practices. To address this gap in the research, this study explored how language learners self-directed their English language outside the classroom across varying academic and social contexts. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice, this study intended to conceptualize the individual, physical, and social dimensions of practice and context. Bourdieu's theory of practice is an empirical as well as a theoretical tool and, therefore, essential to the method, as it informed all the decisions taken throughout the research study. This research project addressed the following research questions:

1. How do self-directed language learners learn English beyond the classroom?
2. What factors or interactions of factors seem to account for the different learning trajectories and practices, particularly those that demonstrate contrasts?

The study adopted a qualitative embedded case study design, involving nine self-directed language learners. This research design enabled me to reach rich descriptions of different data sources, examine the social and cultural conditions and factors influencing SDLL practices of the participants, and obtain a detailed, comprehensive interpretation of the data describing language learners' learning histories, life stories, school and family environments and their dispositions, tendencies, and aspirations.

This chapter outlines comprehensive details of the research design and methods, as guided by the theoretical framework. It begins with the paradigmatic orientation of the research, followed by the presentation of the research design, research setting, and a detailed description of each phase of the study including sampling and data collection.

Finally, the chapter discusses the data analysis methods, procedures to ensure the quality of the study, and the ethical considerations of the research.

3.1. Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is the philosophical positioning about the nature of research the researcher brings into the inquiry (Merriam, & Tisdell, 2016). It structures ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions (Creswell, 2014). All methodological decisions, including the research design, processes, data analysis, and, in turn, all the claims and inferences drawn from the data, should fit the adopted research paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). The dominant research paradigms in social sciences have been positivism/post-positivism and constructivism/social constructivism (Benson, 2013). A dichotomy of objectivism and subjectivism exists in social sciences (Lew, Yang, & Harklau, 2018). On the one hand, the objectivist perspective assumes that "there is only one, fixed, agreed upon reality, so research must strive to find a singular, universal 'truth'" (Croker, 2009, p. 6). The objectivist researchers aim to figure out regularities and causal relationships between a small number of variables. This line of research primarily uses quantitative approaches, which require measurement and empirical observation of behaviors to find out the objective reality (Creswell, 2014).

On the other hand, the subjectivist perspective views reality as existing in the minds of individuals and considers reality as varied and multiple (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In other words, knowledge is "necessarily highly subjective, mediated by the knower's prior experience and knowledge, by political and social status, by gender, by race, class, sexual orientation, nationality, by personal and cultural values, and by the knower's interpretation (construction) of the contextual surround" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 40). Thus, the research focuses on the interpretation of individuals' meaning construction within their social and historical contexts. Qualitative research approaches are mostly adopted to understand a phenomenon in its natural environment or to generate a theory based on the collected data (Creswell, 2014).

Bourdieu (1977) argues that there is an artificial divide between subjectivist and objectivist research views. While objectivists use subjective observation without informing it, subjectivists overlook the objective structures and conditions that shape how individuals construct meaning. The aim of social science should be "a science of the dialectic relations between the objective structures to which the objectivist mode of

knowledge gives access and the structured dispositions within which those structures are actualized, and which tend to reproduce them" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 3). Thus, the research aim should be to examine the complex relationships between agents and structures within a broader context (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). As such, we can better understand the relationship between the subjective meaning of individuals and objective structures within the field by making use of the assets of both strands of research. Guided by Bourdieu's sociological framing, this study employs a paradigmatic approach that incorporates both objectivist and subjectivist approaches to represent the practices and experiences of self-directed language learners considered a social group.

3.2. Research Design

The research domain of SDLL calls for investigating language learning beyond the classroom through an in-depth description and a holistic view of the research situation within its varied contexts. Taking account of the gap in the related literature, in this study, I aim to extend descriptions of how language learners learn beyond the classroom and explore why they learn in a particular way.

SDLL is a complex social phenomenon that researchers have been striving to explore for decades (Reinders & Benson, 2017). Especially for language learning beyond the classroom in this digital age, "there is a great range of diversity in environment, intentionality, interest, structure, duration" and so on (Chik, 2018, p. 76). Individual practices and contexts are interconnected, and it is hard to separate one variable from the others and figure out causal relationships (Murray, 2017; Palfreyman, 2014). Thus, it is essential to adopt a research design that considers a phenomenon under investigation as a body of networks and relationships and provides the researcher with a deep, holistic view of the research situation. The case study design allows for an extensive and in-depth investigation of a complex social phenomenon (Baskarada, 2014; Duff, 2020). This research design appears to be compatible with this study.

Yin (2003) defines a case study as a method for the investigation of "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13), and the researchers do not have any control over the research situation. In this study, I aim to explore the individuals' practices and experiences within their real-life situations and with consideration of contextual factors. To do that, I examined both objective structures and

subjective meaning the learners construct. The case study design provided a research space where both qualitative and quantitative methods can be adopted in line with the research objectives (Yin, 2003). Thus, we can safely argue that case study design can be employed in line with a Bordieuan research perspective which guides the current study.

To maximize our understanding of SDLL, I took the English language teaching (ELT) department as a bounded system and self-directed language learners among English majors as a unit of analysis. In this study, I focused on human cases' language learning experiences and processes within larger social structures, and my central concern was their learning trajectories, tendencies, attitudes, and social networks (Duff, 2020). At the very beginning of the data collection, my sampling strategy sought homogeneity in some respects, such as their ability to self-direct their language learning, majoring in an English department, and young adults. However, as Duff (2020) put it, the visible homogeneity of the case might show the researcher tremendous differences in the lives and experiences of this single group of learners. Thus, the researchers might attempt to understand the diversity in a single case. In this study, as opposed to the problematic tendency in the literature to take this group of learners as a homogenous and stable category, I intended to reveal the heterogenous structure of this group with reference to larger social structures (Duff, 2012). To this end, I employed an embedded single case study design considering multiple units or objects of analysis that focus on different aspects of the case in depth (Budiyanto, Prananto, & Tan, 2019; Yin, 2003). I intended to comprehensively understand the factors or interactions of factors that lead to diversity in the learning trajectories of self-directed language learners. Thus, through a thorough investigation of distinct subunits (i.e., nine participants), I aimed to provide a richer and more detailed analysis of the overall case (Budiyanto et al., 2019). Based on my previous research, I assumed that this case includes learners who vary considerably in their dispositions, practices, and experiences (Dincer & Işık, 2022). Thus, this study design enabled me to collect and analyze rich self-expressed narratives of language learning experiences of the participants to represent the diversity in this group of learners. Given that, I selected different profiles of self-directed language learners and conducted an in-depth examination of each profile.

3.3. Research Site and Sampling

As a researcher who is interested in autonomous language learners (Dincer & Işık, 2022; Işık, 2022; Işık & Dincer, 2021) and who works in an ELT department, I realized that there are many self-directed language learners among English majors who have invested a considerable amount of effort in English learning and have been able to manage their language learning process. They applied for this department because they have reached a relatively high level of English proficiency and intended to pursue a career within the field of English. While researching those self-directed language learners, I realized that they have different dispositions, skills, learning practices, and experiences even though they seem homogenous as a group of learners labeled as good language learners, autonomous language learners, or self-directed learners language learners in the literature. In our previous study with my colleague (Dincer & Işık, 2022), we attempted to categorize those learners according to their learning practices using a psychological perspective (i.e., the self-determination theory) based on Benson's (2011b) out-of-class language learning framework. However, we realized that even the learners positioned in the same category based on their motivational orientations showed different patterns of learning practices. Thus, in this study, I aimed to learn more about the underlying reasons for this variation by focusing on these learners' learning practices and narratives guided by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice.

Choosing a research site according to the conceptual and theoretical framework is important in qualitative sampling (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Considering the rationale behind this research idea, the research site was the ELT Department of one of the state universities in Eastern Türkiye. As widely known, tertiary-level institutions and departments may have class statuses (Vandrick, 2014). According to the statistics of the Council of Turkish Higher Education (CoHE), this university is placed towards the low end of the hierarchical continuum among the universities of Türkiye due to such probable reasons as its location and its relatively recent foundation in 2006 (see, CoHE Atlas, 2023a). The students in this ELT department generally have lower scores on university entrance exams than their peers in most other ELT departments (CoHE Atlas, 2023b). In Türkiye, the university entrance exam consists of two written tests and the overall scores from both tests are used to apply to the university. The first one aims to evaluate academic achievement in subjects, such as Mathematics, Turkish, Science, and Social Sciences. The second one is a written English proficiency exam consisting of multiple-choice

questions (CoHE Atlas, 2023c). However, due to the scoring system, unlike highly preferred ELT departments, there might be a diversity in the English proficiency levels of the students in this department. Particularly, there necessarily exists a group of high-achieving English language learners but low-achievers in other subjects, who are more advantageous in the English proficiency exam conducted by the ELT department evaluating their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills to start studying in the department. The new students who fail the exam receive a one-year language-intensive education in the foreign languages school of the university. The intensive language program creates opportunities for low-achieving students to develop their English language skills and broaden their learning strategies. In this study, there are participants who either passed the English proficiency test or studied in the intensive language program.

Besides the diversity in English proficiency levels, there exists a sociocultural and socioeconomic diversity in this research setting. Despite being more appealing to students from Eastern and Southeastern regions, this department receives students from all seven regions in Türkiye because of good career opportunities, which means a quite diverse profile of students in the department in terms of sociocultural and socioeconomic background. However, a significant limitation is that it is not necessarily possible to find a participant coming from a high-class position in the education faculties regardless of the university's hierarchical situation because teaching is considered a middle-class occupation, and people tend to ascend rather than descend the social class ladder (Hoadley & Ensor, 2009; Iannelli & Paterson, 2005). Thus, the students who choose to study in the education faculties primarily come from low- and middle-class family backgrounds (Eret-Orhan & Ok, 2014; Yurdakal, 2019).

In response to my research project call, 100 English majors in this department accepted participation and signed a confirmed consent form. Later, they filled out a learner background survey and wrote a language learning autobiography. I preferred to recruit preparatory, first, and second-year students because I wanted to study this group of learners as language learners rather than pre-service language teachers. The department offers English courses, such as writing, reading, listening, speaking, and grammar for preparatory and first-year students. Thus, students focus on language learning rather than how to teach a foreign language. In the second year, the students start taking teaching courses, such as English learning and teaching approaches and second language

acquisition. Because the second-year students (i.e., four participants) were still in the procedure of learning, I assumed that their data still reflected a learner's perspective.

Qualitative research focuses on gathering rich, detailed, multi-faceted information from a smaller number of participants. Instead of random sampling, purposive sampling is preferred to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation through the experiences, perspectives, and motivations of the participants in a study (Miles et al., 2014). I utilized a purposive sampling strategy in this study in line with my purpose to get an "in-depth understanding of specific cases: information-rich cases" (Patton, 2015, p. 53). To employ purposive sampling, the first thing the researchers do is to establish a criterion for participant selection. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain criterion-based selection as a process of deciding "what attributes of your sample are crucial to your study and then finding people or sites that meet those criteria" (p. 97). Thus, the criteria reflect the research aims, and the researcher can identify "information-rich cases" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 97).

In the first phase of the study, my criterion was to identify the self-directed language learners within the case who are motivated to learn English and have invested time, effort, and energy in learning English regardless of their formal education in school; who are able to take the responsibility of their learning; and who have the knowledge and skills related to managing their learning procedure, selecting learning materials, and making use of the affordances surrounding them in their own context. Given that, I attempted to reach out to information-rich cases to get an in-depth understanding of how self-directed language learners learn English outside of the classroom and what common characteristics they exhibit in their language learning practices. In this phase, I also intended to figure out what factors or interactions of factors seem to account for the different learning trajectories and practices, particularly those that demonstrate contrasts. This sampling procedure was investigative within the case to serve the best for the research questions. I meticulously worked on the sampling by talking to as many people as possible within the case, trying to understand the patterns among them by identifying similarities and contrasts, exceptions, and negative instances (Miles et al., 2014)

In the first phase of the study, taking an explanatory stance, I sought to conduct the participant selection procedure systematically and reach maximum variation in English language learner profiles. To this end, the sampling procedure required rigorous work with the employment of various types of data collection instruments, including a language learner background survey (N=100), a language learner autobiography (N=100),

and initial unstructured interviews based on prior data (*N*=43). The criteria for participant selection were based on the preliminary data analysis and previous literature. As Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) indicated, within-case sampling can be theoretically driven, as in this study, which was prespecified from the outset. To understand the construct or concept under investigation, we need to explore it in different settings, across different times, different instances of it with different people which helps to understand the conditions under which the construct or theory operates. Thus, drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice and Benson's out-of-class language learning framework, the sample consisted of participants differing in SDLL practices (i.e., self-instruction, self-directed naturalistic, naturalistic), their social class positionings, regions they come from (i.e., metropolitan, urban, and rural), levels of digital capital (low-, medium-, high-access to technology and different frequency of technology use) and gender.

In the study's second phase, I conducted semi-structured, photo-elicitation, and external informant interviews based on the prior data sources to reach an in-depth analysis of participants' English learning stories. I focused on nine purposefully chosen cases of self-directed language learners because "any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon" (Patton, 2015, p. 283). Given that, I would be able to provide a comprehensive picture of how self-directed language learners learn English beyond the classroom and what their shared language learning practices are. At the same time, I focused on the characteristics and conditions that caused the diversity within this group of participants and sought to figure out the reasons behind their idiosyncratic learning practices by making an in-depth comparison within each case and across similar and contrasting cases. With those aims in mind, I, as a qualitative researcher, was "interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing" (Merriam, 2009, p. 42). An overview of the sampling procedure is presented in Figure 1 below.

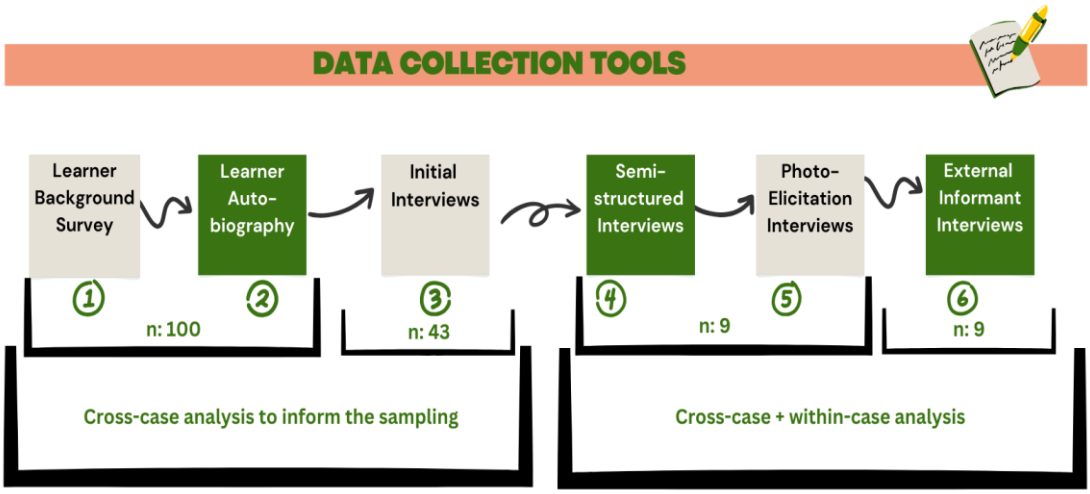

Figure 1. Data collection tools and data analysis

As can be seen in Figure 1, data collection, data analysis, and sampling were concurrent throughout the data collection procedure, as highly recommended by Miles and colleagues (2014) in their qualitative research sourcebook. Concurrent data collection and analysis helped me go back and forth in the existing data, see blind spots in the gathered data, revise my interview questions, collect more data, and decide on the cases I needed to include in my study in line with my research aim and questions.

3.4. Participants

The main purpose of this research study was to reach out to a variety of self-directed language learner profiles with diverse language learning practices and experiences. This approach aims to enhance the applicability of the study's findings across different contexts and situations (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, through a rigorous sampling procedure based on the analysis of a language learner survey, a learner autobiography, and initial unstructured interviews with the participants, nine self-directed language learners were chosen as the focal participants of this study. These participants were selected to illuminate the diverse SDLL practices influenced by the interplay of individual, physical, and social conditions (Lai, 2015a, 2015b, 2019; Lai et al., 2018; Nguyen & Starcke, 2021). Table 1 provides demographic information about the participants and Figure 2 provides a summary of the participants' profiles, highlighting the key aspects that led to their selection for this study, along with the provinces they come from, ranked according to the Socioeconomic Development Index by the Turkish Ministry of Industry and Technology (SEGE, 2017).

Table 1.

Demographic Information of the Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	City	Family Structure	Home Environment	Technology Access	Frequently used digital platform(s)
Sena	Female	31	İstanbul	M, F, S(2), GM	No private bedroom, private working space	Smartphone Laptop Tablet Wi-Fi	YouTube
Deniz	Male	21	Ağrı	M, F, S(4)	No private bedroom, private working space	Smartphone Laptop	Instagram YouTube
Hatice	Female	20	İstanbul-Kars	M, F, S(4)	Private bedroom, private working space	Smartphone Tablet Wi-Fi	YouTube
Nesrin	Female	19	Şanlıurfa	M, F, S(5)	No private bedroom, no private working space	Smartphone	Snapchat
Selin	Female	21	Samsun	M, F, S(2)	Private bedroom, private working space	Smartphone Laptop Tablet Wi-Fi	YouTube
Ali	Male	20	Kocaeli	M, F, S(1)	Private bedroom, private working space	Smartphone Laptop Wi-Fi	Instagram
Fatih	Male	19	Bursa	M, F	Private bedroom, private working space	Smartphone Laptop PC Wi-Fi	Reddit YouTube Discord
Kübra	Female	18	İstanbul	M, F, S(1)	Private bedroom, private working space	Smartphone Laptop Tablet Wi-Fi	Instagram
Emine	Female	19	Ordu	M, F, S(4)	Lived in a dormitory since high school	Smartphone Laptop Wi-Fi	Instagram Chat Apps

M=Mother; F=Father; S=Sibling; GM=Grandmother

In this study, there were five female and three male participants. At the time of the data collection, the participants' ages ranged from 18 to 31 years. They were at various stages of their studies in the ELT department: Hatice was in the preparatory class; Ali, Emre, Selin, Nesrin, and Kübra were first-year students; and Deniz, Sena, and Emine were second-year students. Kübra, Emine, and Fatih had successfully passed the English

proficiency exam on their first attempt, allowing them to progress directly into the ELT department. The others studied in the preparatory class and later started studying in the ELT department. The participants came from different social class positions, which were determined by the education level of their parents, their parents' financial situations, their social networking, symbolic behaviors, and the sociocultural activities they engaged in (Block, 2012). As seen in Figure 2 below, the provinces the participants come from ranged across different levels of SES (SEGE, 2017), which led to varying degrees of access to cultural, social, material, and symbolic resources.

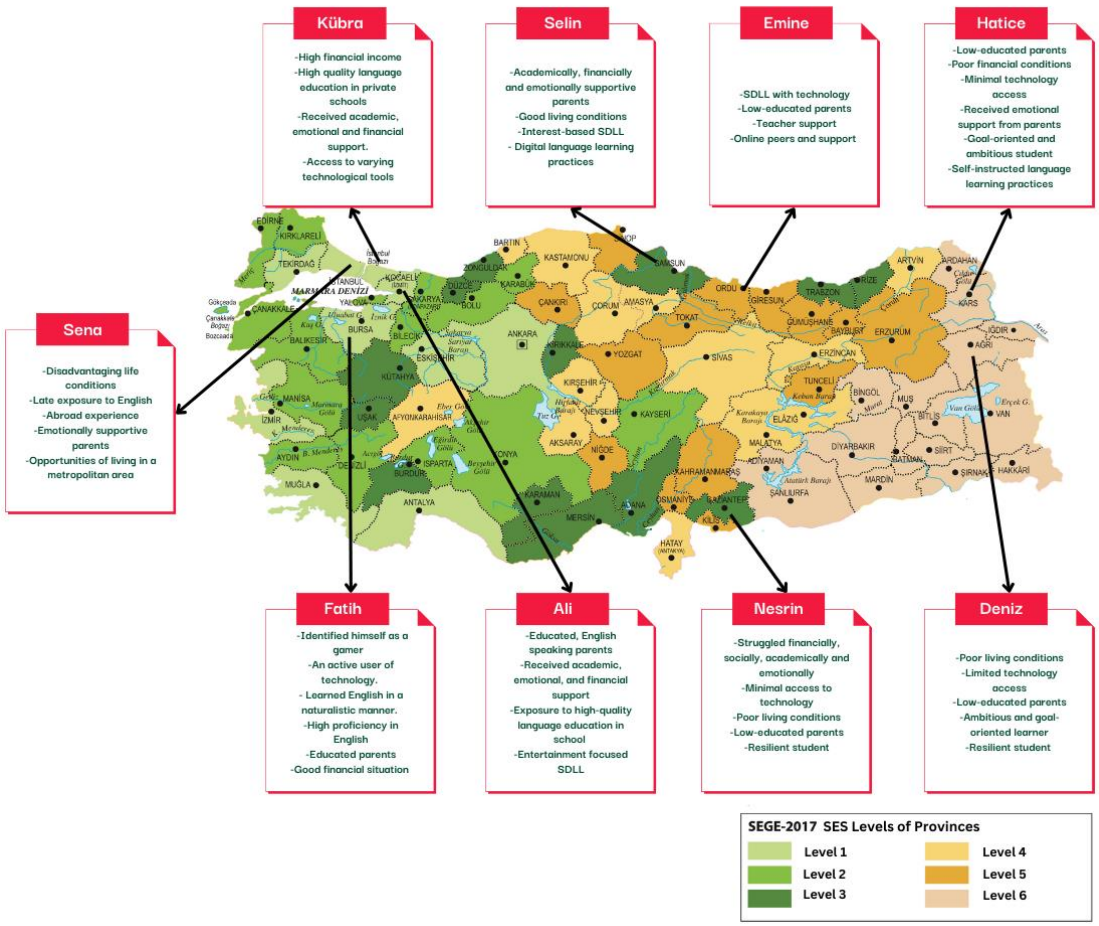

Figure 2. Summary of key aspects in the selection of participants

Based on their access to cultural, social, material, and symbolic resources, some participants were privileged in their education life and in their language learning process. For example, Kübra was a participant with a privileged social positioning, benefiting significantly from her family's economic and cultural capital. Thanks to her ambitious learning efforts coupled with her access to high-quality language education at varying

language institutions, she was proficient enough for her direct admission into the ELT department. The selection of Kübra for this study aimed to provide insights into the influence of a privileged social positioning in educational trajectories and her case served as a lens to explore the interplay of economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital in shaping SDLL practices.

Selin was another participant with a privileged social positioning, benefiting significantly from the affordances provided by her family. Thanks to her SDLL in which she made informed decisions about her emergent learning needs and her interests, she was proficient in English. The selection of Selin for this study aimed to provide insights into the influence of an autonomy-supportive family environment on educational trajectories. Moreover, her case served as a lens to explore the influence of digital practices, particularly the impact of YouTube use, on SDLL.

Another privileged learner was Ali coming from a family background in which both parents were well-educated people and actively contributed to his educational journey by offering academic, emotional, and financial support. As a responsible and disciplined English major, he was highly engaged in coursework outside the classroom. On the other hand, he was displaying self-directed naturalistic language learning practices centered around entertainment. Ali was selected for this study to gain insights into the influence of supportive and well-educated parents, full access to technological resources, and exposure to high-quality language education in school on self-directed English learning practices.

Lastly, Fatih, as a privileged learner, was a participant who identified himself as a gamer and was an active user of the internet. His digital practices centered around his gaming practices that helped him learn English in a naturalistic manner. His proficiency in English was notably high enabling him to successfully pass the proficiency exam and progress into the ELT department. The selection of Fatih for this study aimed to provide insights into the impact of digital practices and the influence of a privileged social positioning on self-directed English language learning.

On the other hand, there were disadvantaged learners in this study who struggled in their educational life with varying degrees due to a number of reasons, such as lack of technological access, poor living conditions, financial challenges, lack of academic guidance, and lack of social resources, among others. However, they demonstrated a great deal of resilience and managed to reach a high proficiency level which resulted in majoring in the ELT department. For example, Deniz was one of those disadvantaged

learners with several disadvantaging conditions, such as lack of academic, financial, or emotional support from his family, lack of private working space, financial expectations from family, and lack of educational resources and opportunities in a rural area. He was selected for the study to get a deeper understanding of a resilient self-directed learner profile with very adverse life conditions who managed to overcome constraining challenges by utilizing the available resources in hand. His case was also a good example of a transformative habitus through education. University education played a significant role in his learning experiences and his identity construction.

Another participant was Sena, coming from a lower social class background and having lived in İstanbul, a metropolitan province in Türkiye. She was exposed to English relatively late when compared to other participants, and she was the oldest participant. Moreover, her English language learning trajectory significantly differed from the other participants. Sena was selected for this study because of her idiosyncratic language learning trajectory, the metropolitan area she came from, and her disadvantaging life conditions but with her emotionally and financially supportive family and better life conditions than other disadvantaged language learners coming from rural areas. She was also the only participant who had an abroad experience.

Nesrin was one of the participants from a disadvantaged educational background, who struggled financially, socially, academically, and emotionally throughout her educational trajectory. However, despite all the challenges she went through, she was highly invested in English learning which was both her passion and her ticket to get out of her poor living conditions. Nesrin was selected for this study to gain insight into a resilient self-directed learner profile with very adverse life conditions who managed to overcome constraining challenges by utilizing the available resources in hand.

Hatice was one of the participants from a lower social class background and the only participant who was studying in the preparatory class in this study. She was a seriously engaged, goal-oriented, and ambitious student in the classroom. She was also highly invested in learning English outside of the classroom in a self-instructive manner. Hatice was selected for this study because of her self-instructed language learning profile coming from a disadvantageous background however with minimal technological access and emotionally supportive parents.

Lastly, Emine was a participant who successfully passed the proficiency exam on her first attempt due to her SDLL with technology. Her socially oriented digital language learning practices helped increase her English proficiency level within a relatively short

time. She was chosen for this study to shed light on the role of a teacher in an underprivileged language learner's learning story and the power of technological devices in overcoming the limitations imposed by a learner's social class positioning.

3.5. Data Collection Protocols

In this case study, I collected data through a) a learner background survey, b) learner autobiographies, c) semi-structured interviews with learners, d) photo-elicitation interviews, and e) external informant interviews. This study was conducted in two phases that are described in detail as follows.

3.5.1. Phase 1:

In the first phase of the study, I intended to recruit self-directed language learners and collect data to answer the first research question: How do self-directed learners learn English beyond the classroom?

3.5.1.1. Learner Background Survey

The purpose of the learner background survey was to yield data about the English majors' personal and family backgrounds. In the first part of the survey, participants provided demographic information, such as age, gender, hometown, and the schools they studied at; their performance in language exams; and their technology access and digital language learning practices. In the second part, they answered questions related to the infrastructure of their houses (e.g., if they have a private bedroom and private working space or what heating system they use at home). In the third part, they answered questions about their family structure and socioeconomic backgrounds, such as their parents' education, occupations, monthly income, and sociocultural activities they engage in. Prepared following the theoretical framework of the study, this survey provided insights into the participants' habitus, ownership of capital, and the characteristics of fields they are situated in (i.e., school, family). The learner background survey is presented in Appendix 1.

To enhance the reliability and credibility of the learner survey, I made several careful considerations. First, I prepared this survey after a careful review of the related literature (e.g., Block, 2012; Butler & Le, 2018; Ghorbani & Golparvar, 2019; Kormos

& Kiddle, 2013) and designed it in different sections so as not to cause any confusion. I ensured that the items were unambiguous, easy to understand, and appropriate for the participants. Lastly, I revised and made minor changes after the expert opinion and the piloting of the survey.

3.5.1.2. Language Learning Autobiographies

Guided by an autobiography writing outline (see Appendix 2), the participants wrote about how they learned English. I analyzed these autobiographies deductively in terms of their school environment and the autonomy level of individuals and traced the features of SDLL within learner autobiographies. I looked for motivated and autonomous language learners who can use technological and non-technological environments for their learning purposes without or with less teacher control. After identifying prospective participants, I invited them for initial interviews.

3.5.1.3. Initial Interview

In this interview session, I introduced the project in detail and informed the participants about the project's steps by disclosing the study's purpose. I introduced the participant information pack and informed them about their rights to non-participation or withdrawal at any time. This session provided an opportunity to build rapport with the participants. Initial interviews verified the analysis of autobiographies and elicited further information about the details that were unclear or missing in the autobiographies. These interview sessions also allowed me to meet non-self-directed language learners and enhanced my understanding of the factors affecting language learning and being self-directed. I prepared the questions based on the participant's answers to the survey and their autobiographies. These sessions were unstructured and served to elicit the life histories of the language learners and create rapport with the participants.

3.5.2. Phase 2

In this phase, I continued the study with the selected participants as a result of the preliminary analysis of the collected data in Phase 1. Semi-structured interviews, photo-elicitation interviews, and external informant interviews were used to yield further data about participants' learning practices, their life histories, and everyday lives.

3.5.2.1. Semi-structured interviews

The purpose of semi-structured interviews was to understand the rationale behind the learners' language learning practices with or without technology outside the classroom in relation to their past and current experiences. Even though some questions overlapped with the questions of the initial interviews and other previous instruments, these interviews aimed to crosscheck their responses and gain a more detailed narrative understanding of the participants' language learning stories. The participants were expected to narrate their stories holistically, including details about their personal lives, family backgrounds, and their education life. Special to each case, I tailored some questions which allowed a natural flow of conversation. Appendix 3 provides an example of a semi-structured interview protocol.

The semi-structured interview guide was formed based on the theoretical concepts used in the study, the literature on self-directed English language learning, the preliminary data analysis, and the researcher's reflective journal. The questions aimed to gain insights into the habitus of learners, their possessions of cultural, economic, social, and symbolic capital and the information related to the social and educational fields they had engaged in. In addition, the interviews sought to uncover how the participants currently self-direct their language learning, as opposed to the learner autobiographies that detailed their past language learning experiences and habits. During the interviews, I asked many unstructured questions as well that probed into their previous data. Furthermore, I explored themes, patterns and practices existing in their earlier responses. The duration of the interviews varied from 30 to 75 minutes due to various reasons, such as the time spent during initial unstructured interviews, the quality of the prior data, and the willingness and personality of the participants.

Semi-structured interviews allowed me to collect detailed accounts of the learners' current and past SDLL experiences, participants' living conditions in the regions they come from, family and social environment, technology access and use concerning their SDLL, digital literacy, life stories, motivational sources, dispositions, general autonomous behaviors, and plans for the future. The conversational approach I took during the interviews altered the power balance and created a relaxing and friendly atmosphere. This approach enabled the participants to reconstruct their experiences and stories with my guidance as the co-author of their narratives.

3.5.2.2. Photo-elicitation Interviews

Rose (2016) defines the photo-elicitation approach as "inserting a photograph into a research interview" and identifies strengths of the photo-elicitation approach as the following;

1. Discussing a photograph can prompt to talk about different things related to the study that researchers had not foreseen before.
2. It may evoke different kinds of knowledge from the interviewees, like emotions.
3. It helps explore taken-for-granted instances in the interviewees' lives.
4. It empowers participants by allowing them to talk about why they have selected a specific photograph and positioning them as experts.
5. It is an easy and fun way to enroll participants in a research project. (pp. 315-317)

This approach is valuable for investigating a phenomenon that is not directly observable to an outsider, and SDLL beyond the classroom is an example of such a phenomenon (Umino & Benson, 2016). Considering the strengths of this approach and its significance for the current study, I used photo-elicitation interviews to capture the learning practices of self-directed language learners blended in their everyday lives. It placed the participants in a central position during the research procedure and provided an emic perspective for the research findings. I asked participants to take at least three photographs representing their language learning practices, their home living conditions, their families, and their perceived identity as language learners. I used the pictures as a stimulus for the conversation. I expected them to narrate the photographs and reflect on them by articulating their thoughts and feelings related to particular learning instances. Thus, this technique helped me gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' habitus and practices within multi-layered real-life contexts. A sample photo elicitation interview guide is presented in Appendix 4.

3.5.2.3. External Informant Interviews

At the end of the interviews of each participant, I conducted interviews with participants' significant others (i.e., they might be their friends, schoolmates, teachers,

parents, or any family members.) to learn more about participants' language learning, everyday life, social connections, motivational orientations and so on. These interviews helped me triangulate the data, overcome the limitations of self-reported data, and see the cases from a different perspective. Table 2 gives details about the external informant interviews.

Table 2.
Brief Description of External Informants in External Informant Interviews

Participant	External informant	The reason of selection	Duration of the interview in minutes
Sena	Her best friend	Sena suggested her best friend who witnessed every stage of her language learning. She thought that her family did not know about her learning procedure due to the lack of cultural capital in her family.	13'
Deniz	His girlfriend	He expressed that nobody in his family knows about his language learning. He chose his girlfriend as the person who knew him best and helped him practice English.	16'
Hatice	Her teacher at the university	She did not suggest anyone from her family and friend cycle. She suggested her teacher in the preparatory class.	16'
Nesrin	Her elder sister	The closest person to her in the family was her elder sister and she provided many insights to the data.	34'
Selin	Her father and mother	In her language learning story, her parents played a significant role, and the interviews verified and extended her data.	60'
Ali	His mother	As a well-educated mother, she greatly influenced his English language learning. She provided insights into the role of a supportive parent.	32'
Fatih	His high school teacher	His teacher provided much insight into what type of background he comes from and the procedure of his learning English.	28'
Kübra	Her uncle	Her uncle was a teacher at a state school but also, he was doing a Ph.D. in the history department. He played a significant role in her decisions related to education.	19'
Emine	Her best friend from Egypt	They met on a language learning application and had kept in touch for almost two years. He played a very significant role in improving her English skills.	30'

3.6. Data Analysis

As Miles and colleagues (2014) outlined in detail in their qualitative data analyses guide, as opposed to quantitative data analysis, this type of analysis is iterative or cyclical where the researcher is in a fluid and more humanistic position. Consistent with the iterative and fluid nature of this type of research, I implemented the data analysis procedure throughout the two data collection phases described above and used the data from all six sources rather than taking them individually at the end.

The data analysis started with the first phase of the data collection procedure to inform the sampling. In this study, first of all, I purposively attempted to find a group of self-directed English language learners majoring in the ELT department. After collecting learner background surveys and learner autobiographies of 100 participants, I started reading the data and taking notes of possible codes guided by the research questions. While reading the data, I started inviting participants who could be potential participants in the following stages of the research and conducted initial unstructured interviews with them. Throughout this procedure, I interviewed 43 participants and took field notes while trying to figure out the variables that would cause the similarities and contrasts in learners' SDLL practices (Miles et al., 2014). After the initial interviews, I identified 20 participants as self-directed language learners based on the features described by the previous research (e.g., Benson, 2011b; Lai, Wang, & Hu, 2016; Lai, Wang, & Lei, 2012). To analyze the data from all three different sources, I utilized the thematical analysis guide by Braun and Clark (2006), and the analysis revealed several themes as different types of SDLL practices, social class, regional differences in Türkiye, and digital capital, which caused the variation among the participants' language learning practices.

In the second phase of data collection, nine representative participants out of 20 self-directed language learners were kept as the focal participants, and the data collection was followed by semi-structured interviews, photo-elicitation interviews, and external informant interviews, which were built on the analysis of the previous one. At the end of the data collection, I organized the case study record for each participant to locate easily specific data during intensive analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For data management and coding, MAXQDA was utilized, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Analysis Software.

In this embedded single case study, there were nine subunits of analysis within a bounded system, which I describe as cases while discussing and reporting the findings. In the analysis of these nine cases, I employed two staged analyses: a within-case and a

cross-case analysis. In the first stage, the main objective was to understand what has occurred in a single case and I focused on the individual to get "a well-grounded sense of local reality" (Miles et al., 2014). In other words, I treated each case separately and comprehensively to understand the contextual factors and conditions that might have an impact on the case. After a thorough reading of the transcribed data, I utilized in vivo coding with the words of the participants (e.g., "I was always supported by my family" [Kübra]). Once got acquainted with each case and completed the in vivo coding, potential themes, and patterns emerged from meaningful segments of the data (e.g., The role of family support in Kübra's English learning and education) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While reading, re-reading, and coding, I wrote memos and reflected on my notes (Maxwell, 2005). Following the generation of an initial list of codes, I finalized the themes for each case. In the end, I wrote a detailed description of each case with vivid extracts from the data centered around the patterns and themes resulting from the within-case analysis.

Following the within-case analysis, I employed cross-case analysis to obtain a deeper understanding and explanation of commonalities and differences (Miles et al., 2014; Creswell, 2014). In this stage, I attempted to highlight abstraction across cases while looking for patterns and relationships that reflect every participant's experience and come up with an explanation that fits all the individual cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this stage, I generated the themes and categories guided by the theories and previous empirical research employed in this study: Bourdieu's theory of practice and SDLL research (e.g., habitus, privilege in education, or autonomy-supportive family). Finally, I drew conclusions related to the nature of SDLL practices from all the representative stories of individual case reports. This offered the potential to make natural transferability to different contexts from the data (Creswell, 2014). Figure 3 below displays the two-staged data analysis in this embedded single case study.

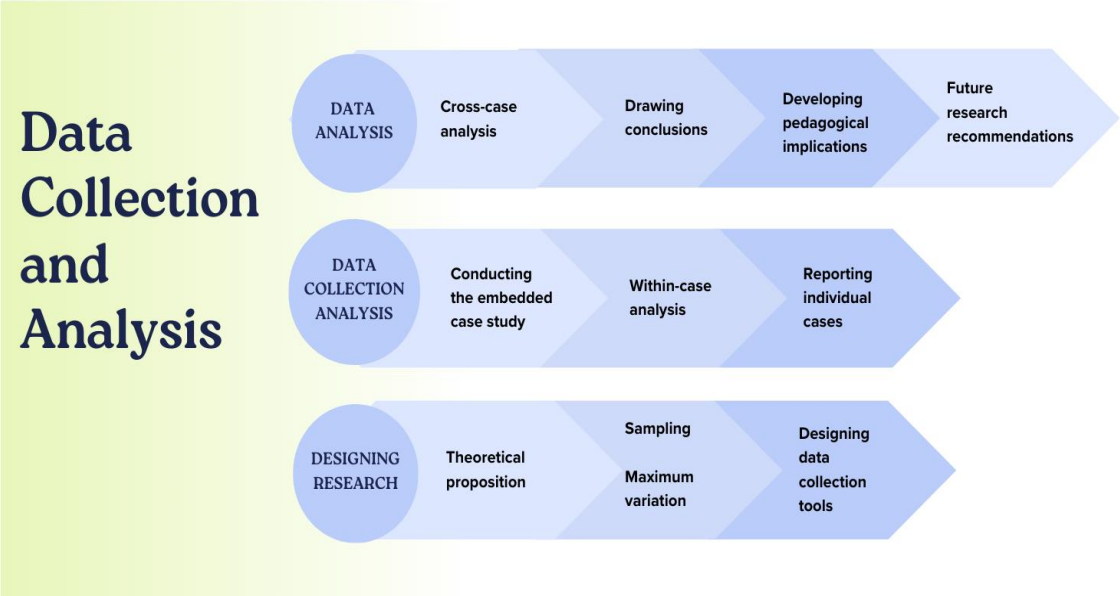

Figure 3. Steps in the embedded single case study

3.7. Researcher's Positioning

Considering the researcher as a product of the social world, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) highlight that researchers bring their own subjective meanings to the field of the study, and they need to acknowledge their relationship with the participants. Thus, reflexivity and explicit discussion of the researcher's position play a crucial role in social sciences to take a "scientific" approach (Rhynas, 2005), by making the research process as transparent as possible. In the field of SLA, there have been recent calls for researchers' reflexivity (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2007; Norton & DeCosta, 2018) to reflect on the potential and inevitable influences that might have on the participants and vice versa. Therefore, to identify my position and relationship with the participants and the research site, I acknowledge that my beliefs, assumptions, and own past experiences might have affected the selection of participants and the interpretations, as well as the presentation of the participants' language learning and life stories.

Throughout the research process, I reminded myself the fact that my participants were the storytellers of their own lives and language learning. I was just the person who collaborated with them to re-construct their language learning stories and reported their story in a structured manner. In this process, I did my best to be as objective as possible from an outsider's perspective. On the other hand, I held an insider position as a researcher due to my job in the same department and the fact that I was also an English learner in an EFL context like them.

At the outset of the research, I had been working as a research assistant in the ELT department for six years and was well acquainted with the policies and practices of the department. Besides my research and office work, I also taught English grammar as a first-year subject and SLA as a second-year subject. Thus, some of the participants were my students, which might have caused a power hierarchy between me as the researcher and the participants. Despite this potential power dynamic, many participants expressed that they felt comfortable sharing their stories with me and found it a relief to talk about their life stories throughout the data collection procedure. Some even mentioned that telling their stories affected their life perspective and changed their perceptions in certain areas of their lives.

Before this doctoral research study, I had already started working on the SDLL practices of the students in the department during my master's studies and had engaged in various research projects. This background made me familiar with the profiles of students, including their practices and motivational orientations and spurred my interest in further investigating English majors and their language learning experiences from a sociological perspective. Initially, I had the intention to categorize the learner profiles in a deterministic manner; however, as the data collection progressed and through extensive literature review, my perspective evolved. I realized my limited research perspective and understood the complex and dynamic nature of English language learning. Instead of categorizing the learners, I recognized the importance of showcasing the diverse nature of language learning practices and highlighting how differing access to different material, social, and symbolic resources affect their language learning practices.

Even though I was not actively learning English at that stage of my life, I was also an English learner in the same educational setting: the ELT department, which helped me to gain an insider perspective. Moreover, our age difference was not huge and even one of the participants was older than me. This position facilitated the creation of a friendly atmosphere in the interview sessions. During the interviews, I also shared my own experiences as an English learner in an EFL context, which might have enhanced my open dialogue with the participants. This situation even might have put me in a position of being a resource for them which was expressed by a few participants.

Moreover, as someone coming from a low social class family and having climbed on the social class ladder, my background might have impacted my decision on the theoretical framework of this study. Reading the works of Pierre Bourdieu helped me gain awareness of my own social class positioning and the extent of the transformation in my

habitus thanks to the university education I received and the resilience I demonstrated throughout my education life. As a foreign language learner, I was also an autonomous language learner who self-directed her language learning under constraining conditions, such as lack of language learning materials, lack of guidance and assistance, and financial challenges. However, I overcame these challenges, maximizing my limited resources, and eventually studied at one of the higher-ranking universities in Türkiye. Thus, this experience might have influenced the selection of the research topic, my choice of participants, highlighting resilient students who came from disadvantaged social positions and overcame these conditions, and my motivation to address the inequalities between privileged and disadvantaged language learners that I also experienced in my earlier life. However, this situation gave me an insider perspective allowing me to better understand students with similar backgrounds and enhancing my relationship and dialogue with the participants. Being an insider provided me with insights that would be unavailable to an external researcher (De Costa, 2010).

3.8. Establishment of Trustworthiness

In terms of trustworthiness in qualitative research, four main issues are essential for assessing the quality of the research: confirmability, dependability, credibility, and transferability, which are terms outlined for qualitative research by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Qualitative inquiries require rigorous research practices that produce accounts that are accurate, coherent, plausible, and provide a vicarious experience for the reader (Miles et al., 2014). These criteria ensure that the research findings are reliable, valid, and applicable to broader contexts. To ensure the credibility, in other words, validity, of the study, and trustworthiness of the study I employed a series of strategies.

First and foremost, I used triangulation in which there are four types as the use of multiple methods, multiple data sources, multiple investigators, and multiple theories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). In the study, I collected data from the focal participants with five different data collection instruments across approximately one year, such as a learner survey, learner autobiography, and a series of interviews using different techniques. Collecting data from the same participant at different times helped me check their coherency, touch upon the points not indicated in detail in previous sessions, and capture the differences in practices and perceptions over time. Moreover, dependability entails that “the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across

researchers and methods" (Miles et al., 2014), and using different instruments and collecting the data over time contributed to the dependability and credibility of the study. Later, I intended to check if their claims and my interpretations were also supported by another person. Thus, I conducted external informant interviews with nine people related to the focal participants, which contributed to the stability and precision of the findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

In addition, after my analysis, I sent 20 percent of my data to a colleague with expertise in the same field. She also coded the same data and we compared and revised the codes. Although one researcher collected the data, multiple researchers were involved in coding the, which contributed to the credibility of the analysis and dependability of the research (Miles et al., 2014). In this study, I also used a theory framework taken from anthropology and sociology and combined the theory with LBC research. Using different perspectives from different research fields enriched my perspective and guided in my interpretation of the data.

While reporting the findings, I provided a "thick" description of each research stage and findings. I wrote detailed accounts of the participants' narratives which were context-rich and meaningful, which can be transferable to other contexts. Following writing each participant's description, I invited the participant to read their case description and give feedback on the accuracy of descriptions, explanations, and interpretations (Miles et al., 2014). I made the revisions based on member checking and also conducted an additional interview with Emine as she felt some data was missing in her case description. To ensure conformality, in other words, objectivity, it is important to inform the potential researcher biases. In this study, I reflected on my position as a researcher in relation to the participants and the research site throughout the research process. In addition, I described all the methods and stages of the study explicitly and in detail to be as transparent as possible (Miles et al., 2014). Moreover, I provided an audit trail with a doctoral fellow as the critical reader to examine the research process and results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, all stages of this study were reviewed by the thesis committee members, ensuring thorough scrutiny and external validation of the research.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

Before the research study, I applied to the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects to ask permission to conduct the study at the institution. After receiving the ethics approval from two institutions (see Appendix 5), I started recruiting the study sampling and collecting the data by strictly following all the requirements of the ethics board.

Written informed consent (see Appendix 6) was taken from each participant at the outset of the study. The research procedure was transparent for the participants by the provision of a participant information pack including such details as the purpose of the study, how the data will be collected, the potential risks and benefits of the current study, and their rights to withdraw whenever they wish. During the data collection procedure, one participant withdrew from the study. Data analysis was shared with the participants, and I asked them to confirm the analysis of their data. The confidentiality of the participants was of importance. The electronic data was stored in my password-protected laptop and was not shared with anyone else. I utilized pseudonyms for each participant to protect their anonymity, and the identity of the institution was masked for ethical considerations.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

4.0. Introduction

This chapter intends to offer a thematic presentation of the findings within each case to present the situatedness and idiosyncratic nature of learners' language learning stories and their life trajectories. In this chapter, I reported the case descriptions of each case to introduce their life stories in various social and educational contexts and conditions with a special focus on their SDLL practices. I tried to provide a detailed and holistic description of every case by avoiding generalizing the findings and categorizing learners. By exploiting an embedded single case study design, I intended to focus on "revealing the breadth and nature of the phenomena under study" (Lewis, 2014, p. 351). Thus, in this chapter, instead of discussing the commonalities and divergences among the cases, I aimed to provide a comprehensive profile of each learner and give voice to them by delving into their life perspectives, experiences, family background, social and educational lives, and so on. Given that, I sought to present the data in a way that enables the transferability of the findings to similar contexts rather than targeting the generalizability of the findings (Stake, 2000). This presentation of the findings enables the reader to have a deeper understanding of conditions and situations influencing learners' SDLL outside of the classroom.

4.1. Fatih's Case Description

"I spend ninety percent of my free time on the internet. Most of my time online is already in English, with the videos I watch and the friends I talk to."

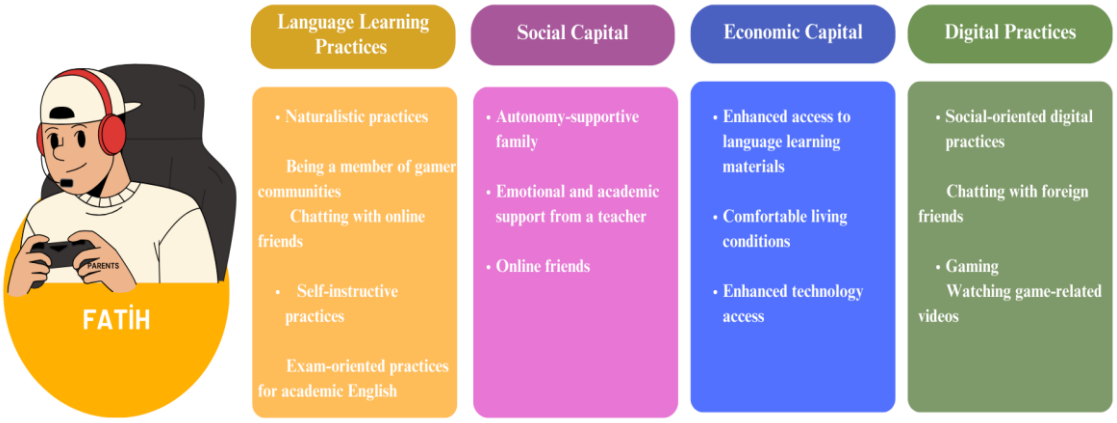

Figure 4. The key themes in Fatih's case

4.1.1. Demographic Profile

Fatih was a 19-year-old first-year student at the time of the data collection who had successfully passed the proficiency exam on his first attempt and gained entry into the ELT department. He came from Bursa, which is located in the Marmara region and is one of the most socioeconomically developed provinces of Türkiye (SEGE, 2017). He was the only child and both parents worked. His father was an engineer, and her mother, a high school graduate, worked as a pharmacy assistant.

Fatih's parents enjoyed being involved in sociocultural activities, such as seeing a movie in the cinema, watching a theater play, or doing some sports activities. Every year, they enjoyed going on a hotel vacation for a summer holiday or cultural and historical trips. Fatih expressed that they, as a whole family, watch documentaries about space or different cultures during weekend breakfast and his parents also love watching movies at the weekends. Fatih either joined them or spent time in his room on the internet playing games or watching videos related to games.

4.1.2. Living Conditions and Technology Access

Fatih was living in an apartment located in *"an elite neighborhood of Bursa where people having a higher level of education live"* (Fatih's teacher, External informant

interview). The apartment was a comfortable one heated by a central heating system and air conditioner when needed. He had his private bedroom with his study table and computer desk. He spent most of his time in this place playing games. As a child of working parents, he had long hours spent alone at home. When he was a little child, he used to go to his grandparents after school so as not to be alone. However, after a certain age, he preferred to go home, leading him to spend a great amount of time on the internet. He was an active user of the internet being online on social media platforms, such as Reddit and YouTube. He identified himself as a gamer who spent 90% of his free time gaming and doing related practices, such as watching game tutorials or games, which shaped his language learning practices to a great extent.

When asked about his technology access, Fatih expressed that he had his mobile phone at a very early age at the time of primary school. However, it was just for the use of calling his parents. In the secondary school, he got his smartphone. They always had a computer and internet connection at home. His parents were also active users of technology. After a certain age, he had been given his own computer which was powerful enough to play online games.

4.1.3. Naturalistic Language Learning Practices

In Fatih's learning story, there is not a certain moment of deciding to learn English. When asked how he started learning English, he responded as follows.

> How did I start? My interest probably came from games at first. I wanted to understand what was said in this game and have fun. It started like that, then I think it went to videos. I watched those videos, and gradually, I guess, I grasped the logic. I connected what they said with what they did. (Fatih, Initial interview)

To Fatih, learning English was a slow and natural process that happened out of his exposure to English through playing games, watching videos, spending time on online platforms like Reddit, and chatting with foreign friends on Discord. In his own words, *"It was more of a hobby rather than something I was studying for. So, being entertained while doing all this definitely helped."* (Fatih, Semi-structured interview) He drew a similarity between his experience of learning English and learning it in an English-speaking country. He said *"Like, the longer you spend in a country, the more you adapt to the language of that place."* (Fatih, Initial interview). Given that he was immersed in

an English-speaking community, he learned English to survive and be a legitimate member of online communities, which took approximately five years to be able to fully communicate in English.

Fatih initially engaged with online games on Facebook after he saw that his parents used this platform to play games. In later stages, he delved into more sophisticated games which required him to use English actively. He said, in the earlier phase of his learning, he relied on online dictionaries and Google Translate to understand the instructions in the games. Over time, his vocabulary expanded, and it enabled him to infer the meaning of unknown words within the contextual meaning. Subsequently, he discovered online communities on platforms like Discord and Reddit providing avenues to deepen his understanding of games, take part in discussions with fellow gamers, and stay updated on current events. The provided screenshot from Reddit below illustrates the platform's interactive nature, offering engagement across diverse topics, including gaming, sports, business, and television.

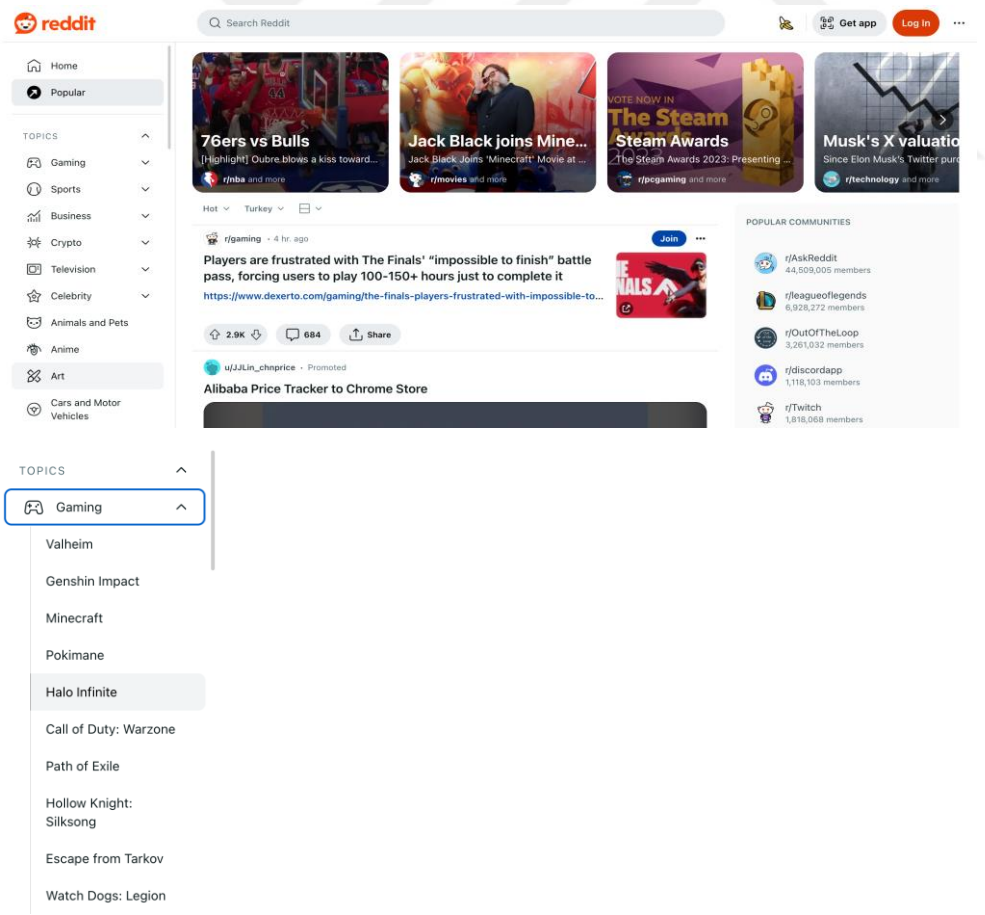

Figure 5. Reddit; social media platform and an online space for gamers

The captured screenshot in Figure 5 illustrates the popular gaming topics available for gamers globally on Reddit. Specifically, Figure 6 is from the “Halo Infinite” gaming topic, exemplifying the various features that Reddit provides to fans of this particular game. Users can share and follow posts, discover communities to join, and explore related topics within the dynamic landscape of the platform.

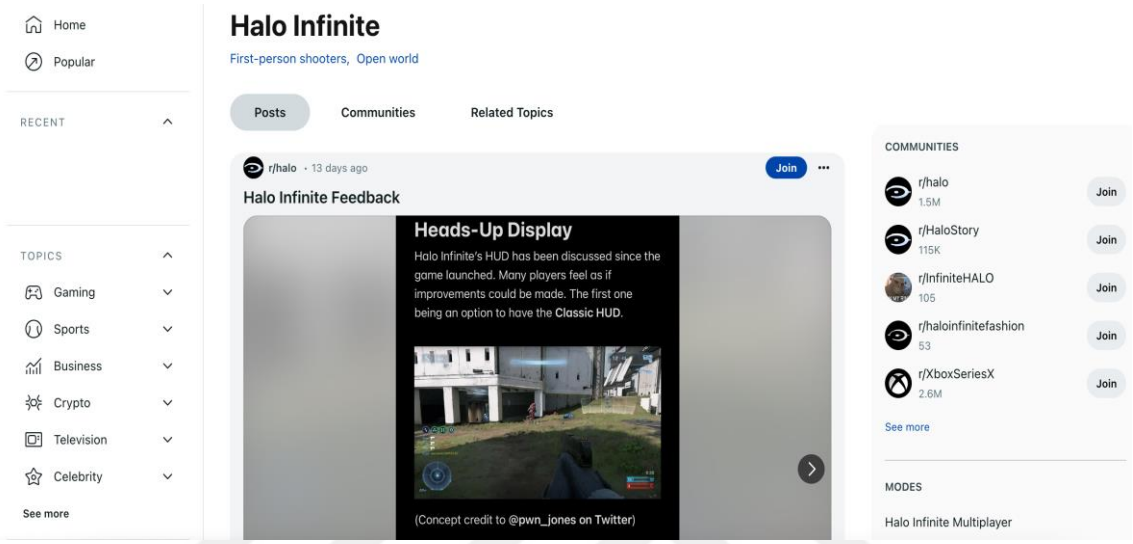

Figure 6. Gaming communities on Reddit

As an active user of these types of online platforms, Fatih found himself immersed in English content coupled with intensive interaction in the language during approximately seven hours of daily online activity. His online interactions primarily involved English-speaking friends from various countries, such as Scotland, England, India, Netherlands, and Canada. In the following excerpt, Fatih elaborates on how he created friendships online and some of them turned out to be long-lasting close friendships.

> Fatih: I always communicated with foreigners. Since I did not play team games, the friendships I formed were mostly with foreign people.
> Interviewer: So, how do you make friends? It must be through these games. What do you talk about with someone?
> Fatih: First, about the games, something about the game itself initiates a conversation. After that, how are you, what do you do in your life, where are you from, which country, which city? Once the friendship is established, you talk about how the day is going, what you are doing, and so on.

> Interviewer: Have you had a friend that you can call close?
> Fatih: Yes. I had a friend from the Netherlands for eight years. … Our communication started with the game, of course. When we started getting along well, we asked each other about our lives, how things were going, how are you, and we sent jokes to each other. As we got to know each other a little better, we became friends enough to call each other friends. He even gave me some gifts. (Fatih, Initial interview)

Fatih had many online friends, like the one from the Netherlands, and they were sometimes meeting on Discord and playing games simultaneously. For the photo-elicitation interview, he brought a picture exemplifying one of these meetings and said:

> I talked with some foreign and Turkish friends on this platform. All of my friends had an interest in languages just like me. In that photo, I think I was doing role play speaking in English. … In that photo, I think we were playing a game. A person called the DM writes the story and narrates the events. Before making a move, you need to throw dice or something, and you have to say what you are doing. Playing in a foreign language also has an impact on the language. We had a foreign friend in this group, so we were speaking in English for him to understand. (Fatih, Photo-elicitation interview)

Besides playing games and game-related practices in English briefly described above, he was also genuinely interested in reading comic books, as described in the following excerpt.

> I constantly read foreign comic books in my free time. … (I got acquainted with comic books) through watching series on digital media. Dragon Ball, a show of Japanese origin. It was also very popular in the West. … (I have been reading these) for about four years or so. (Fatih, Photo-elicitation interview)

Figure 7. Fatih's comic books of his favorite series

As highlighted earlier, Fatih was immersed in an online English-speaking community, and his hobbies and interests were also aligned with that. This immersion extended to his cultural preferences, where he expressed a stronger connection to an international and global culture rather than Turkish culture. For instance, Fatih indicated that he rarely consumed Turkish content in recent years unless shared by a Turkish friend and said, *"When I watch a video, for example, I always watch it in a foreign language. I find foreign culture more interesting than Turkish culture. I constantly talk with my foreign friends on media platforms like Discord. I still do it."* (Fatih, Initial interview). In other words, his media consumption habits, such as watching videos predominantly in English and active engagement with foreign friends on platforms like Discord, further solidified this global orientation. Furthermore, this constant exposure to English led him to perceive his English proficiency as even surpassing his communicative skills in Turkish.

4.1.4. English for a Utilitarian Purpose and Exam-oriented Language Learning

In contrast to his high proficiency level and distinct interest in English, Fatih was not an academically successful student in any other school subjects. He was also a very introverted teenager sitting at the very back desk quietly in the classroom, according to the description of his teacher. When he was supposed to choose a division in high school, Fatih opted for the language division with the guidance of his family and teachers

because, within his options, it was the wisest decision to take a better position at that stage of his education. Agreeing with that, his teacher said,

> Probably because he did not have many friends and did not go out often, he was constantly playing games, and those games were played in English. If I am not mistaken, he was also speaking English with friends from abroad in the games. That is how his English developed. English was the only thing he could do to be successful in the future. (Fatih's teacher, External informant interview)

This choice proved wise, given his success in this subject in the last two years of high school and later in the university entrance exam, in which he correctly answered 78 questions out of 80 multiple-choice questions. Later, he successfully passed the English proficiency exam at the university and directly started majoring in the ELT department.

Despite his success in English classes at school, which is evident in the following excerpt, *"Throughout my educational life, my English exams went well, and using it in daily life with my foreign friends increased my interest."* (Fatih, Learner autobiography), the requirements of the work in language division oriented to the university entrance exam presented a challenge for him, demanding proficiency in academic vocabulary, advanced grammar knowledge, and effective reading strategies. Therefore, he needed to engage in exam-oriented language learning practices, and additionally, he went to a private university preparation cram school providing English classes besides other subjects, such as Maths, Turkish, and Geography with the suggestion of his teacher. His teacher's academic and emotional support encouraged him to study English outside the classroom. He expressed that his teacher used many effective teaching strategies tailored to the competencies required for the university entrance exam and "*The most effective method I remember was this. She used to give us vocabulary lists of forty words every week and asked us to write their synonyms. This way, it contributed both to paraphrasing and learning new words."* (Fatih, Semi-structured interview). This specific strategy contributed to his English knowledge even though, as he expressed, *"normally, I do not learn much in English classes."* (Fatih, Initial interview) Besides vocabulary memorization, he worked on multiple-choice questions in exam-oriented English reference books, learned complex grammatical rules, and read many articles to enhance his comprehension skills. On the other hand, he thought, *"I think my spoken language regressed a bit compared to previous years. It may be due to studying more exam-focused*

and not speaking with my foreign friends as much." (Fatih, Semi-structured interview) after a few years of exam-oriented language learning practices.

4.1.5. Autonomy-supportive Parents

Fatih was the only child of academically, emotionally, and financially supportive parents. Both parents were aware of Fatih's academic competencies, and they supported his decision to choose a career related to English, which was the only area he could achieve academic success in. For example, his teacher said,

> … (Fatih's parents are) supportive individuals, especially Mrs. Nuran (Pseudonym, Fatih's mother), who came to school frequently. By the way, she is a mother who is aware of her own child's potential and knows that he can only proceed with English. … She already knows that her child cannot do anything other than English. Not the other courses, but the child likes English. If he succeeds, he succeeds from here. A father who is an engineer would want his child to have a different career path but he has not put any pressure on him. I went to the university entrance exam with them and asked the father, "Usually, those who are engineers or doctors want their children to go in a similar direction. What do you think?" The father told me that he coached Fatih in mathematics but it did not work. The child cannot do it, and not every child can. He said, "Let him be wherever he is happy." I heard this sentence from his father. (Fatih's teacher, External informant interview)

As evident in the excerpt above, Fatih's mother was a caring mother who was interested in his academic development, and she was also emotionally supportive. Similarly, his father was also providing academic support, such as helping him with his assignments, and was ready to answer Fatih's questions. Similar to his teacher's words, Fatih also expressed that they were not putting any pressure on him to choose a higher-status career that would be out of his reach when his academic success was considered. Nevertheless, they suggested ideas to organize his out-of-class learning in a more planned manner, which Fatih found very helpful for development which can be seen in the following excerpt.

> They mostly provided suggestions. It was about how I should study and create a study plan. … When I was in secondary school, I was not a very hardworking student, and I am not now either. I did not care much about my grades. I used to say I would manage somehow. When my exams went badly, my family suggested

> that I should study more systematically. I cannot say I study very systematically even now, but it definitely had a significant impact. Now, I somehow focus. I am at the university, and I am in the department I wanted. (Fatih, Semi-structured interview)

In addition to offering academic and emotional support, Fatih's parents made significant investments in his academic and personal development. Fatih indicated *"So far, I have not faced any difficulties regarding money, especially in terms of education. I got everything I wanted."* (Fatih, Semi-structured interview) They ensured his access to comfortable living conditions, high-quality technological devices, educational materials, and artifacts related to his hobbies. For example, Fatih was interested in reading comic books in English and his parents willingly purchased these for their son. Moreover, they financed a private university preparation course for two years and they were ready to support his attendance at a private university if he chose to pursue that path.

4.2. Ali's Case Description

"I was not doing the things myself, but I was being pushed to do. But now I am doing the things myself."

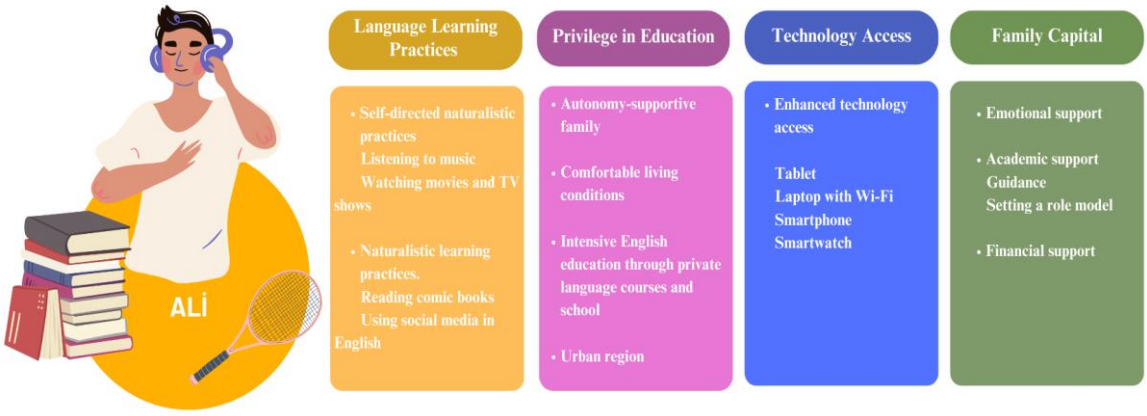

Figure 8. The key themes in Ali's case

4.2.1. Demographic Profile

Ali was a 20-year-old male language learner majoring in the ELT department as a first-year student upon the completion of the preparation class. He was coming from Kocaeli/İzmit, which is a city close to İstanbul and ranks as the 4th most socioeconomically developed province of Türkiye thanks to its industrial capacity,

according to the SEGE (2017). When he was a baby, they lived in İstanbul for a few years because both of his parents, holding bachelor's degrees from communication faculties of two prestigious state universities, worked at TV channels and movie projects. However, her mother found a job as a civil servant in the public health sector in İzmit where Ali lived most of his life and went to school. His father kept working in İstanbul as a production coordinator in many well-known Turkish movies and commuted for a long time. However, because of the demanding work hours and unstable employment conditions, he had to quit his job at one point and attempted to start a small business in his hometown which failed after a short time. After this failed attempt and having financial difficulties for a while, they went back to İzmit, and he started running a small fast-food café where Ali also helped him during holidays for the last couple of years.

4.2.2. Living Conditions and Technology Access

Ali and his family were living in a flat with a central heating system, providing him with comfortable living conditions suitable for a student. He enjoyed the convenience of having his own bedroom, where he spent most of his time studying, playing guitar, reading, playing computer games, and watching foreign series and videos on social media. He was provided with a private and peaceful space with a study table, which can be seen in Figure 9. When asked what the picture reminded him of, the first thing he mentioned was related to his mother's disciplined approach to his out-of-class learning. He said humorously, "*This desk reminds me of the days when my mother made me study by, of course not physically but metaphorically, hitting my head.*" (Ali, Photo-elicitation interview)

Figure 9. Ali's study desk

While not visible in the photograph above, Ali had access to a desktop with an internet connection since his early education. Additionally, he possessed his smartphone for a long time, even though it was not indicated explicitly in the interviews. However, as Ali expressed, in his childhood, he was mostly interested in watching TV rather than spending time on the internet. He said no one at home was extensively spending time on the internet. His desktop usage was primarily for playing video games, watching videos on YouTube, or surfing the internet for a very limited time, which was subject to his mother's restrictions. Two years ago, he was given a laptop that was exclusively designed for gamers, and he expressed satisfaction with its capacity to support extended gaming sessions. While mostly utilizing technology for entertainment, he also used his digital devices to reach out for the information needed for his schoolwork and assignments. Moreover, he used them to practice English, albeit not intensively, outside of the classroom since his high school years.

4.2.3. Sociocultural Activities

During school time, Ali spent his spare time doing homework, reading books, and doing some relaxing activities. On the other hand, he was going to his grandmother's summer house and spending the summer holidays there away from his parents. Ali's grandmother had a summer house in a vacation village and he expressed that since his childhood, he spent all his summer holidays there with his grandmother except for the

last two years because he helped his father at the café his father ran. He experienced many good moments in this place. In the following excerpt, he explained his feelings related to this place.

> The summer house could be the place where I am the happiest. You know, making friends, going to the neighbors, going to the beach, playing games, playing tennis, doing sports, basically everything socially, that place is what has given me everything, I guess. (Ali, Photo-elicitation interview)

Spending his holidays at this summerhouse with his grandmother, he enjoyed the time with his friends there doing a variety of sports, such as volleyball, basketball, football, swimming, and tennis. His enjoyable experiences there affected his hobbies and interests to some degree. He realized these were the activities he enjoyed to a great extent, and he attended a private tennis course at secondary school and played court tennis for the following five years. Later, they had some financial problems and he decided to play table tennis for two years in a club established by the municipality. Another interest of him was listening to music and he had been learning to play the guitar for a while on his own at the time of the data collection. He also added that reading used to be among his hobbies. He said *"In Izmit, we (his parents and he) used to go to book fairs. We would go every year and buy bags and bags of books. I vividly remember one thing. I had finished a 100-page book on my way home in half an hour."* (Ali, Photo-elicitation interview) However, after having his smartphone and computer, he got too distracted to keep reading. He said he forced himself to read 1984 by George Orwell, for example, last summer but it was hard to finish the book because of such distractors as the work in his father's café, videos and shows on the internet, or anything more fun to him on the computer or telephone.

4.2.4. The Role of the Family in Ali's Education

The analysis of Ali's data revealed that Ali's parents, particularly his mother, were highly involved in his education life in contrast with many participants in this study. Both parents held bachelor's degrees from prestigious universities in Türkiye, which endowed them with knowledge about the country's education system and conditions. Additionally, because Ali was a child of working parents, his grandmother, who was a retired teacher and lived in the same building they lived in, took care of him during his childhood.

Although the details of her practices were not extensively described by Ali, her influence on his life was considerable. She was a disciplined woman and expected him to be organized and tidy which shaped his values. Additionally, she actively assisted him with his homework when his mother was at work, which contributed to his academic development.

Being such a significant influence in Ali's education life, his mother had a good proficiency level in English as well. Growing up as the daughter of a primary school teacher, she was raised in a disciplined environment where education was always prioritized. Despite this, she also emphasized that her mother never sat down and studied with her but rather encouraged her to tackle his schoolwork independently and leverage available resources of that era, such as encyclopedias.

She emphasized that she achieved her success in education with her own efforts. On the other hand, she complained that her aptitude for English could have been realized and supported at an earlier stage in her life. She said "*If the attention and interest I showed to my son were shown to me, I might have been in a different and better position."* (Ali's mother, External informant interviews) After graduating from a private secondary school prioritizing English education, she was always motivated to learn English recognizing its potential to unlock opportunities in her future. However, in high school and university, English education was not highlighted and Turkish was the medium of instruction. Consequently, she needed to self-direct her language learning, especially during her university years. In the year of her graduation, she took the TOEFL test to certify her level in English and she expressed she was quite competent.

Recognizing the significance of English as a global language in both social and professional contexts, Ali's mother wanted to provide her son with the support she wished to receive in her own education life. Consequently, she promoted Ali to start his English learning journey as early as possible. Even when Ali was a toddler, she exposed him to English by having him watch English cartoons. When asked about her role in Ali's English learning procedure, she said, "*I think my awareness of his aptitude for English was primarily influenced by my own proficiency in the language, or perhaps, he became inclined towards learning English because we (her husband and she) already knew English. I cannot say for sure."* (Ali's mother, External informant interviews) Ali's father was also competent in English, and they spoke English with each other occasionally when they needed to discuss private issues. They were also watching some shows in English

together. As a result, Ali was immersed in an English-speaking environment from an early age.

When Ali started school, he received English lessons in a formal context and his parents supplemented his school learning by enrolling him in a private English course. As academically, emotionally, and financially supporting parents, they consistently prioritized Ali's education by providing him with all the needed learning materials and technologies. Both Ali and his mother expressed that they always had access to a computer and internet connection at home. Thus, he could easily reach out for the information he needed for his learning.

In addition, Ali's mother further added and explained their roles in his language learning in the following excerpt.

> When it came to learning English, we, as parents, were in a position to provide answers to every question he asked about English. In that sense, he was fortunate. Whenever he struggled with lessons, did not understand something, or had homework he could not understand at school, we were always able to support him. We also encouraged him to read books, especially English books, more after secondary school. (Ali's mother, External informant interviews)

Resonating with his mother's words, Ali also stated, *"When I had a question in mind related to English, I asked for help from my parents."* (Ali, Initial interview). As evident above, Ali's parents affected his language learning trajectory both directly and indirectly in many ways. Their indirect involvement included his early exposure to English thanks to his parents' interest in English and their extramural use of English in life, such as watching TV shows and cartoons in English. On the other hand, their direct involvement encompassed collaborative activities like completing English assignments together, encouraging reading books in English, enrolling him in a private language course, and closely monitoring his learning progress. Besides English, Ali's parents and grandmother played pivotal roles in shaping his overall educational experience. For instance, Ali described his mother's constant support in his education life, shaping his studying habits in the following excerpt.

> My habit of studying comes from my mom. She sat next to me while studying from primary school to high school. … I was doing my homework with my mother, and she was explaining the subjects. To be honest, I was not a disciplined student. I was a student who studied with the force of my mom and the others (his

> grandmother and father) at home. When I came home, if there was my phone or the television, I was running directly to watch the television or play with my phone. They were always warning me about finishing my homework first, then watching TV or spending time on my phone". (Ali, Semi-structured interview)

Consistent with Ali's account, his mother also indicated that she made study schedules, ensuring that he worked in a planned manner, especially while he was preparing for the high school entrance exam. The following excerpt exemplifies her controlling parental behavior by shedding light on the motivations behind her highly involved approach to Ali's out-of-class learning.

> When he was in the 4th grade, we had to change the city we lived in, and his education was disrupted a bit. It is also a bit like with boys that they are prone to being lazy when you leave the control, or I do not know, maybe Ali was like that. That's why I was very controlling in his study schedule and checking what he would study for exams, his study pace before exams, what he did and did not study, and whether he did his homework or not. Maybe it was too much, maybe it was to a degree that would bother him. I do not know. (Ali's mother, External informant interviews)

In addition to Ali's out-of-school learning and preparing for the important exams, his parents were also involved in planning and choosing the high school he would attend according to the score he earned from the high school entrance exam. Their goal was to secure the best educational option for Ali's future, which led them to choose a school that prioritized high-quality language teaching, among other options. However, when he progressed into high school, Ali's parents had difficulties keeping up with the school subjects, which surpassed their knowledge. At that stage of his education, their involvement decreased compared to earlier times of his education. However, they continued to engage in discussions with Ali by exploring various options and guiding him to make choices aligned with his talents and academic achievements within the realm of possibilities.

Ali's data reveals a notable shift in his mother's parenting style from a more controlling approach to a more autonomy-supportive one, considering that he was mature enough and ready to take responsibility for his learning at a certain point. In the initial interview with Ali, he explained his parents' position in his high school years as follows.

> In secondary school, their (his parents') eyes always used to be on me. My mom helped me with my lessons, but in high school, they gradually started to step back, thinking that I could do it on my own. … I think they trusted me. They thought I could do it on my own. They said, "We will not be able to help you after a while. High school topics will start to feel heavy for us, too. They did not intervene as much as in secondary school. During the university exam year, they were not putting so much pressure on me (as they did before). We (with his classmates) organized parties in the university preparation course several times. They allowed all of them. Halloween came. We celebrated Halloween in the prep course. … So, there was not such a tight control over me. They said because you will not be able to study all day or the whole year anyway, so do your social activities as well. But when it was necessary, they knew when to say, "That is enough; focus on your studies now." I must admit I was being negligent sometimes. They did not put too much pressure on me.

As Ali transitioned to the tertiary level, he emphasized his readiness to assume full responsibility for his own learning. The involvement of his parents was minimal at that stage, given that he was away from his parents, living in a dormitory in a distant city. He was pursuing studies in a department he had long dreamed of. He demonstrated a disciplined and planned approach to his academic work. He was aware of his responsibilities to be successful in this new educational environment. It is noteworthy here that at the outset of the data collection, he was planning to get transferred to a higher-ranking university in Türkiye. His dedication to his studies during the first year of university was evident. In the later stages of data collection, he succeeded in transferring to a higher-ranking university closer to his parents thanks to his effort in earning a high grade point average, which was an accomplishment that filled his mother with pride.

4.2.5. Career Planning and Deciding to Invest in English Learning

As described above in detail, Ali was raised in a family of both educated parents who recognized the importance of English as a global language which they believed to open doors for their son in this globalized and highly competitive world. Additionally, Ali's mother also believed English is a must in daily life in today's world and said:

> English is a language that exists in every aspect of life. I used to always say, even if you do not know anything else, learn English for this reason. You play a game, and there comes something in English. There might be an English expression in a small box. In that expression, they can deceive you, trick you, or even infect your

> computer with a virus. I used to say, even if you do not know anything else, learn English for this reason. In today's world, life without English is unimaginable. (Ali's mothers, External informant interview)

Despite Ali's early exposure to English in his family environment and the support he received through private language courses, Ali's serious investment in English learning started during high school when he realized that he was not as successful as he expected in subjects like math and science. In the second year of high school, he was supposed to choose a division according to which he would receive courses and take the university exam. Given that, it was not probable for him to be a scientist or an engineer in the future, which was his dream when he was a little child. However, English was one of the few subjects he felt competent in, and he was at a school where he could receive high-quality language education. Moreover, Seda (Pseudonym), his classmate and close friend since secondary school, told him that choosing the language division was an option about which he did not have any idea by then. Ali thought, "*Choosing to study in the language division would have been very good for me, and it would have been easy."* (Ali, Learner autobiography) By making an informed decision based on his careful evaluation of his academic capabilities and the realities of the Turkish job market, Ali chose the foreign language division and it was a critical incident in his SDLL trajectory.

4.2.6. Self-directed Language Learning Practices

Throughout his education life, Ali found himself in a situation where he needed to be a responsible and disciplined student strictly monitored by his mother. For his future, his diligent effort outside of the classroom was vital in an exam-oriented education system. Thus, he did whatever was required to secure a place in a reputable high school in his town. Until high school, the fact that he needed to do extra English learning activities other than the assigned tasks by his teachers never crossed his mind. However, as he progressed in his education, the necessity of extending his language learning beyond the classroom became evident, driven by a utilitarian purpose: his future career.

In his out-of-class language learning practice, Ali found inspiration and guidance from someone who demonstrated how to leverage technology for effective and enjoyable English learning, who was his close friend, Seda. Seda had been interested in learning foreign languages since an early age and she was using technology actively for her self-directed English learning incorporated with fun daily life activities, such as watching

movies and series, listening to music, and hanging around YouTube. Thus, Ali also adopted her language learning practices, which seemed interesting to him, and started to do similar practices for his language development. At the school, they were already receiving a very high-quality and intensive language education emphasizing four language skills and aiming to develop communicative language competence. On the other hand, the internet, outside the classroom, was providing an additional avenue to practice and reinforce what he learned in the classroom as evident in the following excerpt.

> I was already learning English well in class. Additionally, I used to speak to myself about things and develop skills like listening and speaking, not so much grammar. I constantly listened to music. I still do it, you cannot see me without headphones. Oh, and I watched TV shows and movies. I focused more on improving myself in social areas. I cannot compare myself to those who did not have good teachers at school but developed themselves on their own. However, the things I think I am good at, the things I think I have improved, are the social aspects of English. (Ali, Initial interview)

As Ali mentioned in the excerpt above, he did not need to self-instruct himself outside the classroom, unlike many other participants in this study. He had already had access to language instruction at school which was meeting his needs in line with his language learning goals. However, upon transitioning to the tertiary level and pursuing an English major, the demands intensified and required diligent efforts beyond class hours to enhance his academic English skills. Simultaneously, he continued to employ familiar strategies in his SDLL. Here are a few examples of his practices at this stage of his learning.

> During this preparatory year, I read a five-part English comic book series. There was no Turkish translation, so I decided to read it in English. I noted the words I did not know on my phone. Sometimes, depending on my mood, I wrote either its Turkish equivalent or sometimes its synonym. It completely depended on the situation, time, and my mood. I cannot say that I always do it like this; sometimes, I think, “Forget about the synonym; let me write its Turkish equivalent.” … I watched an entire animated series, Avatar, with English subtitles. … It was a series of four seasons, and I watched all of them in English-English. (Ali, Initial interview)

He further added that his language learning practices evolved in time according to his evolving needs. At the time of data collection, he felt sufficiently proficient in English

to engage in naturalistic daily life activities. For instance, while browsing through Instagram reels, he found himself seamlessly watching videos in both English and Turkish, which brought him great satisfaction. Additionally, he provided examples of how his utilization of the same tools, employed previously and still in use, had transformed over time.

> For example, I listen to music not like a beginner but more with a focus on certain aspects. I pay attention to how they pronounce the lyrics from a pronunciation perspective. As a beginner, I used to listen to music to expand my vocabulary, but now I specifically pay attention to how foreigners pronounce words. … I do not do it (working on pronunciation) while watching TV series and movies, but it happens sometimes. If a particular phrase catches my ear, I might look it up to see what it means, but it is not specifically for learning chunks from there. It is more like if something suddenly stands out and catches my ear, then I pay attention to it. But not with the explicit goal of making it a lesson. (Ali, Semi-structured interview)

4.3. Kübra's Case Description

"I was always supported by my family"

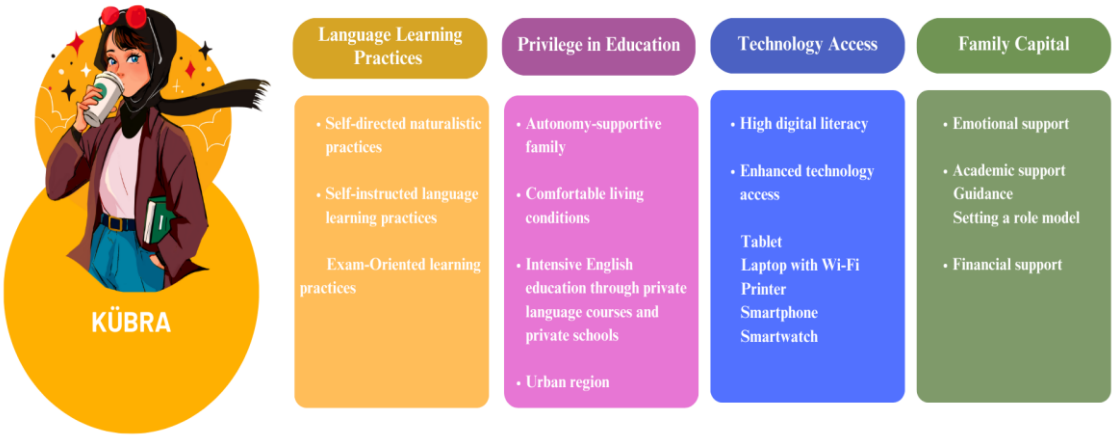

Figure 10. The key themes in Kübra's case

4.3.1. Demographic Profile

At the time of the data collection, Kübra was an 18-year-old first-year student who had successfully passed the proficiency exam on her first attempt and started majoring in the ELT department. She came from İstanbul, which is the most socioeconomically developed metropolitan city in Türkiye and enjoyed the opportunities of living in

İstanbul. On the other hand, her parents were originally from a rural area of a city in the Black Sea region, and they had a summer house there where they spent their annual vacations. Her mother, a primary school graduate, was a housewife, and his father, a high school graduate, was running a fast-food restaurant in a very vibrant neighborhood of İstanbul. He also held a stake in a real estate company. Given that, the economic situation of Kübra's family was highly good and the family invested in her education, which is described in detail later. Moreover, even though her father did not have formal academic pursuits and started working at an early age due to his family's poor financial conditions, Kübra highlighted his interest in his personal development and described him as an intellectual. As a graduate of a tourism vocational high school, he possessed language skills in English and German and exhibited a keen passion for history.

Notably, Kübra's extended family also played a significant role in shaping her educational dispositions and language learning trajectory, complementing the role played by her parents. Being in a close relationship with Kübra, her uncles held bachelor's degrees in diverse fields, including history education, social sciences, mathematics education, English education, and economics. Two of them lived abroad, and both were teachers, serving as a source of inspiration for Kübra to contemplate the prospect of going abroad herself. However, the most influential figure was her uncle who was working as a history teacher at a state school in Türkiye, concurrently pursuing a Ph.D. in the same discipline. He emerged as a prominent role model, significantly shaping her dispositions and aspirations from an early age. For the external informant interviews in this study, she nominated her uncle as the most influential person in her language learning trajectory.

4.3.2. Living Conditions and Technology Access

Kübra was living in a comfortable apartment heated with a central heating system. There was ample space in their apartment allowing her and her younger brother to have separate bedrooms. She possessed a huge personal library filled with her books and a study table carefully tailored to her preferences, where she enjoyed reading books for hours and watching her favorite movies and series. Reflecting on her technological resources, she indicated her early access to technology and found herself very privileged to own all the essential technological devices for a student including a laptop, smartphone, printer, tablet, and even smartwatch, which is evident in the following excerpt.

> When I was born, we had a desktop computer, and then when I was in the fourth grade, my dad bought me my first computer. We changed my computer when I was in the sixth grade, and again in the eighth grade. These changes occurred sometimes because it was broken and sometimes to get a more advanced model. For example, when I was in the twelfth grade, I bought an iPad because we needed to attend online classes due to the pandemic. My friends were trying to attend classes with their small phones, but I had an iPad. In addition to this, I also have a smartwatch. So, I have all the facilities in this regard. (Kübra, Initial interview)

4.3.3. Social and Cultural Activities

Throughout the interviews, she identified herself as a book worm highlighting her passion for literature. She enjoyed having her personal library at home. In the following excerpt, she tells how her reading habit is shaped and developed into a passion for her.

> In our house, there was always a library. When we went out, my dad would always buy me books. Since my dad was always working, he did not have much time to read himself. Even if they (her parents) did not read a lot themselves, my parents still value such things. When I was growing up, they always read me fairy tales. Also, when I was in the sixth grade, there were online book reading groups like Wattpad. Although my mom did not support these applications much because they were not very informative, they still helped me develop a love for reading. For example, I have an Instagram page called "bookinstagram." I used to post what I read there and tag the authors. It made me happy when authors liked my tags. I still do this, actually, and my interest in online groups might have started in this way. This interest might be a bit in the past, but I still try to encourage my friends to read. Now, I prefer more classic books. Before coming here, there was a book fair in İstanbul Üsküdar, for example. I was there on the first day of the fair. İbrahim Kalın and Mustafa Kutlu were there, and I had my books signed by them. I love these kinds of things. (Kübra, Initial interview)

As evident in the provided excerpt, her parents fostered her personal growth by recognizing the pivotal role of cultivating a reading habit in her overall development. Thus, they initiated this process from her early years. Another influential figure in shaping her affinity for literature was her uncle, whom she admired greatly. His uncle also had a huge home library and immersed himself in books which contributed significantly to her admiration of books. Affirming this connection, her father likened her to her uncle. This comparison filled her with a sense of pride.

Besides her passion for literature, her parents actively encouraged her to attend diverse sociocultural activities. She specifically highlighted the significant role played by her father in facilitating her engagement in sociocultural activities.

> My father, since my childhood, would buy theater tickets and bring them home, taking us to the state theater. … My father is an intellectual person. Even though he has a businessman mindset, he values things like that. For example, if it is the anniversary of the Battle of Gallipoli, he comes to me before the day starts and tells me about the significance of the day. My father did not go to university, but he studied tourism and hotel management in high school. If he had the opportunity, I am sure my father would have been more successful than me. He likes to research and read. For example, when we travel 15 hours to Rize, my father starts talking about the Ottoman sultans and explains their lives throughout the journey. When we came here and visited to the national garden, he read about the lives of the historical figures there. He loves such things. (Kübra, Initial interview)

Fostering some of her interests, her family actively encouraged her pursuit of these passions and provided financial support as well. For example, she was also interested in sports and explained how his father supported her passion in the following excerpt.

> In the tenth grade, I was a licensed taekwondo practitioner. I continued for about one and a half years with my friends before the pandemic. Then, I had to quit because I got injured. I was also on the school basketball team. I really love basketball. For this, my dad even built a basketball hoop next to our house in Rize. … I have always loved sports. My dad enrolled me in fitness for a year. I was trying to do basketball, taekwondo, and fitness all together, and it was very challenging. (Kübra, Initial interview)

Kübra articulated her enjoyment of living a very active life. Living in a metropolitan city afforded her access to a multitude of options aligned with her hobbies and interests. She said she enjoyed various sociocultural events, such as visiting museums, seeing exhibitions, watching theater plays, and attending concerts of famous musicians by emphasizing the diverse array of options and opportunities available in İstanbul.

4.3.4. English Learning Supported by Private Language Courses

Kübra was one of the participants in this study who initially met English in the school context around the age of ten. However, the English classes offered in her school failed to significantly contribute to her knowledge and motivation for learning the language. The critical incident in her English learning was the decision of her family to enroll her in a private language course specifically designed for children. The impetus for this decision arose from her mother, who, influenced by discussions with friends, learned that it is important to support children with additional English classes outside the classroom. Her niece would also be enrolled in English classes at a private language course in their neighborhood that year. Thus, Kübra's parents decided that it could be a good investment for her education. Kübra kept going to this language course for a year, during which she gained a valuable perspective on the importance of English and the significance of acquiring a foreign language. The course, administered by native English-speaking instructors, left a profound impression on her, as evidenced in the subsequent excerpt.

> There, I had an American teacher who spoke English constantly, and I could not understand anything. I was quite bewildered at that time because I had no interest in or exposure to English, and there was no one around me who spoke English. However, one day, I learned the pronunciation of the term "BMW", and that made me very happy. Later, I discovered that English was a language and was taught as a subject there because I had not received much education on it at school. (Kübra, Initial interview)

Following her initial positive encounter with a private language school, Kübra expressed a desire to further enhance her English skills in later years. Because she felt the language education at school fell short of meeting her future goals, she took the initiative to address this need. Motivated by the need for additional language instruction, she researched available language courses and identified one that resonated with her preferences. She took and completed courses up to the B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

In high school, Kübra's family decided to transition her to a private high school prioritizing English education after studying for two years at a Religious Vocational High School focusing more on religious and theology education. This transition marked a substantial transformation in both her academic development and social environment. At

that stage of her education, she was in the language division, and she received intensive language education at school in a class consisting of four students, including her. She was satisfied with the language education in this school and described the school's teaching as follows.

> We had two English teachers. One of them, you know, taught academic English. Like, focused on the English Proficiency Exam. The other one was a native speaker. He was conducting our speaking lessons. We were doing conversation practices. For instance, we had a "Countries and Cultures Day". We represented Egypt and dressed accordingly. There are photos of that. We dressed up according to that country. We were doing these kinds of things in our language class. We were trying to involve others (other students at school) as well. We did karaoke and other things among ourselves in English. Since we were only four people, we were like a family a bit more. So, it was nice.

Figure 11 presents a moment from the "Countries and Cultures Day" mentioned by Kübra in the excerpt above.

Figure 11. An example of social events at her high school

Despite the comprehensive language education at her high school, Kübra identified a need for an additional language course tailored to exam-oriented language

teaching coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic. There was an exam she needed to pass, and she was not competent enough to do that because, in her own words, *"I had learned English more on speaking rather than grammar. Since the exam was mostly based on grammar, I struggled a lot."* (Kübra, Initial interview)

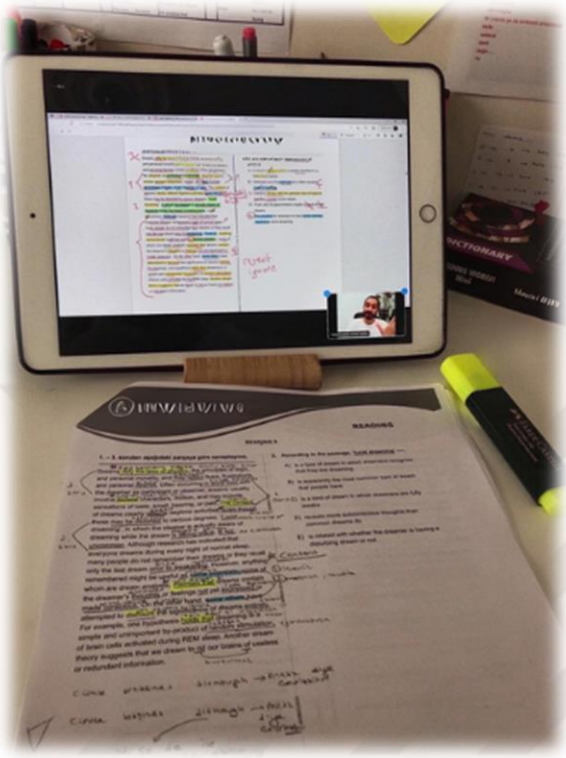

Figure 12. A moment from Kübra's exam-oriented language learning practices

Consequently, she wanted to make use of every opportunity within her reach to be successful in the university entrance exam. Following her uncle's recommendation, she bought an online language course and engaged in tedious exam-oriented language learning practices with the materials and videos of this online package as seen in Figure 12. She said, *"I worked a lot, and my family was expecting this anyway. … So, in total, I must have solved around 400 practice tests."* (Kübra, Initial interview), and she added that "*I increased it (her test performance) from 40 correct answers to the 70 correct answers (out of 80 multiple-choice) questions. I started with 40, which was not too bad, but still, I reached around 75-70, thanks to the (online) teachers. They were always providing tactics."* (Kübra, Photo-elicitation interview) Thus, thanks to her determination and hard work supported by a high-quality language education and language learning materials, she succeeded in the university entrance exam.

4.3.5. Self-directed Language Learning Practices

Kübra's English learning autobiography was full of descriptions of the private language courses she was enrolled in, as briefly outlined earlier. The impact of these language courses, coupled with her enrollment in a private high school, played a crucial role in the development of her English proficiency. In turn, her proficiency level led her to have a good score on the university entrance exam and successfully pass the English Proficiency Exam at the university. In her privileged position as a student, she was also a very responsible and ambitious learner who made work schedules and meticulously leveraged the resources and opportunities afforded by her family. An illustrative example of her diligent approach is found in her statement.

> I used to wake up at five in the morning, solve paragraph questions, and read books. I did not compromise on anything. Besides, due to the pandemic, we could not go out much. I am usually a person who goes out a lot under normal circumstances. But during this period, I set rules for myself and did not go out. If I had gone out, I probably would not have succeeded. Waking up early in the morning has remained a habit for me. Once I establish a routine for myself, I am someone who follows it. (Kübra, Initial interview)

Supporting Kübra's words about her learning practices, her uncle provided insights into her proactive approach to education. He emphasized her ability to independently devise and execute study plans, highlighting her self-directed learning skills. *"She completely makes her own study plans. She knows how to study on her own. In fact, even when preparing for university exams, she completely devised her own study schedule."* (Kübra's uncle, External informant interview)

The significance of Kübra's achievement in the university exam and attending the department of her dreams was underscored by a profound sense of responsibility. She keenly felt the weight of her family's substantial investments in her education, which compelled her to meet their expectations. When she progressed into university, she also kept her ambitious work to excel as a high-achieving student in this new educational environment. With the changing requirements of this new context, she faced some difficulties. However, she demonstrated a capacity to analyze her weaknesses and set goals accordingly. Moreover, possessing digital literacy, Kübra utilized technology for self-instructive purposes to address her emerging learning needs, as illustrated in the subsequent excerpt, where she elaborates on her use of YouTube.

> Because I skipped the preparatory class, I did not know much about academic writing, and I had never even heard the term “topic sentence.” I found all these through English YouTube channels. Sometimes, even if the teacher explains a topic, you might not understand it. (Kübra, Initial interview)

She made informed decisions and knew how to navigate the resources aligned with her learning needs. In the new academic setting, she tailored her learning practices accordingly. She also used the applications outside the classroom suggested by her lecturers, such as Voscreen and she enjoyed listening to podcasts to develop her listening skills. With a predominant focus on developing her communicative language skills, she engaged in English practices centered around her interests. For instance, she watched movies and series in English with or without subtitles. At the same time, as a big fan of listening to music, she translated the lyrics of her favorite songs into Turkish, which was a practice of hers for years. Additionally, she utilized the Slowly application to connect with individuals around the world by engaging in written communication. She expressed that she had a foreign friend she had actively chatted for a year through this platform.

At the time of data collection, she expressed a sense of competence in English that extended to real-life practices, such as following Instagram pages and using her phone in English. She even wrote her diary in English. Given her satisfaction with her English proficiency, she had set a new foreign language learning goal and was into French in a self-directed manner drawing on her experiences of English learning. Her self-directed French learning practices were summarized as follows.

> On Instagram, I am currently trying to do something in French rather than English because English resources are already established for me. I try to watch French content on YouTube channels, sometimes, I listen to French music. I am trying to do the same things for French as I do for English.
> …
> I started using Duolingo and always thought about how I could expose myself to French. While folding laundry in the dorm, I listen to a French podcast. Maybe I do not understand, but at least I become familiar with it. Just seeing it in class is not enough. Then I made a French playlist for myself on Spotify and listened to it on the bus. If I like any of them, I try to translate their lyrics into English. In addition, there is a YouTube channel that teaches French in English, and I listen to lessons from there. I struggle with French because it is a gendered language. I hope this semester goes well.
> …

> I use the “Slowly” app, for instance. You write letters to foreign people through the app. Sometimes I write in English, and sometimes in French. I try to progress in both English and French together. If I see myself as advanced in English, I consider myself a beginner in French and write my letters accordingly. (Kübra, Initial interview)

4.3.6. The Role of Family Support in Kübra’s English Learning and Education

Kübra emerged as a very privileged student thanks to her academically, emotionally, and financially supportive parents and relatives. From an early phase of her education, she was given the feeling of the importance of English, and her proficiency in the language flourished notably after her participation in relevant courses. When she was supposed to choose a division in high school, choosing the language division was the wisest decision which was strongly supported by her uncle acknowledging Kübra’s challenges in subjects, such as maths, physics, or chemistry. They should have focused more on her strengths rather than pushing her to choose a very prestigious career she might not be very successful eventually. In her family, many people had graduated from education faculties. The prospect of becoming an English teacher was also a viable option for Kübra. Despite uncertainties about her future career path, the proficiency in English she acquired could serve as a valuable asset, offering alternative career opportunities. Throughout this process, her uncle guided her about the best ways she could prepare for the university entrance exam and the alternative career paths she could choose from. For example, inspired by his influence, she expressed a desire to pursue master’s studies in Canada and embark on an academic career.

Besides the academic support she received from her family, she enjoyed access to an abundance of affordances conducive to her education. Living a remarkably comfortable life facilitated by her parents, Kübra had the privilege of ample financial support, which was evident in their investments in her education, encompassing expenses for numerous language courses, enrollment in a private high school, and the provision of all digital devices and essential language learning materials. The financial commitment undertaken by her family highlighted their dedication to providing her with an advantage for her educational journey and to ensuring a bright future for their daughter. While doing that, they also demonstrated a profound concern for her emotional well-being, consistently offering motivation and encouragement for her ongoing personal

development. For example, reflecting on this supportive environment created by her parents, she said,

> When I used to get low scores on my practice exams, I would tell my mom that I could not do it. She would respond with a firm "No, do not give up, you will do it." Or when I first came here and thought I could not make it because the city is too small, she would again say, "No, you will do it. Be patient. This is what you have always wanted". (Kübra, Initial interview)

4.4. Emine's Case Description

"Because I promised myself!"

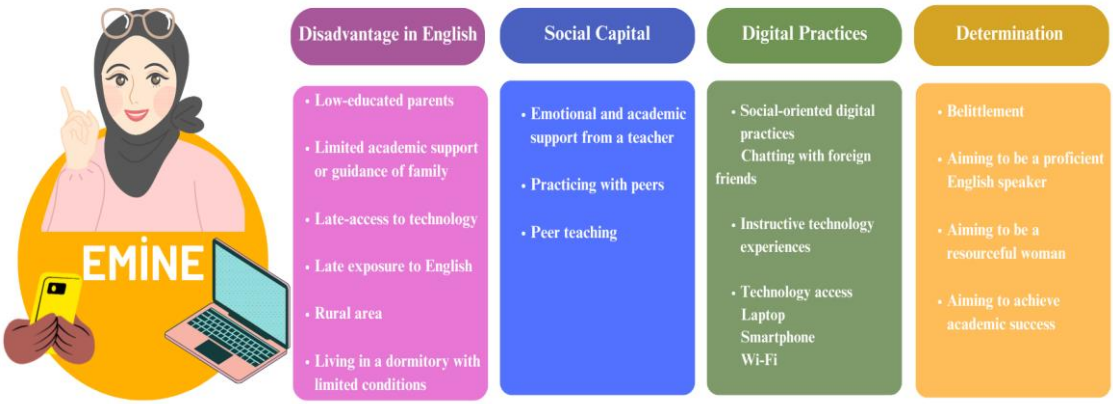

Figure 13. The key themes in Emine's case

4.4.1. Demographic Profile

At the time of the data collection, Emine was a 19-year-old second-year student in the ELT department. She had successfully passed the proficiency exam on her first attempt and gained entry to the ELT department. She was coming from a village in a town in Ordu, a province located in the Black Sea region. Rather than attending a high school closer to her village, she opted for a higher-ranking school in another relatively well-developed town of Ordu. Thus, she stayed at a dormitory for four years away from her family. When she started university, she kept living in a dormitory.

Emine came from a household in which she was the youngest of five siblings. Her mother was a housewife with no formal education. Her father was a high school graduate and a peasant working in their own hazelnut orchard, where Emine spent her childhood working and helping her parents. One of her sisters, despite holding a BA degree in Economics, worked as a prison guard due to limited job opportunities in her field. The

other sister was a housewife and did not opt for academic pursuits. Lastly, both being high school graduates, one of her brothers was working as a freelance photographer in İstanbul and the other was an imam. Because of the physical distance from her family and lack of English-speaking family members, among other reasons, she expressed that the family members had little involvement in her English language learning trajectory. However, this family structure and her social positioning likely played a role in shaping Emine's motivation within her academic pursuit and SDLL journey.

4.4.2. Living Conditions and Technology Access

Coming from a little village, Emine lived in a detached single-family house surrounded by a large green garden as seen in Figure 14.

Figure 14. Emine's house in the village and the backyard where the hazelnuts are processed

The house was heated with a stove during winters which could possibly have a negative impact on one's out-of-class study opportunities to some extent as seen in the other participants' cases. However, this situation did not affect her education life much for the last six years, regarding that she lived in a dormitory during wintertime. She had a private bedroom and a study space at home even though she did not give a detailed description. However, it was evident that she had a peaceful home environment where

she could focus on her language development. On the other hand, living in a dormitory in high school caused many problems for her out-of-class language learning as she described in the following excerpt.

> I did not have a phone, and when I had one, my phone was taken away many times by the dormitory authorities. My father came from the village and forcibly took it back. I experienced (negative things) a lot. It was really challenging, you know. Because I stayed in the dormitory of a vocational high school (not her school's dormitory), and there, we could not have study sessions with the students, we could not study in the study room. There was no working environment at all. No computer, no internet! Phones were prohibited, so what could I do? For example, the teacher assigned digital assignments … Our teacher was telling us "Solve this online test and submit it." Well, I could not do the assignments. What should I do? I had to constantly print them out. (Emine, Additional interview)

Evident in the excerpt above, Emine's living conditions in the dormitory put her in a very disadvantaged position in terms of her education. She expressed that she could not demonstrate the same performance as her classmates because of the adverse conditions of the dormitory among other reasons. She had to go through many hardships to be successful in the university entrance exam even though she felt from time to time that she would not be able to compete with others under these conditions. Until three years before the data collection, Emine did not own a smartphone or a laptop. In the last year of high school, coinciding with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, she possessed these digital devices and a Wi-Fi connection at home, which became a cornerstone in her self-directed English language learning. Prior to this time, using digital devices was strictly prohibited in the dormitory and she did not have access to any digital language learning materials.

Figure 15. Emine's study desk in the dormitory

As a university student, she was living in a dormitory again. However, the living conditions were better in this new place. Even though she shared the room with her roommates, she had her own study space where she put her personal belongings and stuck her study notes as seen in Figure 15. Moreover, she had access to free internet, and she could make use of her digital devices without any restrictions.

4.4.3. English as a Favorite School Subject

Emine met English as a school subject at the age of ten. From day one, she got very interested in English thanks to her English teacher's fun activities. She described the early times of her English learning as follows.

> In the 4th grade of primary school, the attitude of my English teacher towards the class, the activities she assigned, songs, and word games used during the classes motivated and encouraged me. As time passed, my English teacher understood my interest in English, and she started giving me more opportunities to speak in class compared to my classmates. Because she already knew what I knew. (Emine, Learner Autobiography)

As evident in the excerpt above, the teacher's recognition of Emine's enthusiasm led her to get more motivated to participate in class. Emine not only excelled in her assigned homework but also extended her engagement by listening to English songs on TV due to her growing interest in the language. Emine's enthusiasm also continued in secondary school, and she expressed that she was very eager to meet her new English teacher in the first week of school. Again, the emotional connection with her teacher extended Emine's engagement in English. Her proficiency stood out among other students at her village school thanks to her genuine interest in English. The teacher recognized her aptitude and gave her opportunities to participate more in class, resulting in a heightened motivation to learn English.

4.4.4. Deciding to Self-direct her English Language Learning

Since primary school, Emine always became a very engaged student in English classes and diligently did her English assignments outside of the classroom. The school was the only environment where she had access to English and she enjoyed this school subject to a great extent. However, in her learning trajectory, there was a critical moment when she decided to self-direct her language learning. She was in her last year of high school when she would start the university as an English major a year later. When she compared her proficiency level with her classmates, she truly lacked English skills and needed to find a way to develop her language skills. In the summer break, she demanded her parents buy her a smartphone and a laptop to use for her language development. That summer, she conducted constant research about how to develop English on her own. She downloaded and tried various applications and chose the best ones according to her needs. For example, she made use of short stories for reading with both audio and text, and she read them aloud to develop her pronunciation. After the autumn semester, COVID-19 broke out, and she had to come back to her village, staying at home all day and not having much to do other than prepare for the university entrance exam and improve her English skills. Intensifying her SDLL sounded like a great idea within her conditions.

> During the pandemic, I worked hard to improve myself. Since I was going to university and studying English teaching, I felt the need to start developing myself in a specific area. I began with speaking skills because I really had none. (Emine, Initial interview)

As she highlighted above, speaking and pronunciation were the language areas she wanted to develop herself in a self-directed manner. The English lessons were satisfactory in terms of preparing the students for the university entrance exam and Emine found her teacher resourceful and knowledgeable. She believed her vocabulary and grammar knowledge were quite good, thanks to her teachers' teaching strategies. However, exam-oriented systems may neglect certain crucial skills, such as speaking and listening as in the case of Emine. Thus, she felt an urge to improve herself and took the initiative to self-direct her learning, especially to enhance her communicative language competence. She said, *"Once I knew the words and grammar, everything was entirely up to me—speaking, forming sentences, using phrasal verbs, idioms, slangs, formal-informal language. I developed all of that on my own."* (Emine, Semi-structured interview) Additionally, she said *"I compensated for my weaknesses myself because I knew what my goal was, and I wanted it."* (Emine, Additional interview) Given that, her SDLL demonstrated a proactive approach to overcoming the limitations of in-class language learning and addressed specific language skills that were not adequately covered in her formal education.

4.4.5. The Role of a Teacher in a Disadvantaged Learner's Story

"She was like my mother, more than a teacher!"

As a student coming from a rural area, Emine was not privileged enough to be supported by her family with her English language development outside of the classroom before high school. Nevertheless, she was a very ambitious student and worked tediously to attend a higher-ranking high school to receive a higher-quality education and secure better job opportunities in the future. She expressed that she was herding the animals and working on exam materials at the same time. Her dedication and determination brought her to a school in a relatively well-developed town on the coast of the Black Sea. However, she was surprised by the academic success of her classmates coming from higher social class positions and, additionally, had difficulties fitting into the new social environment because of the reasons described by her below.

> Very different people, you know; I mean, it changes even from one district to another, the perspectives of people. The coastal areas are a bit more open-minded, you know, their social lives, family structures, everything was very different. I felt a bit excluded, to be honest. It was a bit of an adjustment process... I stayed in the

> dorm, and because of that, they looked down on me more, and so on. (Emine, Additional interview)

Feeling socially excluded by her friends, Emine was not also able to catch up with her classmates academically despite her hard work under adverse conditions due to a lack of technology access and a comfortable study environment in the dormitory. Realizing Emine's situation, her teacher took the initiative to support her outside the class by providing emotional and academic support. The following excerpt highlights the importance of having a supportive teacher in a disadvantaged learner's learning trajectory.

> A wonderful teacher came into our lives (in the language division). She was very attentive. In fact, she showed extra attention to me, possibly one of the students with the lowest grades in the class. She took me to her home or provided online lessons via Zoom and Skype (during COVID-19 time). After classes, she picked me up and guided me through studying in various ways. She greatly motivated me. Her support was truly more influential than my family's. (Emine, Semi-structured interview)
> …
> Because my grammar and reading were really bad, which used to demoralize me, she would talk to me about why I still could not do well in reading comprehension tests. She gave me a special reading strategy book. She said, "Read this, underline these points, focus on these." I really immersed myself in improving my reading skills. (Emine, Additional interview)

Subsequently, her teacher's efforts contributed to her success in the university entrance exam leading to her increased motivation and self-confidence and paving the way for new opportunities in her academic journey. The teacher not only provided crucial emotional and academic support addressing Emine's needs at that period of her life but also assumed a role transcending that of a mere educator to that of a maternal figure. She was even waiting in the schoolyard where she took the university entrance exam like a family member and also called her in the evening of the exam to check her answers, demonstrating a level of care and involvement beyond conventional teaching responsibilities. Emine said, *"The results were announced. My teacher was extremely delighted, excessively happy. She called me first when the results were announced. She congratulated me and said, "You will achieve great things."* (Emine, Additional interview)

4.4.6. Dispositions towards English and Aspirations

Demonstrating exceptional determination and commitment within the school context, Emine made a decision to improve herself as much as possible, considering that *"I was going to start university, and there would be a preparatory exam. I needed to improve myself. We would be speaking entirely in English."* (Emine, Semi-structured interview) Thus, at that stage of her life, she was determined to excel in English. It was not only a fun school subject anymore; rather, it transformed into a crucial tool facilitating her integration into the new academic milieu she would engage in soon.

As briefly mentioned earlier, in her high school years, she encountered many challenges related to catching up with her classmates because of her disadvantaging conditions, such as coming from a rural area where English received minimal emphasis beyond the classroom, coupled with uneducated parents offering no guidance or opportunities for language learning, and engaging in manual labor, such as orchard work and animal herding during summer breaks. Given that she was the least successful student in her class, this situation made her feel marginalized and belittled as can be seen in the following excerpt.

> In fact, in high school, they used to make fun of me with some words. I remember that I did not even know how to pronounce the word "business." I pronounced it as /bʌsınıs/. They had a good laugh, and I felt a bit embarrassed and shy then. (Emine, Initial interview)

However, Emine was determined not to experience the same situation at the university. This determination ignited a fire in her to develop herself. In a short time of six months, she progressed in her language skills to a great extent, resulting in heightened self-confidence and motivation to excel further. Subsequently, her focus shifted towards holistic self-development which provided her with the freedom to explore diverse career options beyond the confines of becoming just an English teacher. For example, her best friend, the external informant, stated that the English proficiency level she was trying to achieve could open doors for her beyond Türkiye in her professional life.

> About her professional life, I do not think Emine would take the normal job as far as I know her. She would not take the job of teaching English, but she would search for another, like a job that requires English more, such as translation. Maybe she would just continue her study abroad doing a sort of master's … I

> would say the level of English she is attempting to reach right now is the level of proficiency, advanced, or fluent level of English. She would not do that just to become a teacher of English. (Her best friend, External informant interview)

Her friend's words align with Emine's aspiration to become a proficient English speaker, which transcends the limitations imposed by her rural background and overcomes the condescending attitudes of more educated relatives. For example, she stated that her uncle, who was a teacher, had invested in the education of his two daughters, who kept their education in Europe. He was looking down on Emine's family, saying that Emine would not achieve such academic success. Instead, she could find a husband. This treatment fueled Emine's determination to demonstrate her resilience and strength, which aspired to prove herself as a resourceful and empowered woman.

4.4.7. Self-directed Language Learning with Technology

When Emine decided to intensify her self-directed English language learning, it was the COVID-19 time when people isolated themselves in their houses. The limitations imposed by the pandemic led her to explore online platforms and language learning apps to enhance her English skills. Her selection process involved trying various resources and ultimately choosing those that proved most beneficial for her learning. Emine found value in English videos on platforms like YouTube and Instagram, where she could access diverse content to support her language development.

> I was listening to listening tracks in bed, which speak phrases and sentences in your sleep, from basic to more advanced words; I was falling asleep by listening to them. (Emine, Semi-structured interview)
> …
> I was watching informative videos on TEDx talks, documentaries, or slightly more informal ones like animations. I used to watch them with subtitles. Then I started watching without subtitles. I would see how much I could understand, check my level, and track my progress. Later on, I noticed that I could speak now. I began speaking aloud to myself. For instance, I found a topic like viruses – why they are this way or that way – and I made self-presentations. (Emine, Initial interview)

As mentioned in the earlier section and evident in the excerpts above, she was trying to improve her speaking and listening skills that she did not have many chances to improve in the school context. Moreover, she also wanted to extend her knowledge in

terms of informal language use, daily life expressions, idioms, and slang words. For instance, she said, *"I was following pages on Instagram. I was looking at how to sound more native or more informal, you know. I was looking at their phrases."* (Emine, Semi-structured interview) After a while, she felt the urge to speak with real people because she reached a proficiency level in that she was ready to communicate in English. She discovered some language learning websites and apps, such as Free4talk (https://www.free4talk.com) and Hallo, on which she was in contact with many foreign language learners. She described her social-oriented technology experiences in the following excepts.

> I researched how to have a better platform for verbal communication and downloaded Hallo. Then, the app improved itself (in three years). It added teachers, broadcasts, private lessons, and so on. I wanted to give it a try. I met a lot of nice teachers from the Philippines, the USA, and different countries. … For example, they used to ask about my level in a certain subject, and according to my level, they would choose a topic for me. We would discuss the topic, such as the drawbacks of technology use in your environment. We had special sessions for about an hour with the teacher on that topic, tailored to my level. It had a significant impact on me. … Besides that, I had video conversations with friends from a few countries. I usually did these kinds of things. … There is an app called Free4Talk. There are rooms for different languages. You enter the rooms for the language you want to speak and discuss certain topics by turning on your microphone. I met my friends there. Their levels were quite good. Practicing with them through speaking, messaging, voice recordings, and so on, my speaking skills improved naturally. (Emine, Semi-structured interview)

On these two platforms, she spent a great deal of time and created a social network of language learners from all over the world. Figure 16 exemplifies the chatrooms she was using on Free4talk, which is an online learning community platform.

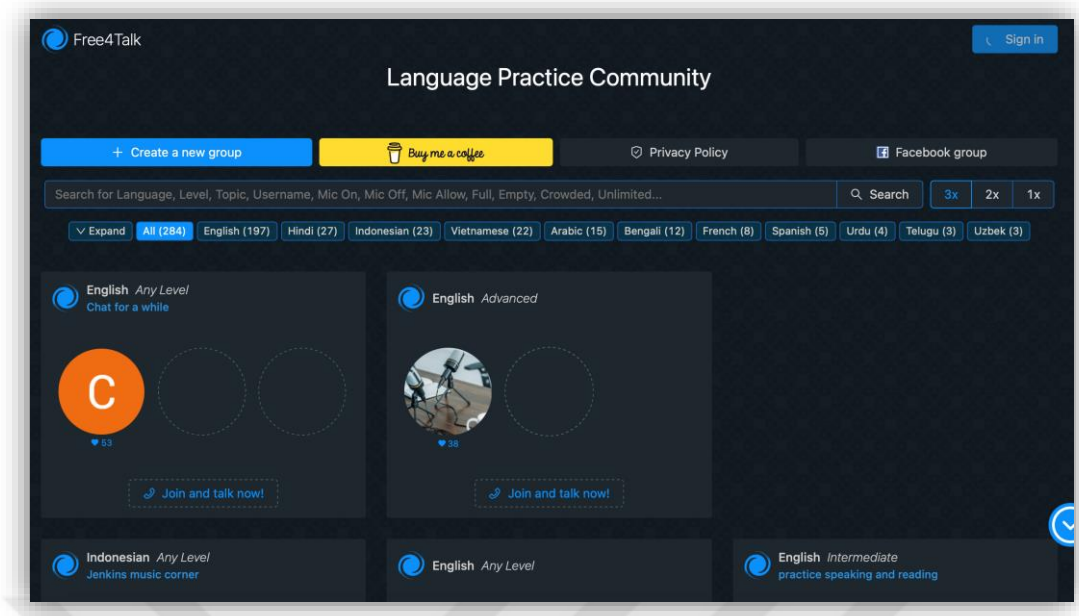

Figure 16. Free4Talk website

She described this community of practice on these platforms as *"I have a family there now. Everyone knows each other. We have our own jokes, certain things we laugh about, it becomes a focal point."* (Emine, Semi-structured interview) She met many people within three years, and some of them became very close friends with her. Even for the external informant interview, she chose a friend of hers from Egypt she met online on Hallo. She believed that he knew her SDLL procedure better than her family and teachers. Her friend described how they met, *"It was in the live stream. So, people on this platform make live streams, and that is where I found her. She was like on a hop-on section talking to someone, and I joined in."* (Her best friend, External informant interview) He also added that he was impressed by her performance because she was such an active user of this platform and very determined to develop herself.

> When I joined Hallo, she was level 100. So, it means she spent a lot of time making conversation with people on this platform before I joined. I do not know what she did to reach that level. Because level 100 is the maximum level on this platform. (Her best friend, External informant interview)

However, even though she reached the maximum level on this platform, her proficiency level was in progress. In time, her English improved a lot and her friend witnessed her progress very closely.

> She was shy to speak, and whenever she spoke, she was stuttering, making mistakes, but over time she was keen on learning English, academic English. She was attempting to learn new vocabulary and at the same time making live streams … Like every day, every single day, maybe twice a day, whenever she was free in the summer vacation. And I could see an improvement in her speaking. The flow of speaking English became smoother. She was making fewer grammar mistakes and using new words I had never heard of. … I am sure she was not like that before university or during her high school years. I do not think she was as good as she is now. I think, in a very short time she progressed a lot.

This friendship had a reciprocal impact by improving their language fluency and facilitating mutual learning through extensive conversations. Their discussions spanned over various topics, such as cultures, religions, political views, psychological issues, and so on as two people with different religious, cultural, and social backgrounds. They also introduced each other to their own circle of friends and extended their social network. Consequently, engaging in conversation with numerous people from diverse global backgrounds broadened their worldview and deepened their understanding of other cultures as exemplified in the following excerpt.

> I encountered very different people with diverse opinions and I came across various ideas like political views or feminism. There were also those who belittled me because of my nationality. For instance, there were many people who newly learned that Türkiye is not an Arab country. We used to discuss their thoughts or their geographical knowledge on such matters. It was interesting. (Emine, Semi-structured interview)

When she attended the university, the first thing she had to do was to take a proficiency exam to test her readiness for the ELT department. Her dedicated and intensive efforts in the six months leading up to the exam proved successful, allowing her to pass and directly advance into the ELT department. In her first year at the university, she enrolled in courses like reading, academic writing, listening, and speaking. In this new academic environment, she encountered aspects of language education that were novel to her and went through some challenges like learning the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which is an alphabetic system of phonetic notation to represent the sounds of spoken language in a consistent and standardized way. However, she was a very ambitious student and engaged in many out-of-class learning activities in line with

her evolving needs in the new academic environment. Figure 17, captured at the library, encapsulates a moment of her diligent SDLL, focused on mastering the IPA.

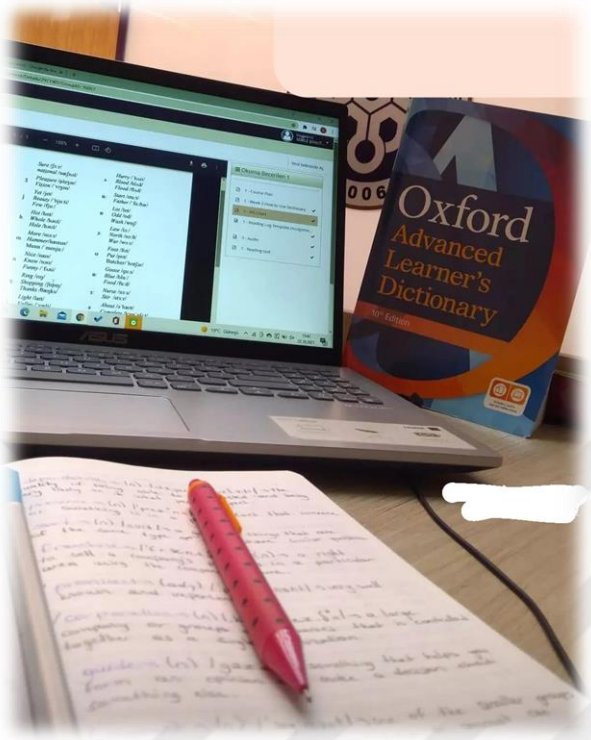

Figure 17. An example of self-directed learning for coursework

Besides the coursework, she was determined to make use of her spare time to improve herself outside of the classroom. Making plans for her day, she was thinking, *"Today, maybe I should read an English book, watch these videos at this hour, or start watching a documentary… At this hour, let's memorize five words or allocate an hour for practice."* (Emine, Initial interview) Additionally, she transferred the learning strategies and tools used and suggested by her instructors for her "*self-improvement,"* in her own words. For example, she continued to use some websites, YouTube channels, online dictionaries, and language learning applications she had never heard of before, such as ELSA and Voscreen. She made use of these tools to improve her pronunciation skills which she cared about to become a very proficient speaker of English.

4.5. Hatice's Case Description

"I did not have any other choice."

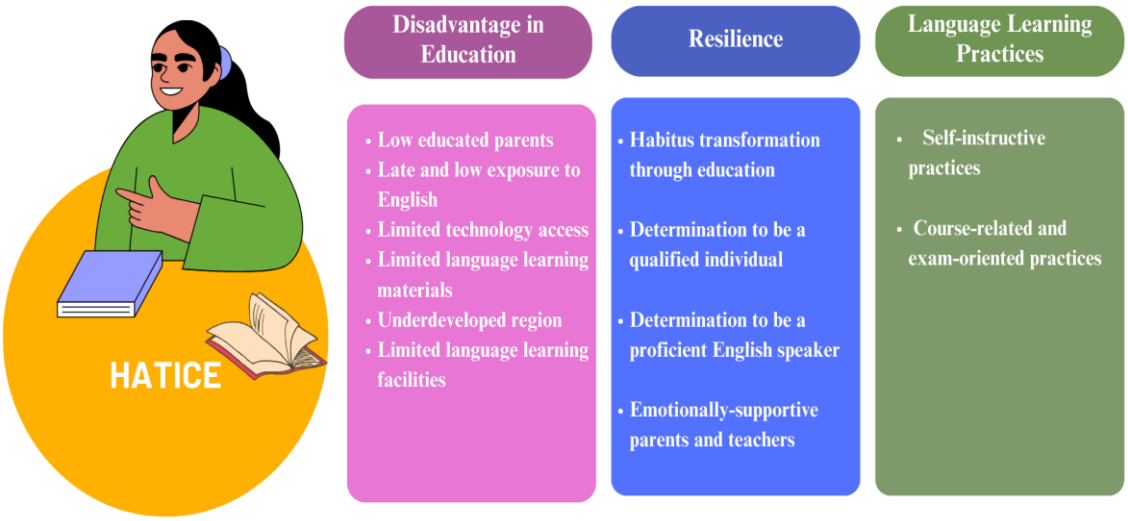

Figure 18. The key themes in Hatice's case

4.5.1. Demographic Profile

Hatice is a female student coming from a rural district of Kars in Eastern Türkiye. She was 20 years old at the time of the data collection and the oldest of six siblings. Her mother was a housewife with just a five-year primary school education like her father. Her father was running a grocery shop. Both parents did not have a high level of education and the economic situation of the family was also quite struggling. Having lived in İstanbul for a while, which is a metropolitan city with 16 million population, they went back to their hometown because of social and economic reasons and started a business there. It was evident in her data that her parents did not read any books, journals, or newspapers. They never attended sociocultural activities, such as going to the cinema, theater, or concerts. Moreover, they did not go on vacations. There was no one in the family who did any kind of sports or played a musical instrument. Taking into consideration the information provided above, Hatice was a participant coming from a lower social class family.

4.5.2. Living Conditions and Technology Access

Hatice's family were living in a rural area which was far from social facilities. Her father built their own house six years ago, and she was lucky enough to have her own

bedroom. Thus, she had a private space to focus on her education and interests, such as reading books and watching movies. However, the heating system of the house was problematic. During wintertime, she had to stay and study in the common area where the stove was.

Figure 19. Hatice's bedroom and study space

When it comes to her technology access, she had limited access. When she was young, they did not even have a TV at home for a while. She expressed, *"My father even did not let us have a TV at home. Later, he realized that I was going to our neighbors, in secret, to watch TV. Then he decided to buy a TV"* (Hatice, Semi-structured Interview). In their house, there was no connection until 2 years ago. At the time of the data collection, she still did not have a desktop or laptop due to financial reasons but had access to her own mobile phone since the first year of high school and her brother's tablet, which was provided by the school as a part of a governmental project (i.e., FATIH project) aiming at a countrywide technology improvement (Demir, 2024). The technological devices she owned indeed enhanced her access to the internet and her language learning in many aspects. However, she expressed that she would prefer to have a laptop because it was difficult to use the tablet for her coursework and assignments. When asked about the difference between a tablet and a laptop for educational use, she said that,

> In my opinion, there's a significant difference. For instance, our teacher had assigned us an online task to complete. It was quite challenging for us (her group

> mates). There were three of us in the group, and all three of us had tablets. That's why we went to the library for two days. It was quite difficult for us; we spent about five hours in front of the computer. (Hatice, Photo-elicitation interviews)

4.5.3. Deciding to Learn English and the First Phase of Her Learning

Hatice was supposed to choose a branch to study in at the high school and she was indecisive about her future career. She had an uncle who was also an English teacher working in the same city. He suggested she could study in the foreign language division and pursue an English-related career, preferably as an English teacher, in the future. She thought it could be a possible path for her as it was for her uncle. She first started learning English with an intensive focus at the age of 16 as a school subject rather than getting exposed to English outside of the classroom. However, the language education in the school was not satisfactory for her. Most of her classmates were not interested in learning English. Her best friend and she were the only ones who took it seriously and engaged in serious work for the exam. However, the proficiency level she attained at school was not enough to pass the university entrance exam at her first attempt and she had to retake the exam in the following year. In a year, she self-directed her learning through exam books and YouTube videos. She watched tutorials of Turkish teachers of English and followed their strategies to pass the university exam. Luckily, she progressed enough to get a score enough to study in an ELT department at a state university. Out of 80 multiple-choice questions, she answered 67 questions correctly. However, her English proficiency did not meet the requirements of the department she would attend.

4.5.4. Dispositions and Aspirations for Learning English

Hatice had a strong ideal self as a qualified person and a very competent English teacher/speaker in the future, which encapsulated an instrumental gain in her learning English. She stated that:

> I'm sure I need to work very hard. Some people think like this: "The department we're studying in is already easy," but I do not think so at all. After all, we're studying English, and the more you improve in this language, the further ahead you are. (Hatice, Semi-structured interviews)

In line with Hatice's own statement, her teacher also indicated that she was well aware that she would be an English teacher in the future, and she did not let herself be weak in any domain in her field. Thus, she was not satisfied with a medium level of quality, but she pursued to be perfect. In one of the interviews, she also indicated, *"I want to be someone who is pointed at in my field."* (Hatice, Initial interviews). Thus, her main drive was to distinguish herself with her qualifications and competence in her field.

The knowledge of English had already made some positions beyond her reach available in the past, such as majoring in an ELT department. This achievement, despite all the hurdles of her social positioning, was a critical turning point that made her believe in the possibility that her linguistic capital could be further used to reach the forms of capital she aspired to have. In her learner autobiography, she said, *"My biggest dream is to run a language course in my city, of course with the help of my uncle and my friend, and I want to write books in this field."* In later interviews, her dreams evolved into running a language course even abroad or doing her masters in this field. However, the important point to emphasize here is the fact that she believed if she developed herself well enough, she could go beyond her probabilities. As a result, she valued her personal development by accumulating linguistic capital as well as other forms of cultural capital. When asked what was her ultimate goal in this life, she answered with a single word, "qualified," and later added,

> I want to add a lot to myself. For instance, right now, I'm learning English, but in the future, I want to learn another language, even if it's on my own. For example, I want to learn French. Spanish later on. Anything is possible. The more I improve myself, the better. (Hatice, Initial interview)

Closely related to her ideal L2 self in the future, at the time of the data collection, her near future goal was to pass the end-of-the-term proficiency exam but as the best student having the highest score. She wanted to distinguish herself from the other students in the class which is evident in such a statement of hers: *"I do not want anyone else to be better than me because I feel like it would make me feel less."* (Hatice, Initial Interview). Her urge to be a distinguished student, teacher, or an individual, in general, could be a result of the sense of socially produced belittlement and marginalization as a result of her social positioning. For example, she said, "*Our family was never supported by them (her relatives/larger family). We were always pushed away and excluded…. It ignited a strange determination in me, I do not know why."* (Hatice, Semi-structured interviews).

Another example could be her marginalization because of her disadvantaged position in the educational field. She was describing how she felt when she failed at her first attempt at the university entrance exam. She went through such a hard time psychologically. She was about to give up on her education, but later, she realized she needed to pull herself up together. She stated, *"I had no other choice in this life (other than preparing for the exam)."* (Hatice, Initial interview). When asked what if she had not chosen to study, she stated, "*I do not know. Maybe I would stay with my family for a few years. In the time of exam preparation, my relatives were arranging a marriage for me in case I would not study"* (Hatice, Initial interview). Therefore, learning English and passing this exam was the only ticket to a better life.

4.5.5. Preparatory Class as an Opportunity for Disadvantaged Learners

At the time of the data collection (i.e., from December 2021 to June 2022), she was studying in the Foreign Languages School of a state university that provides one-year language-intensive education. Because of the rote learning and exam-oriented language education at high school which prioritized learning vocabulary, grammar, and reading skills, she lacked communicative and intercultural competence. Moreover, outside of the classroom, she was also not exposed to English at all in any aspect of her life due to the city she lives in, the low-cultural capital of the family, and her peers. Therefore, when she took the language proficiency exam at the university, she failed that exam and she had to study in a preparatory language program before majoring in the ELT department. In this one year, she was very motivated to develop her English language skills to a great extent and she was a very determined and hardworking student in and outside of the classroom. This one year of intensive language education transformed her habitus and served as compensation for the low-quality language education in her earlier education. First and foremost, she engaged in a new context with different requirements and realized that the concept of language learning was different than what she used to believe it was. Even the language learning tools she used transformed, and she started listening to podcasts, following native speakers' tutorials, watching movies in English, and using online platforms, such as BBC for reading comprehension. She started working on language skills like writing, speaking, and listening and engaged in a range of self-instructive language learning practices as well as the other domains of the language, like learning vocabulary and grammar. Especially academic writing was a domain she had the

most difficulty in, and she engaged in course-related work outside of the classroom. Her writing instructor expressed,

> "When she first started, she was a student who could write better than the other students in the class. However, her grammar was bad: she did not know how to make grammatical sentences. Students generally assume that if they write grammatically correct sentences, they are good at writing. They do not pay attention to what they are supposed to write. Hatice was also the same at the very beginning of the semester. She did not care about the content, organization, and grammatical rules. She had many interesting ideas, but she was not attentive to these criteria. However, now, she writes long, detailed, and engaging texts with grammatically correct and complex sentences. She is good at organization now and attentive to the genre I assign them to. She never misses any details. There are just a few students in the class who are careful with these and she is one of them" (Hatice's teacher, External informant interview)

She made use of this one-year to empower herself in the educational field and she passed the end-of-the-term proficiency exam successfully. For her, this one-year program provided her with a language learning ecology that was inclusive, facilitative, and responsive to her needs and encouraged her to leverage her limited linguistic and cultural resources to reach her ultimate goal. She was not inferior to her classmates in terms of language proficiency anymore, maybe even superior to many of them, and was ready to be in a more fair competition with her more advantaged classmates.

4.5.6. Self-instructive Language Learning Practices

As a very determined and goal-oriented student, Hatice engaged in a variety of self-instructive language learning practices outside the classroom. Hatice's investments before the preparatory year seemed to be restricted to improving herself in particular fields of language, such as learning grammar and vocabulary and working on multiple-choice questions as in the university entrance exam. She engaged in tedious exam-oriented work, implementing information-oriented technological practices, such as watching tutorials focusing on exam strategies or teaching grammatical rules. However, passing the university exam was a critical turning point in her learning history.

> I had not really focused on listening and speaking. My goal was to simply pass the exam through rote learning when I was a YKS (Higher Education Entrance Exam) student. After that, I slowly started to work on improving myself. (Hatice, Semi-structured interview)

After the exam, her learning practices were shaped in line with her needs and emerged in the new field she had contact with. The university context required her to work on her communicative competence and raised her awareness about what it meant to be a competent user of English. She chose learning tools and strategies accordingly. For example, she listened to podcasts to improve her listening skills, read English books and online articles to improve her reading comprehension and learn new vocabulary, watched movies to have a good command of the daily use of English, and watched educational videos on Instagram or YouTube to learn a range of idiomatic expressions, advanced grammar or course-related information. She was very determined to learn English and made use of all the resources within her reach. She spent her weekends exclusively working on her assignments and her own independent learning. She expressed,

> If we do not consider weekdays, I try to wake up early on weekends and study vocabulary right away…. I extract words from books. I write their synonyms, their phonetics, all together. I create sentences to remember them, and then I try to use those words when speaking. They still get forgotten, even if you memorize them. … BBC has essays, and I try to read from there. I have writing assignments, and I do them. I give importance to listening. To be honest, I was quite scared of its exam in the first term. It was very intense. So, I put a lot of effort into it. I think my listening has also improved. (Hatice, Semi-structured interview)

While she engaged in these learning practices, she used notebooks to write down notes because she believed she needed very planned and disciplined work to achieve her learning goals. In the following pictures, some examples from her notebook can be seen. She expressed using colored pens and papers made learning more fun, enhanced memorization, and motivated her to a great extent.

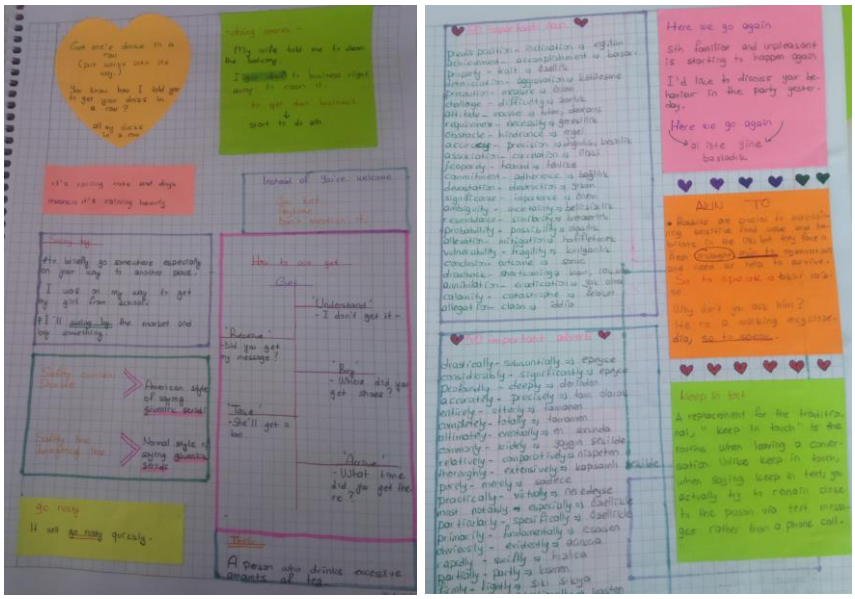

Figure 20. Pictures from Hatice's notebooks

She said that her notebook is such an important learning tool for her, and she was quite careful with it. Referring to the notebook in the picture above, she said,

> "This is the notebook I use for general purposes. I write the words I find on Instagram and YouTube here. I use a separate clean notebook for my vocabulary. In addition to that, I have one smaller notebook. I wanted a portable notebook because I take it with me to the dining hall, the library, etc." (Hatice, photo-elicitation interviews).

The excerpt above shows the extent her language learning was integrated into her daily life. Even when she went for dinner, she took her notebook in case she needed to write down a word or memorize the words she had taken note of before. She also added that besides her notebooks, she also stuck notes on her study desk because *"Notes, for example, are quite important to me. Even if I do not study when I sit at that desk, they catch my eye, and I see them."* (Hatice, Photo-elicitation interview). She further added, *"Sometimes I get stuck. I write down the topics I get stuck on. It's helpful to see them"* (Hatice, Photo-elicitation interview). In the following picture, an example of her notes above her dormitory study desk is presented.

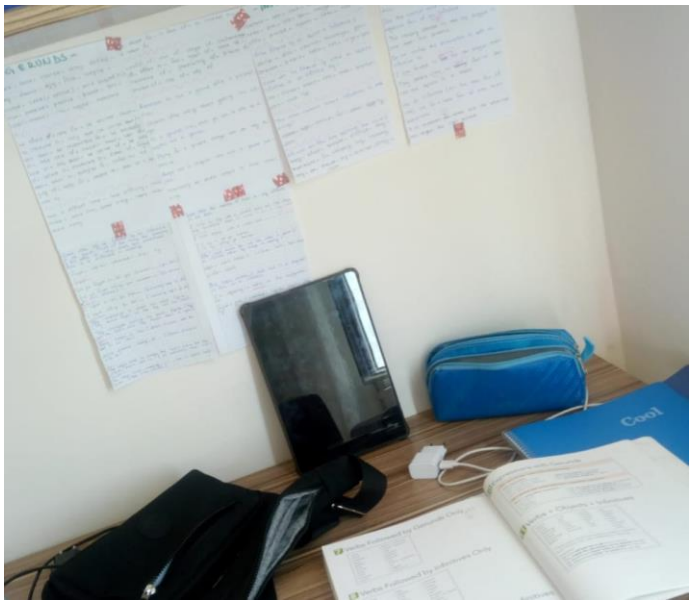

Figure 21. Hatice's working space in the dormitory

As also described by her teacher, Hatice was an introverted person, which affected her learning practices and behaviors inside the classroom.

> She (Hatice) speaks when necessary but remains silent when it's not. She does not have much communication with her friends either. I rarely see her talking in class. ... Hatice was alone. If I did not make a pair match, I did not see her talking much with anyone. Even during breaks, I do not see her having a conversation with someone and going outside. … Hatice is not like that (does not seek support from others). She usually does not ask someone else. She either asks her phone or asks me, but not someone else. (Hatice's teacher, External informant interview)

Hatice's behaviors in the classroom were also evident outside the classroom, and she did not engage in learning practices requiring social exchange. However, she needed to practice speaking to be successful in the end-of-the-term proficiency exam and also to be a competent L2 speaker in general. To this end, she relied on herself rather than asking for help from a friend or getting in contact with foreigners. Based on the speaking prompts she found on the internet, she talked to herself, even on the phone, pretending as if she was talking to someone else. From time to time, she recorded her talk and later listened to herself to monitor and evaluate her speaking proficiency.

4.5.7. Emotionally Supportive Parents and Teachers

Throughout the interviews, Hatice expressed that her parents emotionally supported her while studying for the university exam even though they could not support her financially. After her first attempt at the university exam, she was very disappointed and felt like she would not be able to keep studying for the next year. However, her father encouraged her to work hard and did not lose his faith in her. She stated that her parents' support made such a huge impact on her. On the other hand, she also mentioned a teacher of hers whom she had a close relationship with. For her, that close relationship motivated her to learn English; however, she did not give so much detail about that.

4.5.8. Disadvantaging Conditions for English Language Learning

Taking Hatice's case into consideration, it is evident that her language learning was restricted by many constraining conditions, which put her in a very disadvantageous position compared to her counterparts. First and foremost, both of her parents had a low educational level and did not have any knowledge about the importance of English, did not speak English, and did not consume any content in English which could possibly be listening to English music and watching movies in English. Thus, in the home environment, there were not any situations where Hatice could be exposed to English. Moreover, the internet access was also limited until a certain age, and she did not have computer access which could possibly open a new world for her to get exposed to English on online platforms. Thus, these factors led to very late exposure to English. It was presented as a school subject in school and the teaching methods of the teachers also did not expose her to English in a communicative and meaningful manner. At high school where she had long class hours of English in the foreign language division, the teaching methods were facilitating rote learning and were mostly exam-oriented.

Another factor was the lack of social capital through which she could get inspiration and help. Even though her uncle was an English teacher, he did not provide any support in her language learning procedure other than suggesting she choose the foreign language division at high school. Moreover, except for one friend of hers, there were no friends who were interested in learning English. This could be because of the city she was living in, Kars. According to the SEGE (2017), Kars is one of the provinces ranked as the least socioeconomically developed category (i.e., 6^{th} level). Moreover, corresponding with the results of SEGE (2017) that Kars is ranked 71st in the subcategory

of education out of 81 provinces in Türkiye, Tutar and colleagues (2012) indicate that the development of educational facilities is below the national average and the inadequacy of educational opportunities is one of the main reasons for migration in Kars. When asked about the advantages and disadvantages of the city she lived in, she answered this question in a very pessimistic manner.

> There was absolutely no advantage. The disadvantages were abundant. When any tourist came, people could only look as if an alien had fallen from the sky. Language education was almost nonexistent; there are private language courses that think they can do something in language education, but they are not good at all. … It might be because of the lack of quality in teaching. People have no access to information. They either do not want to reach it, or they are too comfortable.

The excerpt above can be evidence of the low socioeconomic background of the people living in such rural areas and their perceptions of English. Well-educated people generally tend to live and work in economically developed regions due to many reasons. This situation limits lower-social-class language learners' contact with a middle-class habitus for which English plays an important role because of educational, professional, and social reasons. Thus, the demand to learn English in these areas might be low resulting in one or two institutions available in the district. The students who want to take language classes are supposed to attend those particular language schools; otherwise, there is no other option available in that area. Thus, it also affects the competition in business and also the quality of private language institutions. As evident in Hatice's data, the courses were mostly focused on the exam and the skills test for the university exam, which the motivational orientations of the people in those districts could possibly shape. She also complained that the English teacher in the language course was not qualified enough. Instead of going to this language course, she preferred to rely on her own resources and self-direct her learning for the examination.

4.6. Nesrin's case description

"If we can live in this house, nothing in this life can stop us."

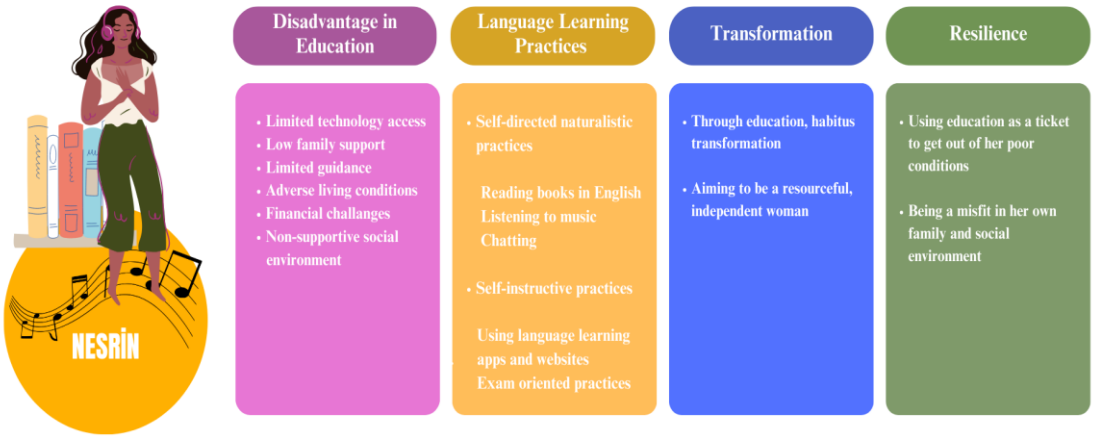

Figure 22. The key themes in Nesrin's case

4.6.1. Demographic Profile

Nesrin was a 19-year-old female student at the time of the data collection, and she was a first-year ELT major after the completion of the preparatory class. She was coming from Gaziantep, which is the most developed province in the Southeastern Anatolia Region, ranking at the top nationwide in terms of competitive and innovative capacity variables due to its intensive industrial activities (SEGE, 2017). However, Gaziantep ranks lower in social welfare indicators like education and falls below the national averages in terms of educational variables, with a 70.9 % rate in the general secondary education enrollment variable and an 11 % rate in the variable of the population with a college or university degree, compared to the Turkish averages of 79.4 % and 15 %, respectively (SEGE, 2017). As an explanation for this finding, Geniş and Adaş (2011) addressed the heavy influx of migrants from Gaziantep's own rural areas, as well as neighboring provinces that are among the least socioeconomically developed provinces of Türkiye. They described this migration pattern as one of the city's most significant challenges affecting the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the population. Six out of every 10 households in Gaziantep are composed of households with migrant backgrounds. Among the migrant population, those born in the outskirts of Gaziantep make up the largest group, and they mostly have low educational levels and are unskilled (Genis & Adaş, 2011).

Nesrin's family, one of those households, migrated to Gaziantep from a neighboring city, Şanlıurfa, 17 years ago. As a primary school graduate, her father worked in a factory. Her mother never went to school, and she was a housewife. Nesrin had five siblings: two elder sisters, one elder brother, and one younger brother and sister. Nesrin was the most academically successful student among them and the first sibling who moved to another city to study at the university which is evident in the following excerpt.

> My eldest sister is a high school graduate. She took the university entrance exam twice but could not attend the university. Another sister of mine is studying theology at the university in Gaziantep. Both of my brothers did not keep studying after secondary school. My younger sister is preparing for the high school entrance exam right now. (Nesrin, Initial Interview)

As a low-income and -educated family, they lived in one of the suburban neighborhoods of Gaziantep. When it comes to sociocultural activities, she reported that they, as a family, never attend sociocultural activities, read books, do sports, and go on vacations.

4.6.2. Living Conditions and Technology Access

Nesrin and her family lived in a three-room house where all the female siblings (i.e., totaling four individuals) slept in the same room equipped with a common little study table next to the bookshelf seen in Figure 23. Aside from a study room and bedroom, the room was also used for hosting guests, and when asked how they studied in case a guest visited them, Nesrin responded with a resigned voice, *"I did not study!"* (Nesin, Photo Elicitation Interviews). The heating of the house was also a problem, particularly during the wintertime, because there was just one stove heating just one room necessitating all the family to spend time in the same space. Nesrin described her discomfort in this house as devoid of privacy with the crowd in the house. In the external informant interview, her sister also echoed the adverse living conditions and said that they always encouraged each other by saying, *"If we can live in this house, nothing in this life can stop us."* (Nesrin's elder sister, External informant interview).

Figure 23. Nesrin's study table and bedroom

Nesrin's technology access was limited to a household television, a tablet she bought during the data collection, and her mobile phone bought at the age of 14. Her sister expressed that despite seemingly insurmountable financial constraints, she was determined to buy her own mobile phone, and she managed to do it with the small amount of money she earned working as a tailor assistant, which was a testament to their ambition Additionally, her sister stated that they could not have Wi-Fi connection at home because the internet infrastructure of the neighborhood they lived in was not suitable. Thus, they all depended on costly mobile data for their coursework or SDL during the COVID-19 pandemic. This placed a substantial financial burden on them, given their economic circumstances.

4.6.3. The Financial Situation of the Family

Nesrin was in her second year at the university and relied primarily on a government scholarship. The meager monthly income she received was far from sufficient to meet her needs. Thus, she was planning to find a part-time job to improve her financial situation. Considering the number of people in Nesrin's household and the occupation of the father, it was not surprising that her family consistently faced financial difficulties. The financial constraints not only had an impact on Nesrin's access to resources for language learning but also played a pivotal role in shaping her dispositions and educational aspirations. She said, *"... one of the reasons for the strong connection I have with education is the poverty and financial struggles I experienced as a child."* (Nesrin, Initial interview) Her sister echoed this argument, underscoring that the

economic challenges, in addition to the social ones they confronted during their upbringing, profoundly influenced their identities and life goals.

4.6.4. Deciding to Learn English and the First Phase of her Learning

Nesrin's initial exposure to the English language, as a teenage girl, transpired through the English songs she avidly tuned into on television. Her intrinsic passion for music created a desire to learn English. Another catalytic encounter with the English language occurred as she watched television programs featuring global travel which opened a window for her to the rest of the world and ignited an interest in traveling the world. She recognized, however, that proficiency in English was a prerequisite for realizing this aspiration.

On the other hand, she started learning English for the first time and realized her aptitude for English learning in the school context. In time, she believed she could pursue a career as an English teacher because teaching has always been a passion for her. During the initial phase of her SDLL, apart from her coursework at high school, listening to music was the only way for her to get exposed to English within her reach due to the lack of technological devices and internet connection at home. She predominantly listened to downloaded songs on her phone and sang along with the lyrics she downloaded beforehand, which significantly contributed to the development of listening skills, pronunciation, and vocabulary knowledge.

Later in her language learning procedure, she had to take the university entrance exam concerning her goal to be an English teacher. Working for the exam was challenging for a student who lived in a crowded household with poor living conditions and faced financial problems, as described above. However, she was ambitious and resilient enough to overcome those adverse conditions for her dreams. She engaged in tedious exam-oriented learning practices and used a set of English reference books prepared for the university exam takers. She described her exam-oriented SDLL practices in the following excerpt.

> … I had a vocabulary notebook. I still use that notebook. I used to write down the word, its meaning, synonym, antonym, and an example sentence. It was like a table. That is how I learned vocabulary. …My teacher taught me this strategy… I used to find them (the new vocabulary) from multiple-choice questions I worked on. … I used to write them on paper and put them into a box. Then, I would pull

> them out (one by one). The Turkish translation was on the back, and the English was on the front (of the paper). I would think, try to remember its meaning, and if I could not, I would look at the back. … Sometimes, I would also create stories in my mind. … I learned the word "machine" in this way. I thought about what a washing machine is, and then I looked it up. Whenever I saw a washing machine, I would say "machine" like that. (Nesrin, Semi-structured interview)

The initial phase of her English learning consisted of coursework focusing on grammar and vocabulary teaching as a student studying in the language division and exam-oriented language learning practices outside the classroom. Her technology access was limited to her mobile phone with a a restricted data plan, and it was not possible to easily reach out to a variety of online resources for her SDLL. Her learning strategies and practices were limited to the possibilities within her reach. Her knowledge about learning strategies was also limited to a few language learning strategies taught by her teachers. However, with the new university context she was immersed in, her learning practices also changed.

4.6.5. Self-directed Language Learning during Higher Education

Nesrin enrolled in the preparatory class, a one-year intensive language program at the university because she did not take, by mistake, the speaking section of the proficiency exam conducted by the ELT department. However, instead of considering this one year as a waste of time, she expressed her satisfaction with this situation because the learning experience significantly differed from her prior language education in high school. In this new context, she was supposed to concentrate more on speaking, listening, and academic writing skills, which were immensely neglected previously. This extra year afforded her plenty of time and space to focus on the communicative aspect of the English language. She implemented different language learning strategies tailored to her specific language learning needs. To address the weaknesses, particularly in the realm of listening and diverse accents, she made use of several language learning applications and online resources, such as Voscreen, Listen and Improve, YouTube channels, and the British Council website, which were used and suggested by the instructors. Additionally, she came up with her own language learning strategies. For instance, she adopted a routine of reading articles on specific topics, listening to podcasts related to those topics, and subsequently engaging in self-reflection and vocalizing her thoughts on the subject while recording her voice. This method allowed her to monitor her speaking skills and identify

areas for improvement. Lastly, she started using an application called “Bottle” to chat with foreigners and had an online friend from the UK.

Additionally, when her SDLL practices were scrutinized, it became evident that she integrated her interests into her language learning procedure. Central to her language learning approach were the notions of pleasure, enjoyment, and learning content through the medium of English. A significant portion of her SDLL activities revolved around her passion for music and reading literature. She was such a bookworm since her childhood and later extended her love for books to enhance her language learning in recent years. For example, she started reading the English versions of her favorite books she had previously read in Turkish, such as The Metamorphosis by Kafka and Letters from an Unknown Woman by Stefan Zweig. In essence, Nesrin effectively utilized her interests as integral components of her language learning materials.

4.6.6. Minimal Access to Technology for Underprivileged Language Learners

Considering Nesrin’s challenging life circumstances, one can assume that learning another language independently would be an insurmountable task. Despite her evident language aptitude, achieving fluency under such constrained conditions seemed exceptionally difficult. However, her case served as a testament to the impact of even minimal access to technology (i.e., her mobile phone with mobile data) and freely available online resources on SDLL. Nesrin acknowledged limited access to technology and language learning materials but a few essential ones for her learning, such as grammar books, exam-related documents, downloaded music with lyrics, and YouTube videos whenever she had internet access. Notably, YouTube was a window opening to the outer world and not only made a significant contribution to her learning and practicing English but also expanded her knowledge beyond the confines of her social context. Through YouTube, Nesrin had the opportunity to follow YouTubers and channels producing content in English. Notably, her favorite channels included TED-Ed, an American channel featuring engaging and informative lessons through animated videos, and Çilem Akar, a Turkish YouTuber creating content on foreign languages, university life, travel, and lifestyle. Çilem Akar became a role model for Nesrin, embodying the kind of life she aspired to lead, described by her as *“an independent woman standing on her own feet and actively engaging in travel to foreign countries.”* (Nesrin, Initial interview)

4.6.7. Dispositions and Aspirations for Learning English

From an early age, Nesrin ascribed an important mission to education in her life: the power to transform and reshape her life and the broader world around her. She was dreaming about being a teacher in the future driven by the profound impact she experienced as a teenage girl feeling isolated in school. A teacher, through a simple yet impactful gesture of asking, "How are you today?" touched her life and illuminated her day.

She described her relationship with education as "love". She emphasized the profound influence that education can have on individuals and, by extension, the world at large in the following excerpt.

> "When I was very young, the negative situations I saw on the news, such as war and famine, deeply affected me. That is why, deep down, I wanted to change the world and rescue it from such situations. Sometimes, I even imagined having magical powers and saving all the children. And one day, I saw a book with something like this written on the back cover, although I cannot remember it exactly: "When I was a child, I wanted to change the world. As I grew up, I learned that this would happen by changing myself. I realized that I could change my family, my family could change my neighborhood, my neighborhood could change the city, and the city could change the country." This quote deeply resonated with me, and I became focused on changing and improving myself. I was aware that this would only be possible through education." (Nesrin, Initial Interview)

In pursuit of her ultimate life goal, she wanted to become a teacher of her favorite subject at school and the source of her greatest joy. Given her approach to language learning, Nesrin seamlessly integrated her passion for literature and music into her learning English. She emphasized the significance of pleasure and enjoyment as integral components of her path toward realizing her imagined identity beyond the instrumental gains of her academic pursuits. English was the language that could unlock doors to her future dreams. In her learner autobiography, she further elaborated on her enjoyment of learning foreign languages expressing that she planned to learn other foreign languages, such as *"Spanish, French, Russian, and Italian. I want to do this purely out of love for them, without any specific reason."* (Nesrin, Learner autobiography).

Furthermore, she cultivated a strong ideal self of herself as a qualified person and a very competent English speaker. To articulate her aspirations more precisely, she

affirmed, *"I want to be the best and I work so hard for this goal"* (Nesrin, Initial interview). Her determination was evident from the outset. She exerted a significant amount of effort to pass the university exam under very disadvantaging conditions and finally succeeded. Subsequently, she invested a substantial amount of time and effort into learning and practicing English to strive to actualize the best version of herself as a competent speaker of English. When queried about language investment at the time of the data collection, she expressed, *"I frequently follow the websites and channels and use applications recommended by my teachers. I dedicate approximately seven hours of my daily time to this work."* (Nesrin, Initial interview) This commitment underscored her determination to realize her goal of becoming her idealized self of a competent speaker and resourceful woman.

a. Being a misfit and desire to escape:

In external informant interviews, Nesrin's sister expressed that she had always been a different person who was not obedient to their parents and the community. She, who exhibited more harmony with the family and the community, described Nesrin using the following words.

> Well, as long as I can remember, Nesrin has always been rebellious and a tough one. Our family always had to deal with Nesrin, both during her adolescence and her childhood. She used to be very quiet and introverted as a child. Around the ages of 13-14, she displayed very masculine behaviors. She used to dress very dark, you know, she would adopt the typical characteristics of the people in the neighborhood we lived in. In high school, she remained introverted, but her world changed significantly. She read books, and her circle of friends changed. Nesrin changed quite a bit, but she was always a rebellious person in life. … She never accepted things as they were, right or wrong. She had such a character. So, I believe Nesrin is a tough girl; that is how I know her. She is a strong woman at the same time. (Nesrin's sister, External informant interview)

Even though her sister did not approve of her rebellious behaviors in the past, she wholeheartedly appreciated Nesrin's courage that she had never managed to achieve. She also touched upon their relatives' belittling and criticizing perspective towards her sister and expressed her disappointment with the following words.

> For example, when Nesrin came here (Gaziantep) and spoke to my cousins, their mothers told them "Do not talk to Nesrin, how do you know what she is doing there (at the university and in another city)?" I was very sad. Why are they saying this? You know, her husband also studied at a university in another city. But here, because of some cultural issues, men tend to think they can do everything. (Nesrin's sister, External informant interview)

In line with her sisters' words, Nesrin also repeatedly expressed that she did not have the feeling of belongingness to her family and the society she lived in. Her parents were very religious, conservative, and strict. When asked how she felt in this context, she described herself as different from others in every aspect. For example, Nesrin always wanted to be a strong resourceful woman and take a better position in social life even though the culture she was born into was fostering a particular gender role for a woman. She never accepted this gender role prescribed by the society as her identity and expressed,

> When I was little, I used to tell my sister that I would become a police officer. She asked, "Are you going to be a police officer? Women clean and do the dishes," and things like that. That seemed to be the most accurate thing for a child of that age because it was the only thing I could see in my surroundings. I had never seen a woman working. But I wanted to be a police officer. … I was probably influenced by television. Yes, I mean, I think about it like this: my mother does the dishes, and cleans, and it should be like that. (Nesrin, Semi-structured interview)

She further added that her desire to be a strong and independent woman was a product of the behaviors and discourse of her parents.

> They (Nesrin's parents) always say that men work outside and women stay at home. Before marriage, you need to depend on your father economically and socially. After you get married, you will depend on your husband. You will not have a life of your own. There are so many like this around me. At least, my closest one, one of my elder sisters, for example. (Nesrin, Semi-structured Interview)

Consequently, she did not want to follow the social and cultural norms imposed on her and had always felt an urge to break the chain. To this end, she attached an important mission to her education and believed that it was her only chance to educate

herself. In this way, she could escape from all the oppressive conditions of her social context.

b. Education as a ticket to get out of poor conditions:

Throughout Nesrin's data, it is evident that she viewed education as the primary means of overcoming the challenging circumstances in her life. The following excerpts highlight the profound importance that Nesrin placed on education and her pursuit of English language proficiency to reach this goal.

> The thing that motivated me the most on this journey was the environment I lived in. I grew up in one of the suburban neighborhoods of Gaziantep. The incidents I witnessed at a very young age made me want to escape from that neighborhood. And I knew that I could only achieve this through education. I believed I should do it in the way I loved the most, which is by learning and teaching languages. (Nesrin, Learner Autobiography)
> …
> …I think it was when we found out that my brother had epilepsy. The whole family collapsed as if it was the end of the world. My mother acted as if she had no other children. … It felt like the world had fallen apart, and that woman had five more children to take care of. She should have thought about them, too. That is when I realized I needed to escape from there. Either they should change, or I should run away from here …. Because I had a very clear feeling of loneliness. Money issues were constantly arising at home. There was always a lack of money, and my parents were constantly arguing. I had to endure that. I still worry about it to this day." (Nesrin, Semi-structured Interview)

Her recurring expressions reflected a strong desire to break free from the constraints and adverse experiences shaped by financial problems, conservative family practices and norms, and the oppressive culture of her hometown. Thus, education was the only ticket to the outside world she had dreamed of for many years.

4.7. Sena's Case Description

"I rescued myself from that environment"

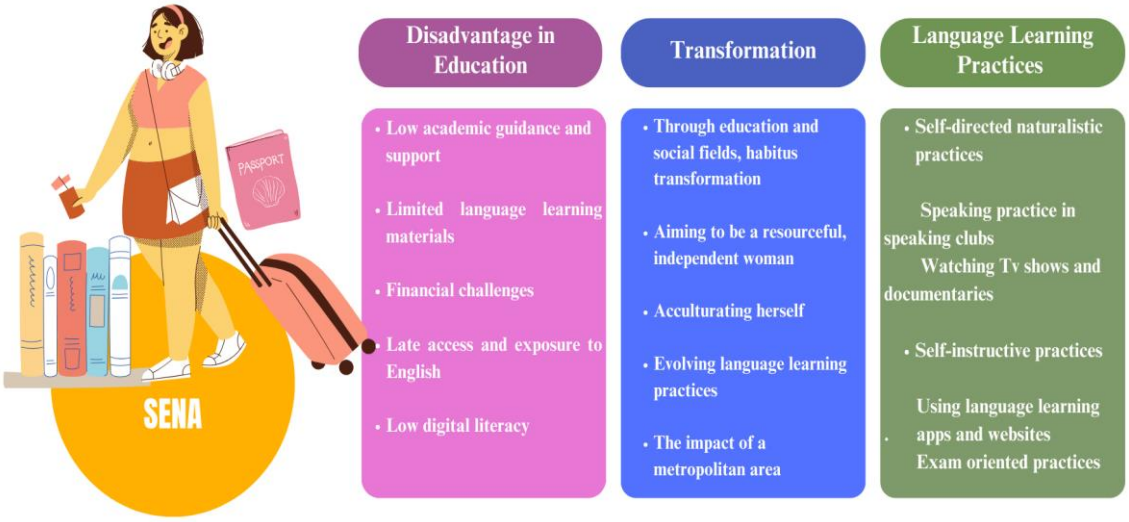

Figure 24. The key themes in Sena's case

4.7.1. Demographic Profile

Sena, a 31-year-old female student from İstanbul, was the eldest of three siblings. At the time of the data collection, her father, with a primary school education, was retired and lived away from home, while her mother, also with a primary school education, assumed the role of a housewife. Both siblings opted not to pursue a university education, and her brother even did not consider going to high school. Instead, they preferred to work. The sister was employed in a clothing store chain while the brother worked as a tailor in İstanbul. All the siblings were living in the same house all together.

In the 1980s, her family moved to İstanbul from the rural district of Samsun, a city in the northern part of Türkiye, seeking opportunities in this metropolitan city. İstanbul is the most socioeconomically developed province of Türkiye thanks to being Türkiye's industrial and production center, where 52 % of the country's exports take place and 46.8 % of tax revenues in Türkiye are collected (SEGE, 2017). 18.5 % of the whole Turkish population lives in this metropolitan city which means 15.907.951 inhabitants (TUIK, 2022a). Like many other immigrating families to İstanbul, both parents found laboring jobs at a factory requiring them to work long hours. During this period, Sena spent her days with her grandmother, who had been a constant presence in their household since the family's move. Her grandmother had great significance in her upbringing and Sena described her as the greatest support in her life. Despite her lack of formal education,

Sena regarded her as a strong and open-minded woman. She also expressed her admiration for her because she was strong enough to restart life from scratch at the age of 35 in a huge city like İstanbul.

4.7.2. Sena's Formal Education Trajectory

Sena's education trajectory was significantly different from that of the other participants in this study, all of whom followed a more conventional path by studying at the language division during high school and proceeding directly to higher education after graduation. In contrast, Sena entered the workforce at a hairdressing salon at a very early age during her high school years with her primary focus being on employment rather than academic pursuits. However, she experienced many belittling and adverse situations at different workplaces over time which led her to a realization that education was essential for securing better job opportunities and gaining empowerment in life. At that time, she was 21 years old and lacked any prior experience or knowledge about how to work for a university exam. Thus, she approached her father with a request for financial support to enroll in a university preparation course. Her father and grandmother financed this one-year private course. Consequently, she achieved a satisfactory score, enabling her to enroll in the Department of Econometrics, which is "a branch of economics that combines mathematical and statistical methods to analyze economic data" (UDEL, 2023). Sena's decision to study in this department was not exactly her own volition but rather influenced by the teachers at the university preparation course. The teachers' aim was just to showcase the effectiveness of their course to prospective students. Later, she realized this department was not aligned with her interests and was a mistake in her life. However, she persevered, completed her studies, and graduated from this department.

After graduation, Sena faced challenges finding a job, leading her to work as a substitute math teacher at a nearby secondary school in İstanbul due to financial constraints. After a year of work as a math teacher, she suggested to her boss to teach English as well at the same school. She explained her decision in the following excerpt.

> Towards the end of the first year, I also developed a desire to teach English because, at that point, I had already reached a certain level, and I continued to engage with English extensively on an individual basis. I shared this situation with my manager, and as a result, I began teaching English in my second year. (Sena, Initial interview)

She held this position for an extra year and enjoyed teaching English to a great extent. During this period, she embarked on studying for the university exam for the second time, aspiring to become an English teacher. The following year, she started majoring in the English Language and Literature Department because her exam score was not enough to get into an ELT Department, which was her main goal. She studied there for a year and went to Slovenia with the Erasmus+ student mobility program for the autumn semester. Upon her return, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, leading to one and a half years of online education in the same department. Towards the end of her studies, she realized she could get transferred to another university to pursue her original goal of majoring in an ELT. Thus, she ended up at the university where this study was conducted. At the time of the data collection, she was studying as a second-year student at her new school.

4.7.3. Living Conditions and Technology Access

Sena and her family lived in a detached single-family house with central heating. Due to the limited number of rooms, she shared her bedroom with either her sister or her grandmother. Despite that, she had a study area in her brother's bedroom, featuring a study table, her books, and belongings. She described this workspace, with her books and belongings, as her arsenal, akin to being in a battle. As the only person in her household pursuing education, this place was exclusively hers, providing a sense of freedom and empowerment despite its position in her brother's room.

Figure 25. Sena's working space at home

Sena's technology access evolved gradually over time. In her early years, the sole available technological device was a household TV. However, Sena was never a big fan of watching TV. At the age of 17, she got her first mobile phone, funded by her savings from working at a hairdresser. As a university student majoring in econometrics, she needed and purchased a laptop. She financed the laptop again by working at the hairdresser during her holiday breaks in İstanbul. She expressed that because she had access to technology at a late period of her life and taught herself how to use it, she did not feel digitally competent. At the time of the data collection, there was a Wi-fi connection and a tablet at home, but the time of her first access to them was not explicitly indicated in the data.

4.7.4. Critical Incidents Leading to Sena's Decision to Learn English

As mentioned before, Sena's formal education trajectory significantly differed from conventional educational paths for other participants in which they studied in the language division and took the university exam to be an English major. Thus, her decision to learn English was also different than the other participants. It would be a better description that her decision was made as a result of several critical incidents in her past. First of all, the turning point of her life was her decision to pursue a university education after several years of work as a hairdresser. After attending the university as an econometry major in another city, Çanakkale, her life perspective gradually changed as a

result of her interaction with many social and educational fields, which led to her decision to learn English.

One day, while hanging out with her friends, she met a family visiting their son studying in the Department of ELT at the same university. This family evoked some feelings related to her education and her relationship with her own family. In her statement, she expressed her feelings related to this moment.

> I confess that I felt extreme jealousy of that boy. The fact that he was studying English Teaching, his family was visiting him... Years have passed, yet I remember it as if it were just yesterday. … First of all, that boy was studying in a very good department, and he was studying at a university I liked. … I am not entirely sure, but after hearing the word "English" that day, I probably told myself "Why do not I learn English?" I mean, I imagine that's what happened. I said to myself, "It might be useful for me." I did not explicitly say that I would study English teaching, but deep down, I believe that on that day, I wanted to be that boy. (Sena, Semi-structured interview)

It can be inferred from the excerpt and her data in general that she felt inferior as an econometry major because it was never her goal to study in this department and it was also not valued by her family and acquaintances. The fact that these parents valued their son's university education, and they came for a visit affected her deeply. Her family had never visited her even though her mother was from Çanakkale, and they had many relatives in that city.

Another incident, which led to her decision to learn English, happened on a bus trip to her home during a holiday break. She saw a girl on the same bus reading an English novel. Until that moment, she never thought that it was possible to read a novel in a foreign language even though she was a big fan of reading novels in her mother tongue. She said, "… the idea of reading English books was not something I could consider back then. Therefore, the fact that a girl who shared the same bus with me was reading English books had a significant impact on me (Sena, Photo-elicitation interview). In this excerpt, it can be inferred that seeing another person who is with the same conditions showed her the possibilities she could also reach out and this girl on the bus became an inspiration for her.

Sena's interaction with different profiles of people from different socioeconomic backgrounds gradually changed her habitus and shaped her dispositions and aspirations, as well. Another important incident that led her to get curious about English was related

to her romantic relationship. She was in a relationship with a guy who lived in İzmir and came from a middle-class family background when she was studying in Çanakkale. Her boyfriend was doing his master's in the history department at a university in İzmir and learning Arabic as a foreign language in addition to English. In this relationship for one and half years, he inspired her to learn foreign languages and her life perspective evolved to a great extent as she expressed. However, more importantly, there was a very critical moment during a home visit to her boyfriend living with his mother. She saw several leaflets about overseas travel on the coffee table, and she was looking at them eagerly and curiously. At that moment, his mother said, *"It seems like they are out of your reach".* That single sentence made her extremely sad, and she expressed her feelings in the following excerpt.

> Actually, she is still a woman I love, and I do not think she said those words with ill intentions. Maybe she said it so that I wouldn't be disappointed later; I do not know. But this made me extremely ambitious. How can someone say something like this to me? No one can say that I can't do it. (Sena, Photo-elicitation interview)

That interaction with her mother was a moment in which Sena felt belittlement and it was never something she could accept. Following that moment, learning English became a life goal for her.

4.7.5. The Initial Phase of Sena's English Learning

When Sena first decided to learn English, she did not know how to learn a foreign language because English was also not a subject she was interested in as the other ones at her previous school education. She was truly a beginner, and she needed a guide in her journey of language learning. Firstly, she started to go to a small private language course in Çanakkale, where she was an econometry major. However, she expressed that she did not even remember what she learned there. This experience was not so effective in her learning. Later, she enrolled in a prestigious language school in İstanbul, and she assumed that it was the beginning of her English learning journey. She summarized the initial phase of her learning in the following excerpt.

> I started at English Time (A private language institution). That place laid a good foundation for me. The teachers were foreigners, and there were foreign friends. Sometimes, I hung out with these people outside as well. … They (the people she met at the language school) opened up different worlds to me. In those days, initially, I always read the dictionary for quite a while. Because at that moment, the resources I had were the information I could get from my teachers and, in addition to that, my dictionary. If you ask, couldn't you have access to more? Yes, I could, but I was not aware of it. As time went on, I realized that my grammar was improving, and in addition to that, I stayed in speaking classes after regular classes. … Later, I started making word cards on my own. When I was going home from the course, I would open them at the bus stop and read them. Then, I would put them in my pocket and read them again when I remembered. I think I found it very useful. … We had our books suitable for every level at English Time. I would find them (the unknown words) in those books. (Sena, Semi-structured interview)

Reading a dictionary and trying to memorize vocabulary with this material was a learning strategy she came up with because her language learning strategy repertoire was quite limited, as she expressed in the above excerpt. Over time, her learning strategies evolved and showed diversity. In this period, she was very determined to learn English as well as possible because she was well aware that English would play a significant role in her life even though she did not have a concrete goal or dream related to English. Her father and grandmother again financed this language school, and she made use of every opportunity this school provided to her. She kept going to this school for two summer breaks and she completed all the available modules. Upon completing this school, she was ready to self-direct her English learning because she was aware of alternative language learning strategies and was already at a certain proficiency level where she could engage in activities independently. She expressed that in that period she got interested in American TV shows, such as Friends and Breaking Bad. She even said, *"Despite having ten seasons, I have watched that series (Friends) three times from start to end."* (Sena, Semi-structured interviews) She thought it was very effective for her language learning to watch TV shows with English subtitles and this practice contributed to a great extent to learning vocabulary and daily expression. She even had a notebook for the vocabulary she learned from the shows.

In this period of her learning, she made use of technology and mentioned particularly a language learning application and a website. At the very beginning of her learning, she made use of "Duolingo" and a website she used frequently called

“engvid.com.” On this website, there were various videos by different teachers on varying topics and appropriate to different proficiency levels (See Figure 26). She said she found this website coincidentally, and she made effective use of this website, especially for learning grammar.

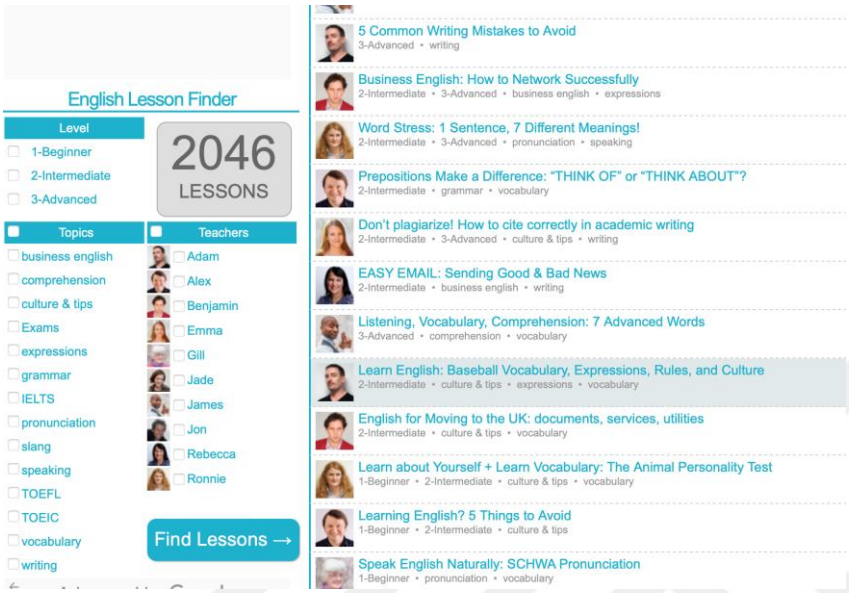

Figure 26. Screenshot from the website of Engvid.com

In the later stages of her learning, she was ready to engage in socially oriented language learning practices. In İstanbul, it was possible to come together with other English language learners and native and non-native speakers of English. She found a café called “English Spoken Café” and she started going there and meeting a lot of language learners and native speakers. Consequently, she became a member of this language learning community, and this space made her a social network sharing similar interests as hers.

> This helped me a lot in improving my English. I spent time with these people occasionally outside the cafe and we used to go to events like camping together. In fact, my first visa application coincided with that period. There was a London event, and I had some saved money. My visa application was rejected for this trip, but at least I learned how to apply for a visa. Those two years of my life were crucial to me. I decided on the profession I wanted to pursue, improved my English as much as possible, and worked to earn my own money. (Sena, Initial interview)

4.7.7. Studying for the University Exam

When she first decided to pursue a career related to English, she was working as a substitute English teacher at a state school. The exam format was exclusively different than how she learned English before in the language course and she did not have much knowledge about the content of this multiple-choice exam. At the same time, she also did not have any acquaintances who had taken this exam before and could provide help in this period. She had a colleague preparing for KPSS, a standardized exam for individuals seeking employment in the public sector in Türkiye. They were going to the school library or an empty class together after their lessons and were studying and motivating each other to work more efficiently. She had found a very old English reference book from the 70s in the school library and was trying to make use of this material as much as possible. Later, she also asked the English teachers at the school where she was working about how she could prepare for the exam. They also gave her some old exam-related books. In the external informant interviews, her friend said that she (Sena's friend) found some random English coursebooks with CDs from the library of a closing school. Sena used those materials to make translations and also used the materials in her lessons. Other than those materials, she did not have many effective materials to make use of and she did not know many learning strategies for the exam but was trying to make use of every little material or instance she could find. She said, *"I did not know the exam system and the methods used. I was trying to do my best in the time and with the energy left after teaching. That explains the score (i.e., 57 correct answers out of 80 questions) I got from the university language exam."* (Sena, Photo-elicitation interview) Obviously, she did not find her performance in the university exam satisfactory. However, it was the best she could reach within her possibilities. When asked why she did not enroll in a university preparation course as she did before, she answered in the following words: *"I was already working (not having enough time to attend) and saving my money. I thought maybe I would use it for something good in the future. I did not want to give my money to a preparation course because they are extremely expensive in İstanbul."* (Sena, Photo-elicitation interview)

4.7.8. Self-directed Language Learning in Higher Education

She was majoring in the English Language and Literature Department in Karabük and the English language competencies needed in this new environment were significantly different than the earlier times. She was supposed to read, analyze, and

discuss pieces of literature and poems to be successful in this new field. Thus, her learning practices evolved into one adjusting to the new requirements. In a statement, she said attending an English major in Karabük made another turn in her English learning history and her social life.

> … the texts I worked on became more sophisticated, and I continued my Spoken Cafe habit with the foreign friends I met there. One was Pakistani, and the other was Jordanian; I had two friends with a very good command of English. I shared their photos with you as well. … The one in the middle, Kübra (pseudonym), is Pakistani; she was the top student in our department in Karabük. The other one, Samar (pseudonym), is originally Jordanian but was born in England and stayed there until he was five. After that, they moved to other countries and finally came to Türkiye. … They were really mature girls. Kübra was always successful in classes, and Samar comes from a family where both parents are university professors.

In this new social and educational field, besides the coursework, she put so much effort into socially oriented language learning practices and used language as a tool to engage in daily life interest-based activities, such as watching series, movies, and documentaries, and reading books. In other words, she engaged in self-directed naturalistic language learning practices when she reached a certain proficiency level.

Among the participants of this study, Sena was the only participant with abroad experience, thanks to the Erasmus+ student mobility program. As mentioned above, she went to Slovenia to study there for a semester as an Erasmus student. This abroad experience contributed to her English proficiency but, more importantly, to her self-confidence as an English speaker. She expressed, *"This is an important factor in overcoming my fears of speaking English in public*." (Sena, Learner Autobiography). After coming back from Slovenia, she also said that her popularity increased as an Erasmus student who had been abroad. With this self-confidence, she started engaging in speaking club activities with the other English learners and foreign students at the university. After a while, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, and she had to focus on more individualistic language learning practices, such as reading books and watching English videos, shows, or documentaries.

At the time of the data collection, when asked about her weaknesses in English and her current language learning practices, she made a self-evaluation of her language skills and summarized her daily language practices in the following excerpt.

> The aspect I find weakest in myself is pronunciation. Because I try to improve myself within the context and conditions of Türkiye, my pronunciation skills do not evolve as much as they should. … I learned English after the age of twenty-two (meaning that it is hard to have a native-like pronunciation after a certain age and in the Turkish context). I think I speak English very often in my life. I give private lessons to three different students three days a week. Now I have started teaching at a private language course, and I attend classes at the university. Thus, I speak English every day. So, I think I'm good at speaking. I also think I'm good at reading because I come from English Literature, and I've read a lot of texts. Lastly, I read the book you (the researcher) gave (Sunset Park by Paul Auster) without struggling too much. There were a few words I did not know. I wrote them down in my notes on my phone as vocabulary. … I tried to use them in sentences, and I realized that I misunderstood the meanings of some words. But most importantly, I think I practice a lot in listening. I listen to a lot of English content on YouTube. I follow some YouTube channels … And when I watch something on Netflix, it's always in English. (Sena, Initial interview)

Considering Sena's language learning journey, which spanned approximately eight years, her language learning needs and her SDLL practices changed over time. Her SDLL practices evolved from self-instruction into self-directed naturalistic language learning practices which are using English for daily life and interest-based activities with the aim of practicing and learning English.

4.8. Deniz's Case Description

"*I wanted to become an English teacher. I wanted something secure, you know. I thought let me have a stable foundation to lean on, and the rest will be easy".*

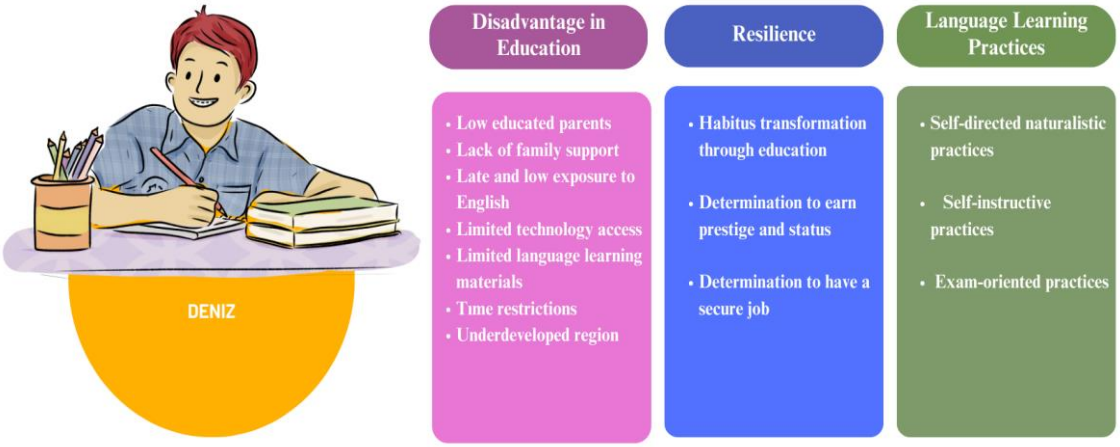

Figure 27. The key themes in Deniz's case

4.8.1. Demographic Profile

Deniz was a 21-year-old second-year ELT student at the time of the data collection. He came from Ağrı which was a province in Eastern Türkiye ranked 80th out of 81 provinces in terms of socioeconomic development. Notably, Ağrı was ranked as the least developed province in terms of education according to the statistics of development rankings by sub-dimensions from SEGE (2017). Coming from a rural district marked by insufficient educational facilities, both his parents did not complete primary school education. Her mother was a housewife, and his father was a merchant involved in the family business established by his grandfather. As the eldest son among five siblings, Deniz started assisting his father in the family business at an early age. Deniz had two older sisters one of whom studied visual arts teaching and had graduated a few years ago. The other sister was married and a housewife who completed high school in distance education in the later stages of her life. One of his younger brothers had studied optometry and was currently working at an optician in a city in the Aegean region. The youngest sibling was studying in the seventh grade at the time of the data collection. Given the family's background, all the children, including Deniz, pursued education with the primary goal of securing employment opportunities despite their parents' low education level.

While Deniz's family did not have financial hardship, their financial situation was a challenge due to complications associated with running a family business with multiple stakeholders. Additionally, as Deniz indicated, his parents' priority in terms of expenses posed another challenge regarding his education and overall personal development. The financial resources allocated to education and sociocultural activities were notably constrained. Addressing his childhood memories, he said, *"I was a child who could not get everything I wanted" (Deniz, Initial interview)* and he ceased asking his father for his needs, even very crucial ones, after a certain age. Instead of relying on his father financially, Deniz made use of a state scholarship he earned in the sixth grade, which continued to support him until the completion of high school. This scholarship played a crucial role in financing his language learning materials and covering various other expenses. Additionally, he also worked at hotels as a waiter during summers in vacation destinations. Furthermore, while studying at the university, he also worked at a private language school to independently finance his ongoing expenses, which showcased

Deniz's determination to be a financially independent and responsible individual and his investment in his educational and sociocultural development.

4.8.2. Living Conditions and Technology Access

Deniz lived in a five-room house equipped with a central heating system. However, despite the spaciousness of the house, he did not have a bedroom that belonged to him or any private space to spend time and study. He slept and studied in a room used to store infrequently used objects and devices, such as an old closet and vacuum cleaner, as seen in Figure 28. This room served a dual purpose of hosting female guests when they had visitors, which was frequent in their family culture. During these visits, he faced challenges in using this space to study or getting rested for school the following morning.

Figure 28. The room Deniz used to study and sleep

As depicted in the picture, the room was not conducive to the needs of a determined and ambitious student like Deniz. However, these adverse conditions did not deter him from pursuing his studies diligently. He found innovative solutions to make the most of every available opportunity to study. For instance, he used the coffee table as his study table and stored his books and belongings in the hidden compartment of this little table. However, while doing that, he was concerned about his health as expressed in the following excerpt.

> At the age of 18 or 19, I was preparing for exams, and I was not able to study at home. Children were coming in and out of the room where I was. I mentioned the business partnership we have with my uncle and cousins, they were coming to our house. I could not study at home in any way, but when no one was at home in the evenings, I could go to the room. There is a small coffee table there. I used it as a study desk. I was studying on it or sometimes on the floor. I was studying on the

> armrest of the chair. I mean, I did not use it as an excuse not to study. I thought of using these as opportunities. Actually, they were not really opportunities. Studying on the coffee table was not comfortable at all. This sometimes causes health problems, which I am experiencing now, for example, scoliosis, and curvature of the spine. (Deniz, Semi-structured interview)

Not even having access to basic facilities needed for a student, such as a study desk and a private space to study, Deniz's technology access was also such a constraint for his education. He got his mobile phone at the age of 17, which was a gift from a merchant, as a result of a business deal. In this way, he could have access to a technological device of his own. After attending the university, especially when the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated online classes, he requested a computer from his father, which was a rare incident, and bought a good-quality gamer laptop even though he waited for a while. Thus, he was free to use it for educational and entertainment purposes. However, the lack of Wi-Fi at home compelled him to go to his grandfather's house or use his mobile data to access the internet which placed a substantial financial burden on him, given his economic circumstances described above. He said, *"I had to constantly buy data packages when connected to my own phone's internet. My money was constantly going there, and sometimes I had to cut back on eating at school to be able to afford internet packages."* (Deniz, Semi-structured interview) These technological limitations further highlighted the disparities in Deniz's access to essential resources for his education.

4.8.3. Deciding to Learn English and the First Phase of His Self-directed Learning

Deniz's education journey started in a primary school located on the outskirts of Ağrı which was a socioeconomically underdeveloped district. The educational experience at this school posed challenges stemming from various factors, such as the socioeconomic profile of the neighborhood, the overall quality of education, and his health issues. As opposed to many participants in this study, he did not harbor a strong affinity for English as a school subject during the early years of his education. After his success in the high school entrance exam, Deniz enrolled in a relatively prestigious high school in Ağrı, where students underwent one year of intensive language education before the four-year high school program. He was immersed in a distinct social and educational environment. This transition marked a significant shift in terms of the academic requirements and social

environment. It was his first serious contact with English and the required proficiency level was considerably high compared to his own. His classmates also demonstrated superior language skills, which led Deniz to feel marginalized in this new educational environment. In this first year, his focus centered on meeting the requirements and passing exams. He perceived English merely as a school subject to be passed rather than as an integral component of his aspirations for a future career.

Two years later, he was supposed to choose a division that would significantly influence his future career path. After a thorough assessment of his academic competencies with the guidance of the counselor at his school, he decided to opt to enroll in the language division. Deniz's goal was to become an English teacher, justifying his choice as "*I wanted something secure, you know. I thought, "Let me have a stable foundation to lean on, and the rest will be easy*." (Deniz, Semi-structured interview) His choice was driven by a desire for job security for stability in his future life and to escape his current constraining conditions. However, his proficiency level was still below the required standards. Consequently, he was to exert considerable effort to excel in the university entrance exam. It was not an easy task to attend to an ELT department, especially given his underprivileged conditions. Even his teacher expressed doubts about his competence in this endeavor and cautioned him against having high expectations. This incident made a profound impact on Deniz and triggered his ambition, instead of discouraging him, to achieve a sufficient score in the university entrance exam.

The first phase of Deniz's English learning focused on the university entrance exam demonstrating exam-oriented language learning practices. He primarily took notes of grammatical rules, worked on reading passages, and memorized long lists of vocabulary as in the way his teacher practiced in the class. He also came up with a few language learning strategies tailored to his ongoing learning needs related to vocabulary memorization. For example, he said,

> I had a list, like a list of annoying words, words I found difficult to learn. For example, "expect" and "except" were similar words, and I could not memorize either of them in any way. … I realized that I needed to do something special. I created lists. For example, I used to write them on different colored papers in list form … I covered them with tape. When covered with tape, it looked like flashcards. Their brightness attracted me. Along with its color, it gave me the desire to study. … I wrote a maximum of 10 words on a page but no more because if I saw more words than that, it would scare me. … For example, I would see the blue paper. On the blue paper, there was "adore," there was "abandon," there was

> this, there was that. Okay. What was the meaning of this? (Deniz, Semi-structured interview)

Additionally, to sharpen his test skills, he worked on practice tests including multiple-choice questions aligned with the requirements of the university entrance exam. He predominantly made use of a set of books recommended and used by his English teacher. However, his access to various language learning materials was highly restrained because of his constraining financial situation and also the facilities available in the region which is explained in the following excerpt.

> We were studying for the exam (in the classroom). Well, accessing books for personal development was challenging. We especially had to order them (from another city), and they were also expensive. Those were not books we could afford at that time. Even the Dilko books (particular publishing designated for the university entrance exam) we bought were coming to us at a cost, and we were paying those fees in instalments. I was trying to cover that with my scholarship.

Working on the required language skills for the exam within his conditions, he did not have any chance to focus on intercultural communicative language skills, which was beyond his reach given his disadvantaged position as a student who lacked technology access, faced financial challenges, did not find a peaceful space to study at home and worked long hours to help his father. However, despite his adverse conditions, he succeeded in the university entrance exam and became one of the few students in his high school class attending the ELT department on their first attempt.

4.8.4. Preparatory Class as an Opportunity for Disadvantaged Learners

Deniz's proficiency level, combined with his performance on other sections of the university entrance exam, granted him admission to an English major department he had dreamt about. However, he lacked communicative language skills due to his predominantly exam-oriented language learning practices which did not adequately address listening, writing, and speaking skills. Consequently, it was not a surprise for him to fail the English proficiency exam that required a comprehensive understanding of English proficiency encompassing all four language skills. Thus, acknowledging the need for improvement, he enrolled in the preparatory class providing a language-intensive education over an academic year. At the same time, he had access to the internet through

his laptop and mobile phone. This one year of language education served as an opportunity for him to develop his English skills. Being a very determined and responsible student, Deniz dedicated considerable effort to following his classes actively. For instance, he stated, *"There were speaking lines in speaking lessons. There were group activities. I participated in all of them with joy."* (Deniz, Semi-structured interview) Besides the classroom learning, he enjoyed exploring new learning strategies and language learning materials suggested by the instructors.

> I discovered the Oxford Dictionary and used it for the first time. I listened to pronunciations for the first time there. In Translate, it did not give us the pronunciation we wanted. For example, I discovered sites where I could listen to podcasts for the first time in listening classes. When I understood that university is a completely different world, I thought I should meet what this world offers me in the best way and try to triple what was given to me. (Deniz, Semi-structured interview)
> …
> I was listening to songs, trying to read the lyrics and pronounce the words. Sometimes, I was trying to sing the songs. I still do these things. Anything I could do for personal development, anything I could add as a plus to myself, I started trying. I began to go beyond the traditional methods that we know. I was also using the advice of our teachers. For example, there were podcast websites. I was using them. Sites like Voice of America and British Council websites. (Deniz, Semi-structured interview)

Recognizing the opportunities available within the university context, as evident in the excerpt above, he engaged in ambitious work outside the classroom. He also actively participated in a research study conducted by one of his instructors and used an English language speech assistant, ELSA, to develop his pronunciation for nine months. Deniz believed that this application significantly contributed to his linguistic knowledge, and he expressed:

> For example, I did not know that the word "laugh" ends with an 'f' sound. We were always saying "lav" and ending it with 'v', but later, I learned that it ends with an 'f' sound. I noticed or observed these kinds of differences in pronunciation in the app. (Deniz, Semi-structured interview)

In his pursuit of reaching a satisfactory proficiency level, Deniz employed a variety of language learning applications and websites and used an array of strategies to

create the best version of himself in his educational and social life. Having achieved satisfaction with his level in later years, his SDLL practices also evolved into more spontaneous ones addressing his emerging needs. Concurrently, he had already integrated English into his interests and hobbies. In his learning autobiography, he described his current SDLL practices as *"Video games I play, the series and movies I watch, and social media…"* He played games with foreign people and chatted with them, he watched movies and series in English in his spare time and spoke to his classmates and close friends in English. Deniz perceived this integration of English into his daily life as a means to learn new vocabulary and sustain his fluency.

Deniz's efforts aimed to achieve not only holistic language development but also foster general personal development, which marked another transformative phase in his language learning journey. He articulated this shift by stating, *"My goal was not to pass exams anymore or to get a grade from somewhere. Because I was learning-oriented, I left memorization aside and turned towards learning."* (Deniz, Semi-structured interview) In this phase of his learning, his SDLL practices were responsive to the needs arising from the requirements of the new educational environment he was recently immersed in. At the same time, he aspired to be a competent speaker of English and achieve comprehensive personal development beyond academic pursuits. His goal was to be a distinguished and respected person in his social environment in Ağrı, and he aspired to be an academic in the future. This broader commitment reflected his dedication to shaping not only his academic capabilities and language proficiency but also his overall character and standing within the community.

4.8.5. Disadvantaged Position in Education

Deniz's language learning story, as outlined above, showed a myriad of challenges arising from his life conditions shaped by his social class positioning. Compared to a student with more privileged conditions, Deniz was disadvantaged in multiple aspects of his education life. Nevertheless, he emerged as a resilient student who utilized any opportunity within his reach and showed an agentive approach despite all those constraints. His girlfriend summarized his conditions in comparison with her own in the following excerpt.

> We are very different when it comes to family. Our families are not alike at all. Even if we like doing the same things, it is still very different. Because, for me, having a room or a computer was always provided for me. These were given, but Deniz was not given such things. Deniz always earned them on his own. In this respect, I have more respect for him because he always achieved it on his own. … Because he constantly had a job to go to. I mean, sitting at home, and also, I think there is a bit of a different attitude towards male children. Because boys should not sit at home, they should work, with this kind of mindset. ... So, in terms of family, we are different, but as I said, he has acquired it. He has provided for himself, those opportunities. (Deniz's girlfriend, External informant interview)

Deniz was acutely aware of the disparity between himself and his privileged peers. He openly shared the emotions he experienced throughout his educational journey. He thought he lacked academic, financial, and emotional support from his parents. Having low-educated parents, there was no one around him to guide him through the out-of-class learning and educational choices he would make. He was also facing financial and regional problems with having access to language learning materials. Besides academic and financial challenges, he also faced some social problems. He was a physically small boy who experienced bullying by his classmates. Despite this serious problem, his parents showed little concern and took no cautions to address the issue. He kept going to this school and felt emotionally deprived. In the following excerpt, Deniz tells an anecdote from those years.

> There were our English teachers, and math teachers, whose children came and studied in our school. In fact, they could not endure being there for a month and went to private schools. I can even mention names, like Emre, for example. I used to envy that child a lot. His mother, especially, would come to the classroom and take care of him. "Sweetie, my child, how are you? What are you doing?" and such. When you do not see something similar from your own parents, you cannot help but get emotional. You wonder why it is like this. They did not have to come to school every day but for example, they could ask one day. Like, what did you do today? What did you learn? But you think about where you were born, then you think about your family. What are you expecting? What are you expecting from within? I mean, you cannot say anything to your parents about it. (Deniz, Semi-structured interview)

Deniz's conditions differed from his privileged peers in many aspects, such as his access to technological devices and language learning materials, and his living conditions, as mentioned in detail earlier. Additionally, the importance attached to education by his family and the responsibilities expected from children within the household put Deniz in

a very challenging position. For instance, he was expected to be helping his father at work after school and during weekends. Furthermore, he had to work full-time in his father's absence. Finding time to study was impossible at that time. He even had to miss his classes. Thus, lack of time to study was a prominent challenge in his language learning.

> Sometimes, my dad had to travel to İstanbul for his physical therapy, and even during those times, I was looking after the store and taking care of the business. You know, it is impossible to study at the workplace. There were times when I did not go to school. When I tried to catch up on my missing lessons from friends, they were not very supportive because everyone looked at each other as competitors. (Deniz, Semi-structured interview)

In addition to time restrictions, the region he was born into presented numerous limitations. For example, he had limited options for accessing private language courses to receive high-quality language education, especially while preparing for the university exam. There was only one institution where he could receive additional support. However, his school teacher was employed there which was pointless to enroll. Consequently, he found himself constrained to rely primarily on his school learning and his own resources, which were not abundant. He expressed his desire for guidance which would possibly transform his learning trajectory, and said, *"I would have liked support too: I mean, I would have wanted to learn things earlier."* (Deniz, Initial interview) and he added, *"I am thinking about where I was born, then I think about my family. So, I was asking myself, what do you expect?"* (Deniz, Semi-structured interview). When he came to the university, he received the guidance he needed before and had access to many resources. It was a realization of what he missed before and the world outside of Ağrı.

4.9. Selin's Case Description

"***I see English as an opening to the world, like a gateway to the world.***"

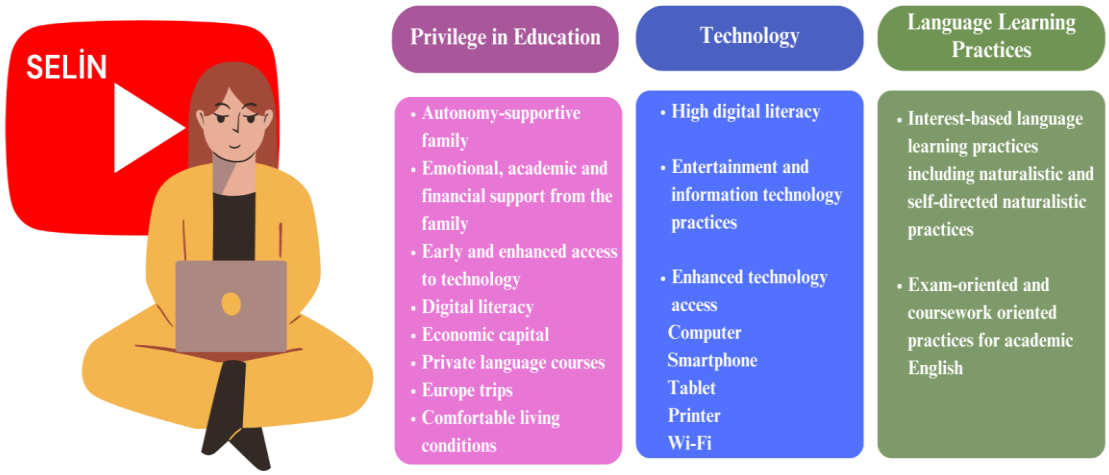

Figure 29. The key themes in Selin's case

4.9.1. Demographic Profile

Selin was a 20-year-old first-year ELT student. She was raised in a little town in the Black Sea region of Türkiye. For her high school education, she and her family moved to Samsun, a province located on the shore of the Black Sea and ranked 31st out of 81 provinces in Türkiye in terms of socioeconomic development. The city of Samsun offers relatively adequate educational and social facilities (SEGE, 2017). Selin indicated that moving to an urbanized city changed her sociocultural environment to a great extent, resulting in a transformation in her interests and hobbies, and she enjoyed the facilities the city offered.

Selin came from a household where education was always prioritized. Her father was an office worker at a state job and was holding a bachelor's degree which he earned during Selin's childhood and changed his job. Selin grew up seeing her father studying for his exams in the evenings, which inspired her very much. In his spare time, he enjoyed playing video games and watching American TV series. On the other hand, her mother was a high school graduate who did not have many opportunities to pursue a university education. Instead, she worked as a hairdresser until she got married. However, she was highly interested in her personal development with a range of sociocultural activities. Selin had two younger sisters one of whom was studying at high school and was interested

in doing theater. The other one was a five-year-old kid who was encouraged to learn English from an early age by her mother with the help of nursery songs and educational videos on YouTube.

Selin's parents were interested in attending social and sports activities. Going to the cinema and watching movies was one of their hobbies. Her father was playing football and doing winter sports. Her mother was into plates and yoga and attended a yoga group Selin also joined a few times and realized her inclination toward sports. Afterwards, Selin did a range of sports including playing volleyball, basketball, athletics, and doing fitness. Both parents supported their children's personal development besides their academic development. Even though they did not read books much in general, they facilitated Selin's reading habit and provided financial support for buying books, which was approximately 30 books per year. Additionally, they encouraged her to play a musical instrument and Selin preferred playing guitar and kalimba while her sister opted for melodica and guitar.

4.9.2. Living Conditions and Technology Access

Selin lived in an apartment with a centralized heating system where she had her own bedroom she could use throughout the whole year. In this room, she had a study desk since her primary school years where she had a peaceful environment to focus on her assignments and out-of-school work. Her conditions at home were carefully arranged according to her academic needs. For example, her father bought a printer/copier exclusively for her when she was in primary school in order to print her assignments and practice sheets with ease rather than finding a place outside to print them out. Selin indicated that she currently had access to a tablet, laptop, smartphone, and Wi-Fi connection at home and she did not remember a period when she did not have access to a computer.

4.9.3. YouTube as a Window to the Outer World

Having very early access to technology and the internet, Selin actively started utilizing the technological devices in hand for entertainment and information-seeking purposes at a very young age. Notably, she immersed herself in platforms like YouTube, which served as a gateway to a vast array of content and experiences. Her exploration of this platform sparked Selin's curiosity in the English language. She perceived English as

a means of comprehending and connecting with the broader world beyond her immediate surroundings rather than viewing it solely as a school subject she needed to study for and pass. In the following excerpt, she described the early stages of her YouTube use and its impact on her English learning journey.

> I do not even remember how old I was when I started using YouTube. There were not even YouTubers back then. It was mostly singers and bands, foreign ones. We learned about them from magazines. There was a constant interest in magazines during that time; you know, there were girls' magazines. Like "Hey Girl," for example, those magazines were very popular. They were sold everywhere. Even though I lived in a small town, I would see them, get curious, and buy them. Many of our friends also bought them, so I learned a lot that way. And well, we had a computer at home, so I could access YouTube. I would open it and see videos (of the celebrities she saw in the magazine) without subtitles. Without understanding the subtitles, I would try to imitate what they were saying by listening. Maybe they were not saying that word, but I was trying to mimic their pronunciation. (Selin, Initial interview)
>
> …
>
> There were video clips there (on YouTube), and their lives were completely different. For example, One Direction, their clips showed popular places in England, it was like a promotional film for me. It showed me what was in England, what kind of world it was. There is such a country, it is very popular. It showed me a bit of that. … If I learn their language, maybe I can be like them someday. I thought I could go there. (Selin, Initial interview)

During this phase of her language learning journey described above, English was the language of the videos depicting her favorite musicians' and celebrities' lives, as well as the language of the songs she was listening to. Thus, she was immersed in English as an integral part of her daily life thanks to the technological affordances within her reach. Using online platforms, particularly YouTube, led her to realize the vast possibilities and opportunities that learning English could unlock for her.

As Selin was growing up and keeping up with the advances in technology, she was highly curious about the lives and cultures of other people around the world. Her exposure to popular culture and her online engagement with people she was following and interacting with profoundly influenced her aspirations and dispositions. Her interests, as a result, underwent a significant diversification. For instance, in her learner background survey, she compiled a long list of individuals she followed on YouTube, ranging from chefs to aestheticians, which was listed as the following: *"AliaZaita, Alivia D'andrea,*

Anthony Youn, AS/IS, BBC, Black Pumas, Buzzfeed, English with James, Gordon Ramsay, Impulse, Lilly Sabri, Linda Sun, Michel Khare, Oversimplified, TedX Talks." (Selin, Learner background survey) She talked about these people with great admiration. This exposure fueled Selin's burgeoning motivation to learn English and she recognized it as an indispensable tool for effective communication across cultural and linguistic boundaries, which is evident in the following excerpt.

> I always saw language as a tool. So, I see it as something that can be used to communicate, like a key. For example, I do not follow those people to have better grammar knowledge, to constantly improve myself, or to be an academic in the future. Instead, I am more interested in their lives, you know, of those people. (Selin, Initial interview)

Evident in the excerpt above, Selin's perception of English as a communication tool affected her language learning practices outside the classroom, and she engaged in naturalistic language learning practices by focusing on content without a concrete learning agenda. In other words, she learned and practiced English through these real-life activities to an extent.

4.9.4. Emerging Learning Needs, Changing Learning Practices

Throughout her language learning journey, Selin encountered different learning environments and faced different learning needs. In the initial phase of her language learning, English served as a tool to consume English content on the online platforms she was interacting with. Thus, she did not actively engage in structured and organized language learning practices. Instead, she focused more on understanding the content she was exposed to, which allowed her to learn English naturally through exposure. While her language learning progress might have been gradual during this phase, this daily life exposure familiarized her with English vocabulary and structures which ultimately aided her in her formal schooling.

In a later phase, Selin was supposed to choose a division to study at high school. After a careful evaluation of her academic capabilities and future aspirations, language division was the most suitable path for her. While studying in the language division, her learning practices outside the classroom would significantly influence her career path. Her future prospects depended on a language test including multiple choice questions

which notably differed from her language use in her daily life. Thus, she used some English language learning websites like BBC English which was suggested by her aunt, who was an English teacher. When asked when she used these types of language learning websites, she said, *"When I wanted to be successful"* (Selin, Initial interview), and this stage of her language learning was a period she sought for success.

Selin perceived the English classes as unsatisfactory and thought school teaching did not contribute much to her English proficiency. She also confessed that she was not a very motivated and hardworking student at school. However, her family was expecting her to attend a university for a bright future. Given that, she decided to supplement her education by attending a private language course teaching in line with the requirements of the university entrance exam. She studied at this institution for two years. Thus, she practiced the grammatical rules taught in the course, kept learning and memorizing vocabulary, and tried to sharpen her test skills outside the classroom. To develop her reading comprehension, she read graded English books. The following excerpt from the photo-elicitation interview exemplified what type of practices she was engaging in in this stage of her language learning.

> On this desk, there were a lot of test books, you know, textbooks or English books, especially reading books, particularly those with levels. I had my computer, and I was constantly watching foreign series from there. Especially in high school, there was a series called Friends. You probably know; the whole world knows. Actually, I can say that I really started to learn English slowly with that series. So, especially during high school, these things were in my life (Selin, Photo-elicitation interview)

Despite her perceived hard work, Selin fell short of achieving a satisfactory score on her initial attempt at the exam. So, she took the exam one more time and kept learning English in the same manner. In this phase of her learning, her practices were predominantly exam-oriented to get an adequate score. Finally, she successfully gained admission to the university and proceeded to attend a one-year preparatory class upon her failure in the proficiency exam conducted by the ELT department. An extra year of intensive language education was an opportunity to further enhance her English language skills to meet the requirements of the newly engaged educational environment.

She was finally an English major and her speaking skills were lacking stemming from the exam-oriented language learning procedures. She took the initiative to

proactively address this deficiency because she believed that would be a problem in her future education and career, which is explained in the following excerpt.

> Now, I have come to this department. Okay, I will become an English teacher in the future, but I need to have a good level of English to be an English teacher. So, I cannot do this just in terms of my interests. I mean, I need to know English too. Otherwise, how will students trust me? (Selin, Initial interview)

Recognizing the critical role of a good proficiency level for her career, she connected with an American friend on a language learning application called "Bottle." She said, *"I used to be very hesitant to speak, but I took a radical step in this regard and reached the level I am at now by almost speaking for 10 hours a week with an American friend for two years."* (Selin, Learner autobiography). At the same time, she kept watching series which contributed to her communicative language skills. Through consistent practice and determination, Selin experienced a remarkable transformation in her speaking proficiency. As a result, she gained self-confidence and identified speaking as her strength in her current language proficiency level at the time of the data collection.

On the other hand, she also detected her weaknesses in writing and listening skills based on the fact that she faced some difficulties while navigating her university coursework. To this end, she was decisive in planning a learning schedule to carefully work on these areas of language during her summer holiday. She also attempted to use tools like Grammarly to improve her writing skills. Additionally, she identified a deficiency in her vocabulary knowledge and acknowledged its critical importance for effective communication and academic success. To enhance her lexical repertoire, she engaged in various language learning practices utilizing online platforms, particularly YouTube as a primary learning tool, which she was most familiar with. For example, she self-instructed herself with YouTube channels specializing in vocabulary instruction as exemplified in the following two excerpts.

> I think my vocabulary is quite limited. I do not know many academic words, or for example, I do not use the word "fascinating" much when describing something beautiful. When I wanted to learn new words so that my sentences would not be too simple, I came across this guy (English with James, a YouTube channel). …
> I discovered a new channel recently on YouTube where they teach English along with the Friends series. I downloaded a few PDFs from that channel and tried to create a study plan based on it. Honestly, I did the same thing today. I really

> remember those words highlighted in red in those sentences. I think maybe by doing this, I can learn a lot of words. (Selin, Semi-structured interview)

YouTube was not only an educative and informative platform but also an entertaining platform for her. As described briefly above, she used this platform for entertainment, following a wide range of channels, which contributed to her English skills immensely. She said, *"I learned a lot even from the simplest skincare videos."* (Selin, Learner autobiography) Thus, she made use of this platform for differing purposes in line with her needs. Besides her self-instructive and self-directed naturalistic language learning practices using this platform, she utilized other online platforms to develop herself as well. For example, she and her close friend found a movie website, on which they watched movies with English subtitles. In this way, she enjoyed watching movies and, at the same time, she learned a range of vocabulary within its context.

> …For example, there was the word "gratitude." I used to forget it because my memory is a bit weak. But in the movie, they said "accept with gratitude" in a sentence, and now I do not forget it anymore. Actually, our brain picks it up. It remembers seeing it before and focuses on that word. … I believe that learning from movies like this is more permanent because we learn how the things we try to learn from books are used in real life. (Selin, Photo elicitation interview)

Through her self-directed approach to language learning, Selin demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement and aligned her practices to meet her emerging needs. By evaluating the areas of weakness in her proficiency and actively seeking growth opportunities, she positioned herself for success in her language studies but also in her broader personal development. However, noteworthy here, her learning practices were not as intensive as many other participants in this study because she maintained satisfaction, over time, with her English language skills enabling her to effectively engage in daily life activities. Therefore, Selin's language learning practices were primarily centered around her personal interests and allowed her to pursue areas of study that resonated with her passions and curiosities.

4.9.5. Dispositions and Aspirations for Learning English

At an early age, Selin met foreign cultures due to her own interest in popular culture and her parents' entertainment habits, such as watching foreign movies and series,

which made her realize the world outside of her own and sparked her curiosity about the lives of other people. In later years, she realized it was among her possibilities to go abroad for different reasons, such as professional, educational, or just touristic reasons. For example, she said, *"It did not seem far-fetched to me. After all, if they (people she was interacting with on social media) can go to different countries, why can't we go to the other countries?"* (Selin, Initial interview) Her family also strongly supported her in exploring life abroad and encouraged her to pursue a career in Europe because of the adverse economic conditions of Türkiye. Her dispositions and aspirations had a significant impact on her perception of the role of English and her motivational orientations. English was a tool to communicate with and connect her to the rest of the world. As a proficient speaker of English, she believed she was capable of seeking opportunities beyond her immediate environment and English would open doors other than being just a teacher which was already guaranteed. In the following excerpt, she explains how she perceives the role of English in her life.

> There is a whole world out there, and I believe we use this language as a tool to explore that world. I do not just see myself as Selin from Türkiye. I am also interested in understanding the life standards of people in Europe. I research these things (on the internet). For example, I wonder about the kind of education people receive there and what their lives are like. … Or living there, for instance. So, I think about these things. I have a goal, and I use English to pursue that goal. (Photo-elicitation Interview)

In addition to her curiosity and living abroad dreams, Selin had a strong ideal self as a resourceful and educated woman. Thus, she was highly focused on her personal development by self-education through literature, movies, and sports. To this end, English was the language mediating her intellectual and social development besides her academic development and enabled her to reach out to the current resources and choose among millions of choices.

4.9.6. The Role of Family Support in Selin's Education and English Learning

Selin was raised in a household in which education was of the highest priority. She emerged as a privileged student thanks to her academically, emotionally, and financially supportive parents. Particularly, her mother played a pivotal role in fostering Selin's educational journey, demonstrating care for her well-being and ensuring

conducive conditions for efficient studying beyond the classroom. For example, she described a day from her childhood in the following excerpt by underlying the role of her mother in her educational life.

> As soon as I came back from school, I would immediately talk to my mother about what I did at school that day. Then she would prepare my meal, I would eat, and then I would quickly change my clothes. I would sit down to study, for example. The house was always quiet. The baby (her sister) would be sleeping at that time. Or if she was awake, my mother would take her out for a walk. … She created a reading time at home. Even if she did not read herself, she really wanted me to read books. (Selin, Initial interview)

Both parents wished for her to be a doctor in the future, which is a common aspiration among many families in Türkiye due to the perceived prestige associated with the profession. Thus, Selin was expected to excel as an academically successful and very diligent student to make this dream come true. Thus, they wanted to give her a feeling of responsibility for her schoolwork from a very early age. Prioritizing the education and well-being of their daughter, Selin's mother attempted to create a peaceful environment at home for her and implemented study schedules. Additionally, her father provided assistance whenever Selin encountered challenges with her homework, particularly in subjects like mathematics, where she struggled a lot. However, Selin's own career choices evolved over time, and she decided to choose the language division at high school. Wishing the best for their daughter, her family wholeheartedly supported her chosen career path aligning with her interests and academic capabilities.

Regardless of her career aspirations, Selin was already given the awareness of the importance of English from the very early phases of her education. Her aunt was an English teacher and served as a role model in the family by emphasizing the significance of English proficiency. Even though the parents did not speak English, they recognized the importance of English for their children's lives and supported each of them.

In addition, Selin's mother encouraged her to learn German as a foreign language after she attained a certain proficiency level in English. Selin said, *"There are many German companies in Samsun, you know. They also get pretty good salaries there. She (Selin's mother) says you do not necessarily have to become a teacher. She says you can also work for one of those companies there."* (Selin, Initial interview). For her mother, learning another foreign language was an asset to finding a better job. Moreover, pursuing

an education and career abroad was also possible. Türkiye's economic situation was not going well; living and working abroad would be beneficial for Selin to live a high-quality life, which her family always aimed to provide for their children. To this end, recognizing the potential benefits of multilingualism, the parents were highly motivated to create optimal conditions for their daughter's academic and personal development. Despite their modest income, the parents prioritized investing in her education by providing her with essential technological devices, learning materials, and private courses to support their school learning. During data collection, they even financed her trip to Germany with her relatives and encouraged her to experience a different country and culture, which would broaden Selin's horizons and foster her personal growth. Ultimately, the parents' overarching goal was to empower their daughter to become an independent and resourceful individual with a successful career regardless of the economic challenges they faced as a single-income household.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

5.0. Introduction

This embedded single case study sought to investigate self-directed English language learners' learning practices outside the classroom by focusing on the individual and contextual conditions that lead to the situatedness of these practices. Moreover, this research set out to figure out why self-directed learners have engaged in diverse learning practices outside the classroom. The impetus for this study was the common proposition in the literature that language learners engage in various language learning practices outside the classroom, often using technology, shaped by a significant number of factors, such as age, gender, proficiency level, types of motivation, and so onBased on the analysis and interpretation of nine distinctive cases, this study provided supporting evidence for the claims of the previous research and a detailed account of SDLL outside the classroom. All participants had diverse and idiosyncratic language learning trajectories with their unique stories. More importantly, it offered a nuanced picture of the situated nature of SDLL which is highly complex, multilayered, and dynamic, and highlighted the presence of unequal power relations in the site of language learning by emphasizing the pivotal role of social class influencing these trajectories (Block, 2012; Darvin & Norton, 2023). Given that, in this chapter, the main themes that emerged from data analysis will be presented by answering two research questions.

5.1. How do Self-directed Language Learners Learn English beyond the Classroom?

Informed by Benson's (2011b) framework of LBC, the analyses of the findings showed that English language learners engaged in various language learning practices beyond the classroom with different levels of pedagogic intentionality ranging from self-instructive practices involving specifically designed language learning materials and a learning agenda to naturalistic learning with no intention of learning and by engaging in real-life activities using English. Benson (2011b) indicated that self-instruction and naturalistic learning are the two ends of a pedagogical continuum for learning beyond the classroom. In this study, each participant demonstrated SDLL practices on this continuum across different settings and time, shaped by a dynamic and complex interaction of such

factors and conditions as institutional policies and instructional practices, learners' personal histories, access to material, symbolic, and social resources, proficiency levels, dispositions and aspirations, and their immediate language learning needs.. The findings related to how the participant engaged in self-directed English language learning practices are presented under three titles: self-instructed language learning, self-directed naturalistic language learning, and naturalistic language learning practices.

5.1.1. Self-instructed Language Learning Practices

Self-instruction refers to the intentional, self-initiated language learning efforts of a learner outside the classroom by utilizing existing resources to achieve a learning goal (Benson, 2011b; Kocatepe, 2017). Regardless of their learner profile, all participants engaged in self-instructive practices beyond the classroom with varying degrees of engagement. Particularly, the learners engaged in intensive self-instructive language learning practices in the earlier phases of their learning trajectories, especially when they faced educational requirements, such as university entrance exams or enrollment in English-related departments. In line with their evolving learning needs across different times and settings, they utilized online and offline language learning materials within their reach to improve different language areas. The findings revealed that they navigated through two major stages in their educational paths: preparation for university entrance exams and enrollment in ELT department. These stages influenced the nature and focus of their self-instructive practices. In other words, educational policies, instructional practices, and access to language learning resources extensively shaped their self-instructive language learning practices outside the classroom.

5.1.1.1. University Entrance Exam and its Impact on Self-directed Language Learning Practices

All the other participants, except for Sena, attended high schools with language divisions in which they received intensive language education alongside the other school subjects. The quality of this formal language education they received depended on regional conditions and instructional practices. However, regardless of these conditions, all participants were motivated to pursue a university education in an English-related department. On the other hand, the university entrance exam presented a significant challenge for the learners as it was highly competitive. Only in-class learning was

insufficient to meet their learning goal which was to earn a high score in this competitive exam setting (Özer & Yükselir, 2023). Consequently, the participants found themselves in a situation where they made learning goals relevant to the university entrance exam and adjusted their learning practices valued in the formal education context (Bourdieu, 1987). In this stage of their learning, they self-instructed their learning outside the classroom by using a variety of language learning materials for exam preparation, grammar referencing, and vocabulary development with learning strategies taught by their teacher and discovered by themselves.

Similar to many exam-oriented education systems (e.g., Lai, Zhu, & Gong, 2015; Rezai et al., 2024), the instructional settings the participants interacted with were mainly teacher-dominated and the practices were mostly based on traditional pedagogical practices. The findings revealed that teachers generally took a form-focused rather than a meaning-focused language teaching approach and predominantly focused on vocabulary and grammar teaching. Moreover, they aimed to sharpen their students' test skills required for their success in the university entrance exam. Therefore, the participants were immersed in an instructional setting shaped by exam-oriented language education policies. In turn, the students' SDLL practices and choice of language learning materials beyond the classroom were shaped accordingly in such a time and setting (Jung, 2017; Rezai et al., 2024; Wu, 2017). For example, Fatih's case in this study offered a significant example of how self-instructive language learning practices can intersect with exam-oriented goals, even in the learning trajectory of learners who are predominantly engaged in naturalistic learning environments. In the year of the university entrance exam, Fatih was supposed to improve his skills in specific language areas valued and prioritized in the formal school setting such as academic vocabulary, reading comprehension skills, complex grammatical structures, and also test-taking strategies. To address these needs, he utilized various language learning materials tailored to the requirements of high-stakes language exams. Particularly, he focused on vocabulary lists including the antonyms and synonyms of the words, which he attributed his success to in the language exam of the university entrance exam. He achieved an exceptional performance by making only two mistakes out of 80 multiple-choice questions.

It is of little surprise that the other participants also showed similar learning patterns around the same language areas at this time of their learning trajectory. Their focus was to be successful in the university entrance exam, and they structured their SDL accordingly. For example, Kübra made use of an online exam preparation pack including

synchronous/asynchronous tutorials, a variety of test books, and reading comprehension materials. She was determined to increase her score in mock-up exams and she boosted her performance as a result of a determined and organized work tailored to the exam. Coming from a similar background, Selin went to a private cram school that provided language education specifically tailored to the university exam. In her free time, she diligently practiced multiple-choice questions, reviewing her answers and focusing on areas, such as grammar and vocabulary that needed improvement. Selin also maintained a practice of noting down unfamiliar vocabulary encountered during these exercises, thereby expanding her vocabulary repertoire.

Hatice's experience highlighted the challenges faced by learners who did not have access to high-quality language education in school and had to navigate their language learning journey independently. Despite her disadvantaging conditions, Hatice showed a great amount of resilience and engaged in tedious exam-oriented language learning practices to improve her chance of success in the exam (Kim et al., 2018). Similar to Selin and Kübra, she worked on multiple choice questions testing her grammar and vocabulary knowledge and a set of language skills, such as reading comprehension, translation, paraphrasing, and so on. Additionally, she sought alternative resources and turned to exam-oriented language instruction videos available on YouTube, as a student who did not have any guidance, especially in the second year of her university preparation, which is in line with the findings of Hiromi (2021). These videos likely provided her with structured guidance and instruction tailored to the requirements of the university entrance exam and helped her fill the gaps in her language knowledge and skills.

Deniz, Nesrin, and Sena's experiences highlight the determination of learners who faced limitations in access to technology and guidance. Despite these challenges, they engaged in self-instructive practices tailored to their individual learning needs and circumstances. For example, Deniz, self-instructed himself by making lists of unknown words written on colored papers to enable himself to memorize them easily. Nesrin prepared flashcards for the unknown words to teach herself vocabulary and had a notebook that included lists of vocabulary she had run into in reading passages or exam preparation books. As a student who came from a different background than other participants, Sena worked on every single material she had access to. She made use of the old exam preparation books she found in the library of the school where she worked at the time and some online resources she found while looking for alternative ways to develop her English skills. These participants' experiences underscored the importance

of adaptability and creativity in SDLL (Chu et al., 2024; Çelik, 2017). By leveraging available resources and implementing personalized learning strategies, they overcame obstacles and made meaningful progress in their language proficiency despite challenging circumstances.

To conclude, these examples highlighted the role of the participants' strategic self-directed learning efforts, which were closely aligned with the demands of the university entrance exam. By targeting specific language areas, they aimed to maximize their chances of success in the university entrance exam. In this period of their learning, the participants generally engaged in self-instructive language learning practices in a planned and organized manner with a concrete learning goal in mind instead of focusing on their entertainment in English. Fatih even expressed that his communicative skills got worse in this period of his learning due to his focus on exams rather than talking to his foreign friends and playing games in English. This finding is in line with the findings of Kozar and Sweller (2014) that learners' goals shape their language learning activities and expected learning outcomes.

5.1.1.2. Tertiary Education and its Impact on Self-directed Language Learning Practices

The findings revealed that many participants were exposed to exam-oriented language instruction before their university education which often lacked emphasis on productive language skills. However, when they progressed to the tertiary level, the expectations of the new learning context tended to be a more holistic approach to language proficiency. As Darvin and Norton (2023) argued, the rules of the new context were constructed by people in power, who were university professors in this study, and to assert their legitimate place in this educational context, the participants adjusted their language learning practices accordingly to meet the requirements of the institution to be successful in this new learning context.

At the same time, their perceptions of foreign language competence also evolved in the same direction. In that stage of their learning, they were aware of the importance of communicative skills for their proficiency level, as also evident in Wu (2017). For example, Deniz expressed that he mostly focused on passing exams and studying English for a concrete goal in the earlier stages of his learning. However, when he progressed to the tertiary level, his learning practices showed a transformation immensely. He was

introduced to a variety of learning materials and strategies by his teachers and classmates. At the same time, his access to technology was enhanced in this period. Thus, he self-instructed himself using podcasts and songs to enhance his listening skills. He also used some language learning applications like Voice of America, and websites like British Council besides his intensive schoolwork expected particularly in the preparatory class. For example, he worked on his writing skills to a great extent outside the classroom by extending his coursework in writing classes. He believed he received a high-quality education at school. He also kept learning vocabulary because of his own perception of his need to extend his vocabulary knowledge. On the other hand, he was motivated to enhance his speaking skills and practice speaking with his classmates between classes with the aim of improving his speaking skills rather than speaking for real purposes.

Another participant, Hatice, who was a preparatory year student with a clear goal to pass the proficiency exam at the end of the academic year, engaged in intensive self-instructive language learning practices. She created a study space in her dormitory room with a study desk covered with sticky notes. She had several notebooks designed specifically for different language areas and meticulously focused on each skill she found herself weak. She emphasized the place of learning vocabulary and she created lists of vocabulary she was exposed to through reading passages, YouTube tutorials, and Instagram posts designed to teach English. When she ran into an unknown word in a reading passage or any piece of English text, she looked up its meaning with its phonetic description, checked its synonyms and antonyms, and later, she tried to use the newly learned word in sentences and wrote them down on her vocabulary notebook. Similarly, she studied on the grammar topics she had difficulty in understanding. She practiced with grammar books and also watched YouTube videos teaching grammar while taking notes. Thus, YouTube provided her to individualize her learning in line with her emerging learning needs and goals and complemented the formal education she received in school (Wang & Chen, 2020). For example, she followed some English teachers on YouTube, such as “Adam’s English lessons.” She perceived him as her native teacher. Besides academic vocabulary and grammar, she sought to learn everyday language to sound more natural in speaking and she watched the same English teachers on YouTube introducing daily life expressions, chunks, and idioms. She perceived YouTube as an instructive tool rather than using it as an entertainment tool as in the case of Hiromi (2021). Moreover, she searched for the “ELT speaking topics” on Google and found some speaking prompts

in a variety of topics, such as science, education, technology, and so on. Every day, she talked about the prompts as if she were in the speaking exam in front of an examiner.

The participants were English majors who had an English-related career plan requiring a high English proficiency level, and the learners engaged in out-of-class language learning activities in line with the aim of balancing the development of both their receptive and productive skills (Wu, 2017; Zhang & Liu, 2023). Given that, some of the participants engaged in language learning practices to develop their vocabulary, writing, speaking, and listening skills through self-instructive learning practices with a clear learning intention. In line with the findings of Nguyen and Starcke (2021), they put emphasis on both receptive and productive skills outside of the classroom, even though earlier studies (e.g., Lai et al., 2015; & Lamb & Arisandy, 2020; Mohammed & Ali, 2021) revealed that learners mostly engage in out-of-class language learning practices exclusively focusing on receptive skills.

For example, Emine's approach to language learning demonstrates a comprehensive and balanced strategy aimed at improving both her productive and receptive language skills, which supports the findings of Zhang and Liu (2023) that English majors engage in real-life language learning activities with technology, participate authentic English-medium communities contributing to affective and linguistic gains, and they are more aware of the resources and opportunities that technology bring. Being one of those majors, Emine self-directed her language learning with technology and met online friends and teachers on online platforms and language practice apps, such as "Free4talk" and "Hallo." She participated in oral and written conversations with a lot of people to improve mainly her speaking skills. Initially, she engaged in written communication only. However, the more her language skills progressed, the more confident she became. She started participating in live streaming on the topics of her interest. Later, she started live-streaming herself, which resulted in her being a legitimate member of an online community. On Hallo, she also attended speaking sessions with the teachers of the platform covering very diverse topics in English. In addition to her focus on speaking skills, Emine also dedicated time to improving her listening comprehension and pronunciation. She utilized language learning apps like ELSA and Voscreen, as well as listening tracks and YouTube videos. She also supplemented her learning by following Instagram pages dedicated to teaching how to sound native-like and natural. By actively monitoring her progress and detecting her

evolving language needs, Emine ensured that she was consistently progressing in her language learning across various language domains.

Another participant, Selin, self-instructed in the language areas she detected weaknesses when she progressed to tertiary education. She realized that her vocabulary knowledge was lacking in diversity while speaking and texting. Also, at school, her knowledge of academic vocabulary was limited. Following her instructor's suggestion of a YouTube channel, "English with James," she started learning academic and daily vocabulary. In interaction with the English teaching YouTube channels, she also found different ones and extended her vocabulary learning. She said she enjoyed learning a variety of words to express herself in a more sophisticated way rather than using only basic and simple words in her speaking and writing. For instance, she found a channel teaching vocabulary by using famous TV shows like Friends and made use of it for her learning. Given that, she was well aware of the potential of YouTube for her SDLL (Darvin, 2023; Wang & Chen, 2020). She further added she had weaknesses in writing and listening skills. While writing a motivation letter for an Erasmus project she wished to join, she realized that she had difficulties in expressing herself appropriately. Moreover, in the listening classes, she was struggling a lot even though she was watching and spending a lot of time on YouTube in her free time. Thus, she decided to improve her writing and listening skills during the summer holiday by using YouTube instructional videos and the writing books she had from the preparatory class. She had already got a brand-new notebook for her summer study plan focusing on three language areas, including writing, listening, and vocabulary. In sum, her learning needs were emerging in this new educational field in interaction with other social and professional fields, and she set learning goals and took the initiative to compensate for the deficiencies in her language competence to take a better place in those fields (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

5.1.2. Self-directed Naturalistic Language Learning Practices

Compared to self-instruction in language learning, self-directed naturalistic learning refers to less structured language learning practices merged with entertainment- and social-oriented activities. As Kocatepe (2017) described, "the learner uses naturally occurring contexts and resources to meet the dual purpose of fulfilling real-life needs while at the same time recognizing potential pedagogic gains of this activity" (p. 106). Similarly, corroborating with the findings of Lai and colleagues (2024), individual

interests and hobbies emerged as an essential component of the learners' SDLL. The participants demonstrated a variety of self-directed naturalistic language learning practices ranging from consuming a significant amount of authentic English content to taking part in online discussions in online communities of practice (Nguyen & Starcke, 2021). The learners' learning practices were more flexible and diverse when compared to their learning practices for the university entrance exam. At the time of the data collection, thanks to their attained proficiency level, they were able to use English as a tool for communication in real-life activities. However, they still had perceived weaknesses in particular language areas and perceived English learning as a long-lasting or never-ending procedure. Therefore, they had set a learning agenda along with those leisure activities. Corroborating with the literature (Nguyen & Starcke, 2021; Soyoof et al., 2023), the learners engaged in meaning-focused activities to enhance their language proficiency level, such as watching movies and shows, listening to music, reading novels and comic books, and spending time on YouTube. Indeed, those practices, more or less, required the use of digital technologies and they were predominantly entertainment- and social-oriented technological activities (Lai, 2017).

5.1.2.1. Watching Movies, TV Shows and Documentaries

One of the most common self-directed naturalistic learning practices is watching TV shows, movies, and documentaries (e.g., Bekleyen & Selimoğlu, 2016; Lai, 2019; Maros & Saad, 2016; Socket, 2013). Similarly, the participants expressed that it was an effective and enjoyable way to immerse themselves into natural language, expand their vocabulary knowledge, enhance their pronunciation, and improve their listening skills while gaining knowledge about various subjects. One of the participants, Selin, was a big fan of movies and TV shows, spending a great amount of time watching them in her spare time. In one of the winter breaks, she and her friends even challenged themselves by watching three movies with English subtitles a day, followed by a discussion about the movies they watched. Consistent with Socket's (2013) findings, she expressed that watching movies and shows helped her to learn new expressions within their authentic context which made them easy to remember to a great extent. Similarly, Sena watched famous American TV , such as Friends and Breaking Bad more than once with a learning goal in mind while enjoying a lot. Sena further added that she watched documentaries in English which was both a way of learning English and her self-development. She was

interested in being a knowledgeable person in different fields and documentaries extended her world knowledge in many topics. She made a habit of watching documentaries with English subtitles, noting down interesting words and expressions as she watched. In this way, watching documentaries contributed to her vocabulary learning and enhanced her listening skills, as well. Overall, the practice of watching TV shows, movies, and documentaries emerged as a valuable and enjoyable practice of SDLL among the participants.

5.1.2.2. Listening to Music and Working on the Lyrics

Aligning with the findings of previous research, listening to music was one of the most common and effective self-directed naturalistic language learning practices reported by language learners (Lai, 2015a; Peng, Jager & Lowie, 2022; Sockett & Toffoli, 2012; Xodabande, 2018). Many participants indicated their interest in listening to music in their spare time and emphasized the role of English songs in various aspects of their language development. Specifically, they underlined its contribution to their vocabulary acquisition thanks to its provision of a meaningful context. They also noted improvements in their pronunciation and listening skills resulting from their regular engagement with English through songs. One of the participants, Nesrin, even attributed her performance in pronunciation and fluency to her habit of listening to music. Moreover, as an underprivileged learner with limited access to technology and the internet, the downloaded songs on her MP3 player were one of the scarce language learning resources she had access to. She relied on music as an accessible and enjoyable tool for her language learning for an extended time in her learning trajectory. Her case underscored what an invaluable resource music could be for language learning under disadvantaging conditions.

Another participant, Kübra, shared her approach to learning English through lyrics. She enjoyed translating the lyrics of her favorite songs and writing them down on a beautiful piece of paper in two languages, Turkish and English. Thanks to this habit of making a collection of bilingual lyrics of her favorite songs, she learned many words and their pronunciation while having a deeper understanding of her favorite song's content. This personalized practice allowed her to interact with the language meaningfully and fostered a deeper connection with the songs she enjoyed.

Last but not least, for many participants, music served as an initial introduction to a foreign language and sparked their interest and curiosity in English. The enjoyment derived from listening to music in English not only made the language learning process more enjoyable but also served as a source of inspiration and purpose to learn English.

5.1.2.3. Reading Novels and Comic Books in English

Many participants in this study demonstrated a strong commitment to their personal development and perceived reading as a central aspect of their pursuit of cultural capital and transformation. Thus, reading was one of the hobbies highlighted by the participants, which also affected their language learning practices. The participants integrated their reading habits into their language learning. Even though some of them engaged with graded books in the earlier phases of their learning, this type of reading was more of a self-instructive practice with a concrete learning goal of learning vocabulary and enhancing reading comprehension skills. However, when they attained a certain level of English, they transitioned to reading authentic pieces of literature in English. They especially preferred reading the original versions of the books they had previously enjoyed in Turkish. The cases showed that the learners started to integrate English into their daily lives after a certain stage as much as possible. By regularly reading in English, participants were able to expose themselves to the language in a natural and immersive way, which in turn contributed to their overall proficiency level.

Although Lamb and Arisandy (2020) found it to be a less popular practice among 21st century language learners, reading comic books emerged as a common practice among the male participants (i.e., Ali and Fatih). It served as entertainment and a means of language practice (Lin, 1999; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). Milton (2008) suggests that comic books might have a potentially positive impact on vocabulary retention because they link vocabulary to images. Thus, it can lead to a sizable vocabulary gain. Even though the participants did not elaborate on their experience with the comic books in detail, it was evident that Ali, in particular, recognized the opportunity to utilize comic books as a resource for language learning. He adopted a proactive approach by jotting down unknown words on his phone to facilitate his vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, he recognized the potential of using this tool for his language learning (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016).

Noteworthy here, there was a slight difference in the intention of the participants. Different than the others using novels, for these two participants, the need to read comic books in English arose from the absence of translated versions. Later, they realized they could use those books as a learning resource. Overall, reading served as a valuable and enjoyable means for the participants to enhance their language skills, deepen their understanding of literary pieces, and continue their journey of personal development and transformation.

5.1.2.4. Watching YouTube Videos

YouTube was valued as a source of information and an entertainment tool by the participants, which served a dual role for self-directed learning outside the classroom. All participants in this study reported utilizing YouTube videos throughout their English learning procedures for different purposes. As mentioned above, some learners used English teaching videos on YouTube as self-instructional tools by following tutorials and lessons designed specifically for language learners (Hiromi, 2021). On the other hand, similar to the findings of Wang and Chen (2020), some of them took a less structured approach and incorporated authentic YouTube videos into their learning while enjoying English-language videos for entertainment and acculturating themselves.

By engaging with content created by native and non-native speakers of English on YouTube, the participants could gain insights into the target culture or other foreign cultures, their daily lives, and the pragmatic aspect of the target language. For example, they followed American YouTubers documenting their daily lives, their travels all around the world, and their experiences with different events, holidays, or customs, and discussing topics related to their own society. Additionally, they followed channels dedicated to exploring specific cultural aspects, such as cuisine, music, literature, and fashion, which provided them with insights into other cultures and societies.

Participants diversified their YouTube consumption by following a wide range of YouTubers and channels catering to their individual interests, hobbies, and learning goals. For instance, Selin’s experience with YouTube highlighted its value as a language learning tool and a source of cultural immersion. She discovered a plethora of content aligned with her interests, ranging from beauty and makeup tutorials to channels covering various other topics like food and fitness. By engaging with content creators who spoke English, Selin exposed herself to natural English and colloquial expressions, which

contributed to her language learning journey in an unconventional yet effective manner. Additionally, her exposure to diverse content on YouTube broadened her horizons and expanded her knowledge in areas beyond language learning. By integrating YouTube into their language learning routines, participants were able to engage with authentic language use in contexts that resonated with their personal interests and preferences, thereby enhancing their language proficiency in an enjoyable and meaningful way (Wang & Chen, 2020).

Noteworthy here, Nesrin's case also underscored the accessibility and utility of YouTube for underprivileged language learners with limited access to language learning materials and technological devices. Thanks to her mobile phone, Nesrin was able to access this platform providing a wealth of educational and entertaining content for her self-directed naturalistic language learning. Particularly, she enjoyed following a channel called TED-Ed, which streams short videos covering many interesting subjects. She said she first watched those videos without subtitles and later with subtitles to check her comprehension. She found those videos entertaining and conducive to her language learning, which led her to learn not only interesting English phrases and expressions that did not exist in the coursebooks used but also lots of information she never had the chance to learn before. Moreover, it is important to mention that Nesrin was inspired by a Turkish YouTuber and an English teacher, Çilem Akar. Nesrin considered her a role model. By following Çilem Akar's English tutorials and lifestyle content, Nesrin not only learned from her instructional videos but also got inspired by her experiences, travels, and career trajectory. Thus, Nesrin's engagement with YouTube extended beyond her language learning and enriched her journey with her personal development.

5.1.2.5. Being a Member of a Community of Practice

Communities of practice is defined as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). In this study, some participants actively sought opportunities to immerse themselves in English-speaking communities to improve their English skills. These communities provided a space for individuals with a shared goal of learning English to interact and collaborate with each other. The language learners gathered in physical spaces like

speaking cafes and joined online communities including language learners with varying language proficiency to practice English.

Participating in these communities often transcends mere language learning by engaging in real-life activities centered around shared interests and hobbies. Through this multifaceted engagement with language learning and real-life activities, the learners engaged in self-directed naturalistic learning practices. For example, Sena's experience with the English-speaking cafe illustrated how she not only improved her language skills but also created many memorable experiences with people in this community, which is in line with the findings of Nguyen and Starcke (2021). For instance, she applied for a UK visa for an abroad trip planned by the people in this community and engaged in outdoor activities like hiking. This finding resonated with the findings of Murray and Fujishima (2013), having identified several affordances provided by those social learning communities for language learners, such as social networking, intercultural exchange, information exchange, learning support, and metacognitive knowledge and skills.

Similarly, Emine's case exemplified the benefits of being a member of a community of practice. Through her active engagement with online language practice platforms and apps, such as "free4talk" and "Hallo" for three years, she forged connections with individuals around the world, whom she regarded as family and close friends. Participating in conversations with people from diverse backgrounds provided Emine with invaluable insights into various topics including politics, cultures, religions, and psychology, which contributed to her general personal growth. Among these people she met online, she chose her best friend for the external informant interview and highlighted the depth of their relationship. Notably, he, also a language learner but with a higher proficiency level, played a significant role as a peer and mentor in Emine's language learning journey. Her interactions with him offered her practical assistance in improving her language skills and developing her autonomous skills. He witnessed her remarkable progress in her productive language skills throughout their friendship. Sena's and Emine's experiences with communities of practice centered around language learning underscored how participation in such communities enriches their language learning experiences and fosters meaningful social connections and personal growth beyond linguistic proficiency alone.

5.1.3. Naturalistic Language Learning Practices

Naturalistic language learning involves using English as a tool for the fulfillment of everyday activities without a particular learning goal, as Kocatepe (2017) defined. The analysis of the data revealed that the participants engaged in various naturalistic language learning practices centered around their hobbies and interests, because, at the time of the data collection, they had already reached a certain proficiency level, which enabled them to use English freely in their daily lives. Those language practices encompass playing games, listening to music, watching movies, shows or documentaries, reading books, using social media, and chatting with friends in English similar to the self-directed naturalistic practices described above in detail. However, while engaging in those activities, the learners had no intention of improving their language skills or no concrete learning plan (Benson, 2011b; Kocatepe, 2017). Thus, this naturalistic approach allowed them to immerse themselves in English language contexts and contributed to their ongoing language development.

Fatih's case was a remarkable example of English language acquisition in naturalistic environments right from the outset. His case illustrated how a language learner could achieve a high level of proficiency through intense exposure to English in contexts that align with their genuine interests. This finding is similar to Sundqvist (2019) which compared Swedish teenage gamers and non-gamers and found significantly higher scores in vocabulary tests among the group of gamers. Fatih also demonstrated a very high performance compared to other participants in this study.

He identified himself as a gamer and indicated that his learning journey resembled learning English in an English-speaking country, albeit in an online environment. Initially, he faced challenges in understanding English content while playing games and searching for game-related information on the internet. However, he managed to deal with these challenges by using dictionaries and Google Translate. Over time, his language skills gradually developed through continuous exposure and practice. In this context, learning English served to communicate and survive within online English-speaking communities. In other words, his learning with entertainment-oriented technological practices was essentially casual and randomized and did not necessitate much autonomous learning skills, which corroborated with the findings of Lai and colleagues (2024), indicating that information-oriented technological practices require more demanding cognitive processes and autonomous learning strategies than entertainment-

oriented ones. Given that, for Fatih, it was difficult to articulate his learning strategies and elaborate on his learning journey because his learning was not an intentional and structured one from the outset. Instead, it was a natural process that unfolded over time. Unlike other participants who began learning English through more conventional methods and progressed relatively faster in their learning, Fatih's language progress to a certain English level took approximately five years. In other words, through this immersive experience, Fatih managed to excel in his English language skills seamlessly and gradually. Fatih's case underscored the effectiveness of naturalistic language learning approaches and the integration of English learning into the learners' everyday life (Lai et al., 2024; Tajeddin, Hassani, & Bakhshandeh, 2023)

Digital games provide many avenues and affordances for language learners to learn and use English. As Chik (2014) also pointed out, digital gaming provides language learners with online gaming interaction, in-game text consumption, and game-related text production. In other words, playing digital games goes beyond just gameplay. For instance, Fatih's passion for gaming led him to visit game webpages, watch game tutorials on YouTube, participate in communities devoted to the games on Reddit, participate in or organize gamer events, chat with other gamers for experience and information exchange and so on. Moreover, Fatih was not an English language learner but an English language user which also granted him the ownership of English and intrinsic motivation to keep learning (Liu, 2023; Persico et al., 2019).

5.2. What Factors or Interactions of Factors Seem to Account for the Different Learning Trajectories and Practices, Particularly those that Demonstrate Contrasts?

Generally, English is associated with prestige, high educational background, high status, and sophistication in Türkiye. Nevertheless, people hold diverse perceptions of English depending on their age, and educational, geographical, professional, and political backgrounds, which influence their achievement in English as well (Doğançay-Aktuna & Kızıltan, 2005), which was also evident in the findings of the study. As the previous literature (Bellibaş, 2016; Gumus & Atalmıs, 2012) also indicated, there was an unbalanced distribution of all forms of capital in different regions of Türkiye and it was visible in the learning trajectories of the participants in this study.

This study recruited participants based on their language learning background and shared common qualities, such as being self-directed in their language learning, being highly invested language learners, and possessing linguistic capital (i.e., knowing a foreign language -English). However, despite their commonalities resulting from the common educational fields they were interacting with (e.g., the influence of institutional policies and instructional practices), the participants differed in their language proficiency, language learning goals and needs, motivational orientations, exercise of learner agency, and learning practices, which were highly affected by their social class positionings which define their access to material, symbolic, and social resources (i.e., capital) and dispositions and tendencies (i.e., habitus).

The findings revealed a nuanced picture of the critical role of social class encompassing various features characterizing one's social positioning by going beyond the positive correlation between SES and language learning, which related previous research revealed (Ghorbani & Golparvar, 2020; Shin & So, 2018). The analysis showed that one's social class habitus and capital possessions shaped their motivational orientations, English learning goals, access to the target language, identity construction, the amount of exposure to English, the language skills they work on online and offline spaces, and most importantly the reason why they self-direct their learning, all of which resulted in diverse learning practices. Instead of only focusing on the differences in learners' SDLL practices, this study also underlined the inequalities among language learners beyond the classroom by showing the disparities in their possession of cultural, economic, and social capital (Darvin & Norton, 2023). In this part, the individual and social/contextual conditions or interactions of those conditions seem to account for the different learning trajectories and practices, particularly those that demonstrate contrasts are explored under two main titles: self-directed language learners' practices shaped by their class-inscribed habitus and self-directed language learners' practices shaped by access to capital possessions encompassing learners' material, cultural, social and symbolic resources.

5.2.1. Self-directed Language Learners' Practices Shaped by their Class-inscribed Habitus

The findings revealed that language learners' learning practices within particular learning ecologies are shaped by what Bourdieu (1986) referred to as habitus. Being a

very complex notion, habitus is defined as "ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being… [which] captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others" by Maton (2008, p. 52). This description of habitus explains the reason why individuals' historical experiences formed predominantly by their family and school environments orient them towards certain learning trajectories and language learning practices (Rowlands & Gale, 2016). Moreover, in his book, "The Logic of Practice," Bourdieu (1990) argued that habitus provides individuals with a "feel for the game" for specific social fields. Thus, they decide what is reasonable and unreasonable or likely and unlikely within a "game" and take action accordingly to claim a position in a social field. In other words, their subjective choices are made among their available objective probabilities (Maton, 2008).

Parallel with Bourdieu's arguments and the findings of the previous research, which focused on lower-class or disadvantaged learners' learning trajectories and aspirations (e.g., Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Soyalp, 2020; Wu & Tarc, 2021), the utmost goal and motivation of the learners with disadvantaged background, shaped by their habitus, in this study was to change their family legacy and transform their inferior social position by attending university and, thereafter, getting a relatively prestigious job within their reach. Thus, their habitus gave them the feeling that becoming a teacher was a probable option for them. Especially for those learners, their teachers represented a relatively prestigious profession and a respected social position within their immediate school context. Further, some of them had role models in their extended families who were teachers having succeeded in climbing the social ladder and inspiring them by illustrating that it is an achievable goal (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Li, 2019; Li & Yeung, 2019).

Noteworthy here, the participants, except for Sena, were supposed to choose a branch in the second year of their high school education, and the English language branch was an option in which students received intensive English language classes for two years. Thus, regardless of their social class positions, the learners had access to intensive language education at school. However, the quality of the education depended on teachers' teaching methods, school facilities, and the region's opportunities. While students in urban and metropolitan areas received a relatively higher quality education in and outside the school, students from rural areas, especially in the Eastern and Southeastern regions of Türkiye, were limited by various disadvantageous conditions

(Dinçer & Seferoğlu, 2020; Koza Çiftçi & Cin, 2018). Given that, when the learners decided to learn English, which is quite late for many of them compared to more privileged learners (Huang et al., 2018), their primary goal was to get a job related to English, which, they believed, would open doors for them in Türkiye (Arik, 2020; Sayer, 2018; Selvi, 2011). For instance, Deniz believed that his linguistic capital would distinguish him from the other people in his hometown and give him a more privileged position. All the female underprivileged participants, Sena, Hatice, Nesrin, and Emine, emphasized that attaining linguistic capital would empower them to be independent resourceful women and change their inferior position as women in society. It would even prevent Hatice from getting married at an early age, which was initially arranged by her relatives. Moreover, Sena, who had worked as a hairdresser for many years before she decided to study at the university, went abroad as an exchange student, which used to be beyond her imagination and out of her objective probabilities. For all these learners, achieving linguistic capital was empowering and driven by the desire to compensate for prior unfavorable experiences, such as societal belittlement or marginalization. As a result, they adopted an identity as a determined and ambitious language learner whose first goal is to create the best version of themselves.

However, when the underprivileged learners faced their life realities (see the cases of Deniz, Sena, Nesrin, Emine, and Hatice), they found themselves in a position where they had to take control of their own learning due to various adverse conditions, such as lack of language learning materials and technology access, low quality of education at school, lack of financial and academic support from family and so on. However, “Rather than defining limits upon themselves and working within the perceived constraints of social conditions and conditionings”, these learners with a “transformative habitus” made use of their limited learning opportunities and language learning strategies in their repertoire through self-direction (Mills, 2008, p. 105). The sense of agency enabled them to put all their symbolic, material, and social resources into overcoming the excessive restrictions limiting their English learning and turn the limitations into a stimulus for effort (Duff, 2012; Liu, 2023). They exercised self-instructive learning practices for the improvement of linguistic benefits and enhancement of language proficiency relevant to their immediate needs and preferences (Hiromi, 2021). The learners took notes of grammatical rules, worked on reading passages, and memorized long lists of vocabulary to be recognized by their English language teachers and to be successful in the university entrance exam. Later, a more comprehensive language competence was prioritized in the

university context, and the learners aligned their practices accordingly. In other words, to accumulate symbolic capital valued at the tertiary level in the later stage of their learning, they had to align their practices to develop more comprehensive linguistic competence (Wu, 2017). The learners reevaluated their learning goals and engaged in activities to develop their speaking, academic writing, and listening skills which were mainly neglected in their previous education but recognized as crucial in the new context. Considering all these conditions, their motivation to learn English was mostly instrumental in utilitarian gains, such as meeting school requirements, passing university exams, and getting a better job (Zhang, Dai, & Wang, 2020). However, after being engaged in the university context in interaction with academic, social, and digital spaces, their habitus transformed which resulted in an evolution in their motivational orientations, identity construction, and learning practices similar to more privileged learners' practices.

On the other hand, for more privileged learners, such as Selin, Ali, Kübra, and Emre, English was already a component of their habitus, and their discourses of English highlighted its value as a global language (Butler et al., 2018; Shin, 2014). Corroborating with the findings of Huang and colleagues (2018), privileged learners with higher class positioning were exposed to English from a very early age and more in contact with English. Thus, they were raised with an awareness of the value of English for their daily life and future. Moreover, to take a position in the competitive education and job market, their habitus gave them the "feel for the game" that they needed to know at least one foreign language, especially English (Doğançay-Aktuna & Kiziltepe, 2005). For instance, Ali's mother, who holds a university degree and speaks English, expressed that she made him watch cartoons in English when he was a toddler and sent him to a high school known for its high-quality foreign language education. Besides English, Selin's parents encouraged her to learn German for her future education and career opportunities in Germany, where their relatives live. During the data collection, they financed her visit to Germany to experience a different culture and country. Kübra's family was not well-educated, but they lived in a Metropolitan city and had high economic capital. Thanks to their sociocultural environment, they were aware of the importance of English for her future. Since her childhood, she went to private language courses, and later she studied at a private high school where English education was highly prioritized.

For these learners, learning English was not an option, but it was almost given within their sociocultural environment (see the cases of Emre, Selin, Ali and Kübra). Thus, they did not need to exercise their agency in choosing to learn English but showed

agency in the way they learned English. When compared with underprivileged or disadvantaged participants, they were in a very advantageous position because they were exposed to English thanks to their financially, academically and emotionally supportive parents who provided language learning materials, language learning strategies, higher quality language education through schools and private language courses, and digital tools needed for their education (Butler & Le, 2018; Huang et al., 2018; Khansir, Jafarizadegan, & Karampoor, 2016; Kormos & Kiddle, 2013; Lai et al., 2015; Tao & Xu, 2022).

When their identities were examined, the identity formation of the learners was closely related to their social class habitus. Kübra, Selin, Fatih, and Ali identified themselves as global citizens, gamers, bookworms, or music fans. For example, Fatih identified himself as a gamer. He had attained a high proficiency level in English through playing online games and engaging in online multinational platforms. Thus, Fatih's motivation for English learning was primarily for pleasure, and his language learning practices were mainly related to the use of English as a communicative tool without a learning agenda (Kocatepe, 2017). Even though he temporarily engaged in language learning practices for instrumental reasons in line with the necessities of the school context, his SDLL practices outside the classroom were characterized as naturalistic, which was unstructured and incidental in a naturalistic setting (Benson, 2011b; Sayer & Ban, 2019). As Bourdieu (1987) argues, the value of practices is recognized by the members of the dominant class in a specific field and these practices are transformed into capital. Evident in the findings, the value of language skills and language learning practices were necessarily determined by social actors and particular fields the learners were in contact with. Additionally, Darvin and Norton (2023) argued that as learners engage in different fields, power relations continuously change, and individuals adapt to the rules of the fields decided by the people in power to assert their legitimate place in those contexts. In the earlier stages of his learning, Fatih valued developing speaking and listening skills because of his contact with foreign online gamer communities using English as a communicative tool. However, in later stages, to legitimize his linguistic capital acquired extramurally in the online social fields (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016), he had to align his learning practices with the school's expectations and the exam-oriented educational system of Türkiye (Blume, 2019).

Another participant, Selin, had always had access to the Internet and digital tools; the international internet and social media culture shaped her hobbies and interests. Even

though she emphasized the instrumentality of learning English, her primary English learning motivation was to seek an "international posture" characterized by one's tendency to be a member of an international community, openness to foreign cultures and making foreign friends, and willingness to travel or work overseas (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013; Lamb, 2012; Yashima, 2009). Unlike the others, being an English teacher was not her utmost goal but an area where she could use her already gained linguistic capital and preserve her social class position. Thus, even though, like Emre, she showed exam-oriented language learning practices for the university exam for a limited time and tried to meet the requirements at the university, her SDLL practices beyond the classroom were primarily for pleasure and interest-driven as in the study of Lamb (2012) which compared young adolescents' motivation to learn English in urban and rural settings. Selin and Emre developed their communicative English language competence and, through entertainment- and social-oriented technological activities, such as chatting with foreign friends, listening to music, playing online games, watching TV shows, movies, and YouTube videos, and following foreign people on social networking platforms (Lai et al., 2018; Liu, Zhang, & Zhang, 2024). Their interest-driven learning practices, which their parents supported as well, capitalized on their language skills in different settings (Barron, 2006).

Financial expectations from families, related to their habitus, also significantly influenced the educational and language learning trajectories of the participants. According to the Household Labor Force Survey by TUIK (2023), 22% of children aged 15-17 start working to contribute to their family economy in Türkiye. In this study, Deniz, Nesrin, and Sena's cases demonstrated this early entry into the workforce, and the findings revealed how it affected their SDLL. Particularly, as the male child in his family, Deniz was expected to work in the family business, which significantly limited his study time and influenced the depth of his learning because he needed to focus only on the requirements of the educational context, but neglected communicative skills in high school. He spent all his free time helping his father and worked at hotels during the summers to earn money for his school expenses. Even during the period of data collection, Deniz, and also the others were still engaged in part-time jobs to finance their education. This dual responsibility of working and studying limited their time for their SDLL. At the same time, they had to balance work and study, often prioritizing immediate financial needs over long-term educational goals.

5.2.2. Inequalities in Possession of Capital among Self-directed Language Learners

5.2.2.1. Objectified Cultural Capital

The data analysis revealed significant disparities in the possession of objectified cultural capital among the learners, which was a product of social class and regional differences in the Turkish context. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) definition, in terms of language learning, objectified cultural capital can be defined as learners' access to technology (i.e., to Wi-Fi, mobile phones, computers, tablets etc.), their access to language learning materials, and living conditions at home (i.e., having a study desk, a private bedroom, a heated room during the winter), which impacted their initial access to English, the amount of exposure to English, and their language learning practices.

The regional differences were evident in the possession of objectified cultural capital in this study, especially among the underprivileged learners. As in the case of Diouani (2023), regardless of their social class, Emine and Sena from urban areas in developed regions had access to basic technological devices (i.e., a mobile phone and Wi-Fi), better living conditions, and free social facilities in their cities. Thus, they made use of available objectified capital within their reach for their learning. The analysis revealed that even minimal access to basic technological devices made a significant difference in narrowing down the gap between disadvantaged and privileged learners' SDLL practices. For instance, Emine's case demonstrated to what extent learners with disadvantaged social positioning could transform their SDLL thanks to her agentive technological practices (Liu, 2023). However, Nesrin, Deniz, and Hatice from rural areas of Eastern and Southeastern Türkiye were drastically disadvantaged in possessing objectified cultural capital and limited language learning facilities in their hometown.

Particularly, Deniz and Nesrin faced significant challenges due to their adverse living conditions and their cases exemplified such a disadvantaged position in English learning but a significant example of resilience in the Turkish context (Esen & Adıgüzel, 2023; Kim et al., 2018). For example, Deniz did not have access to a mobile phone until the age of 17 and to a laptop until he started at the university, where the teaching was carried out in an online setting due to COVID-19. At home, a Wi-Fi connection was unavailable. To catch up with his classmates, he used his own mobile data to watch educational videos online and to search for information for the coursework. Deniz said he had to spend all his pocket money to buy data, or he needed to go to his grandparents' house where there was a Wi-Fi connection as in the case of students in Beckman (2015)

who went to a relative's home to use digital devices. Being online was such a luxury for him, although his father had enough financial resources to provide him with better technological conditions. Similarly, Nesrin also faced similar situations in terms of technology access. She showed a lot of resistance and courage to get her first mobile phone because of her oppressive family and their financial challenges. Additionally, the Wi-Fi connection was problematic in their neighborhood due to the infrastructure issues, and she relied on her limited mobile data, despite having her own mobile phone at a certain age. As Guo and Lee (2023), the available infrastructure plays an important role in language learning as a contextual factor at a macro scale. For a very long time, the only technological device within her reach was her MP3 player, which she used strategically for her learning by listening to English music. Resonating with the findings of Lee and Lee (2023), Nesrin's and Deniz's parents' technology awareness for language learning as well as education in general was not as high as parents with higher education levels. This situation negatively affected their technology provision for their children, investment in educational resources, and their expectancy for their children's language achievement. However, these two disadvantaged learners demonstrated resilience to overcome the difficulties (Chu et al., 2024).

Their living conditions were equally disadvantaged compared to the other learners in this study. They were not prioritized by their parents to have a private bedroom or even a study desk of their own which was even expected considering their sibling sizes. Especially, Deniz used a coffee table to study and slept on the couch in the living room shared with others. On the other hand, Nesrin found a study table shared with other siblings in the living room where all the siblings slept together, and guests were welcomed. The possession of a private bedroom with a study space was important for them in many aspects and could possibly have changed their SDLL journey. For example, as in the case of other more privileged learners, they could have concentrated on their studies without interruptions by some guests and other family members while working. Moreover, this study space could contribute to establishing a study routine and structured learning environment, enabling them to organize their learning materials around this space. Last but not least, it could contribute to their emotional well-being by having a private space just for themselves, which was a dream to have in the future. Noteworthy here, when Deniz compared his conditions with his cousins living in the same region but having a father with a university degree, his conditions drastically differed from theirs. He expressed that his cousins had their own study space and during school time, guests

were not welcome, or the visits were planned according to the children's study schedule. This situation underscored the importance of the education level of parents.

Deniz and Nesrin's cases represented a snapshot of a Turkish child's life without a bedroom and study space. The results of recent statistics on child welfare revealed dramatic disparities in living conditions that correlate with children's socioeconomic background. According to TUIK (2022b), only 34% of Turkish children have their own bedroom, while 66% share their room with other family members. Moreover, children from higher social class families had a higher chance of having a private bedroom, which was also evident in this study. Deniz and Nesrin were children with many other disadvantaging conditions, and their cases underscored the inequality among children in their access to a peaceful study environment, affecting their educational journey in many aspects.

The absence of objectified capital due to the lack of their parents' cultural capital and other social conditions limited the opportunities for their access to English and put Deniz, Nesrin, and Hatice in an underprivileged position. While learning English for the university entrance exam, the only language learning material available was a few English reference books prepared for the exam, which their teachers suggested. They primarily learned English from books by writing down the vocabulary and grammatical points on colored papers; whereafter they would attempt to memorize them. Consistent with Wu and Tarc's (2021) study in a similar exam-oriented context, China, they engaged in tedious test-oriented language learning practices with limited language learning resources and strategies in hand.

On the other hand, Kübra, Ali, Selin, and Emre were in a very advantageous position thanks to their parents' cultural and economic capital. They had more effective language learning resources, including technological ones, and better living conditions (Ghorbani & Golparvar, 2020; Lee & Lee, 2023). For example, like her other privileged counterparts, Selin had access to a computer from a very early age, and she expressed that she does not remember a time when they did not have a computer at home. Her parents were also interested in technological developments and bought the latest mobile phones on which they let her play games. Her father even bought a printer to print her assignments and worksheets to work outside of the classroom when she was at primary school. Later, she was given her own laptop, tablet, and mobile phone at a very early age. Thanks to her entertainment- and information-oriented technology experiences, she caught a vast interest in the English language. Particularly on YouTube, she followed channels of

musicians, chefs, daily life vloggers, sportspeople, and make-up artists. She also watched TV shows, such as “Friends”, contributing significantly to her pragmatic understanding of the language. Moreover, she also engaged in social-oriented technological practices (Lai et al., 2018) and made an American friend on an online platform called “Bottle.” They chatted approximately 10 hours a week for two years, which contributed to her language fluency.

Having acquired the cultural capital at home valued in school (Darvin, 2019; Martin, 2023), Selin was also a successful student and motivated to learn English for academic purposes. Unlike Deniz’s and Nesrin’s parents, her parents always prioritized her education and had high expectations of her language achievement. Thus, they provided her with her own bedroom with a peaceful study environment. Moreover, for the university entrance exam, Selin went to a private cram course and made use of exam-oriented reference books. However, the quality of her books, learning strategies, and life conditions were quite different from theirs. Moreover, instead of just relying on reference books and a few basic learning strategies, she used technology for self-instruction to troubleshoot language problems, especially in grammar.

On the other hand, Ali’s technological learning practices were more limited to other learners who used technological efficiently for their language learning. This observation aligns with the findings of Zhang and Liu (2023), who noted that learners from higher social positions might not fully exploit the educational potential of technologies due to their ingrained digital habits centered around entertainment and pleasure rather than educational pursuits. Another possible explanation could be that he received substantial support from his school and private language institutions, which may have lessened his reliance on technological tools for learning. In contrast to many of his peers who might have depended on digital resources to compensate for gaps in formal education, Ali’s robust language education provided him with sufficient resources and guidance, thereby reducing the need for additional technological interventions. In the later stages of his learning, he started integrating his hobbies and interests, such as listening to music and watching TV shows into his language learning practices with the advice of his close friend. However, when compared to other learners in this study, those practices were relatively limited and lacked depth.

All in all, the analysis of the contrasting cases showed the significant inequalities in the possession of objectified cultural capital and its impact on language learning practices. Important to note that “cultural goods can be appropriated both materially—

which presupposes economic capital—and symbolically—which presupposes cultural capital." (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 20). In the case of English learning of self-directed language learners, the possession of digital tools and language learning materials was indeed related to their economic capital. However, the parents of underprivileged learners from urban areas at least provided basic technological devices, learning materials, and better living conditions which could be possibly about their habitus shaped by their sociocultural environment and also their drive to compensate for their inferior positioning in society through their children (Ergin, Rankin, & Gökşen, 2019). However, the participants from rural areas of Eastern and Southeastern regions had at least one illiterate parent and lived in such a sociocultural environment, leading to a lack of cultural capital, which negatively impacted their parents' perceptions of English learning, the use of technology for language learning, and academic support.

5.2.2.2. Social Capital

Social capital encompasses family, peers, teachers, and others who contribute to learners' SDLL, their use of technological and non-technological resources for learning, and their educational aspirations. As a critical form of social capital, families from different socioeconomic backgrounds exhibit varying educational aspirations and education-related dispositions, which result in varying involvement and investment in learners' learning procedures (Zheng & Mei, 2021; Tao & Xu, 2022). This study featured participants from diverse family profiles and illustrated a nuanced picture of the pivotal role in their learning trajectory in multiple aspects, such as affecting their material possessions and the nature of the social network they could tap into. However, in contrast to the tendency of previous research revealing correlations between parents' socioeconomic background and motivation, language achievement, use of learning strategies and technology, with clear-cut categorization in terms of higher and lower socioeconomic background (e.g., Huang et al., 2018; Iwaniec, 2020), it was hard to come up with clear cut differences considering the multidimensional nature of social capital in the analysis of the data in this study (Ream & Palardy, 2008). All participants, regardless of their social class or socioeconomic background, had access to different material and social resources which affected and contributed to their SDLL practices outside the classroom. While some of them were privileged for having academically, financially, or emotionally supportive parents, siblings, or extended family members, some of them had

access to caring and supportive teachers or peers, and the others made use of other social resources thanks to their digital literacy and regional opportunities and facilities.

In line with the previous research, families from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tended to have higher educational aspirations and were more likely to invest in their children's education (Butler & Le, 2018). For instance, Ali's case was a good example of how autonomy-supportive families can play a vital role in their children's educational life and shape their language learning practices from the early stages of their education life (Lai et al., 2015; Tao & Xu, 2022). Raised in a family with both parents being educated and aware of the importance of English as a global language, Ali benefited from a supportive environment that recognized the competitive advantage that proficiency in English could offer. His parents' educational aspirations and dispositions led them to invest in Ali's education comprehensively, which put him in a very privileged position in education. Academically, the parents ensured he had access to high-quality language education in formal education contexts. They provided him with all the necessary language learning materials, both technological and non-technological. They also guided him on how to study and learn a language using a range of language learning strategies. In this study, Ali's mother was the only parent who could provide learning strategies thanks to her possession of cultural capital (i.e., English competence) since the early stages of his learning, which is a finding aligning with the findings of previous research (Lai et al., 2015; Shin & So, 2018; Tao & Xu, 2022). Financially, they also invested, even in economically challenging times, a great amount of money to attend additional language courses, buy high-quality language teaching books, and engage in extracurricular activities that enhanced his language skills. Their investment was not just financial and academic but also emotional even though the role of parental emotional support was not widely examined in the previous studies. They offered encouragement and guidance throughout his language learning journey (Coffey, 2018; Martin, 2023). This emotional support was conducive to maintaining his motivation and perseverance.

Moreover, Ali's social environment played a complementary role in his language development, highlighting the role of peer support and collaboration as a form of social capital in SDLL (Lai, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2022). His classmates and friends, who were also from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, reinforced his educational goals. This social circle provided a context in which educational aspirations and high academic performance were the norms. Additionally, Ali's close friend significantly influenced his approach to integrating English into his daily life and entertainment practices. This friend

demonstrated how English could be seamlessly woven into various aspects of life, ranging from consuming media to engaging in hobbies, thereby making the language learning process more enjoyable and relevant. Ali's case illustrates how a supportive family environment combined with conducive social and academic settings can significantly enhance a learner's language learning journey. His parents' investment and involvement, coupled with the influence of a motivated peer group, created a rich ecosystem for his academic and linguistic growth. This comprehensive support system enabled Ali to thrive and achieve proficiency in English and also in his academic pursuits.

Selin's and Kübra's cases with privileged positions also exemplify how supportive parents can significantly influence their children's educational outcomes, even if they lack direct expertise in English. By leveraging their social networks and providing comprehensive support, Selin and Kübra's parents ensured they had a robust foundation for their academic and social success and highlighted the critical role of family as social capital in language learning. They provided extensive support, both materially and emotionally, ensuring they had access to all the tools and opportunities needed for success in their academic and social pursuits. Both families recognized the importance of the language and took proactive steps to ensure their daughters could excel in it, although they were not proficient in English themselves. Moreover, they facilitated connections with English-speaking individuals and professionals in relevant fields (Tao & Xu, 2022). This network included extended family members, language tutors, and professionals through private language institutions, providing them with insights and strategies to improve their English proficiency.

Especially, Kübra's experience was a notable example of how extended family members can positively impact a learner's SDLL journey (Beam et al., 2002). Even though Kübra's parents were not highly educated, they recognized the importance of seeking guidance for their daughter's future, which is identified as bridging and ideational support (Osman, Carlhed Ydhag, & Månsson, 2021; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). They turned to Kübra's uncle, who was a history teacher doing his PhD in the same field. He recognized the importance of English in today's globalized world and was also learning English to find a position in academia. He played a pivotal role in her academic and language learning trajectory. By evaluating Kübra's academic capabilities within her probabilities, he realized choosing the language division at high school as the best strategic move for her future career. English could open doors for her in different career paths. Beyond this critical decision, Kübra's uncle also continued to support her learning

procedure by suggesting strategies to improve specific language skills and guiding her toward resources that could aid her language development. He directed her to a private online language course during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that her learning continued uninterrupted and that she could get a high score on the university entrance exam. This case underscored the significant role of knowledgeable extended family members in a learner's educational journey, particularly in contexts where parents might not have the educational background to provide direct academic support, which was not a common form of social capital discussed in the previous literature.

Conversely, some participants, not as privileged as their peers, faced some challenges due to limited material and social resources. They did not have many chances to receive language learning support from their parents because their parents did not possess the relevant cultural capital (e.g., competency in English, understanding of the importance of English, and language learning strategies). Neither did some of them have the social capital to link their children with other significant others who might support them (Osman et al., 2021). However, these learners showed agency and managed to self-direct their English learning by relying on their relationships with their teachers at school and significant others, such as their peers and friends from abroad. Particularly, Deniz and Emine's cases underscore the importance of teachers and friends in the learning trajectories of language learners who had not received academic and financial support from their parents or other family members.

Deniz's case clearly showed that he lacked support from his family, teachers, and peers during high school. However, when he progressed to an ELT department, he reached a social network where he could ask for advice or take a role model. As Hemmati and Allaiee (2017) indicated, schools provide a hidden network of social connections, including their teachers and peers from different social backgrounds. For Deniz, as for many other participants with underprivileged social positionings, tertiary education played a significant role in transforming and shaping his SDLL (Nguyen & Starcke, 2021). Deniz reached access to valuable language learning resources thanks to institutional agents, such as his teachers and classmates (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Thus, using the social capital the educational field provided strategically, Deniz relied immensely on his teachers' and peers' support to figure out alternative materials and strategies for his language learning more efficiently Particularly, his girlfriend helped him improve his communicative language skills by practicing with him as much as possible

and sharing her own learning strategies, which underscore the crucial role of peers in SDLL (Cheng & Lee, 2018; Yang, 2016).

On the other hand, Emine had an illiterate mother, a father with a high school diploma, and four siblings who were not academically successful either, which means she possessed a meager cultural capital due to her family background. However, she was fortunate to have English teachers who realized her ability to learn English, and they motivated her to do so from an early age. Particularly in high school, she was less successful in English than her classmates; however, her teacher encouraged her to work harder, taught her how to learn efficiently, and even provided private tutoring for free by meeting her online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When she reached a proficiency level high enough to pass the university entrance exam, she also tried to find alternatives to improve her speaking and listening skills, which were not assessed in the exam. Thanks to her digital literacy, she made many foreign friends on a platform called "Hallo." When asked to choose a person with in-depth knowledge about her learning process for the external informant interviews, she suggested her friend from Egypt, whom she met online on this platform. She believed he contributed significantly to her learning and knew her learning process better than her family. When asked about their virtual friendship, he emphasized their shared interests, similar personalities, a common sense of humor, and similar language learning goals besides their cultural differences and different life perspectives, which enriched their conversations and engaged them in chatting and talking on the phone for hours at a time. In this way, she had a chance to develop her intercultural communicative competence (Rezai et al., 2024). Thanks to him, she widened her social network in this online community, which led her to be a more active user on this platform.

Explicitly in Emine's case, the presence of supportive teachers at school and peers who shared similar dispositions and learning goals served as a buffer to the negative impacts of her low social class positioning on her language learning success (Bottrell, 2009). Additionally, her case showed the pivotal role of technology and digital literacy in accessing a social network through which she could receive peer support (Deng & Tavares, 2015; Lee & Hsieh, 2019). As Darvin and Norton (2023) put it, even though her habitus could possibly orient her towards certain practices, she put her limited material and symbolic resources into force and transformed her habitus. Thanks to her efficient use of technology within her reach, she asserted the right to be a member of online communities by exerting her agentive power and embarked on successful language

learning. Moreover, this finding supports the specific conclusion of Shin and So (2018) that lower-class learners depend on social strategies to develop their language skills more than higher-class peers who already have better resources to assist their language learning which is also evident in the findings.

The analysis also revealed that unconditional emotional parental support played a significant role in the learning trajectories of learners with disadvantaging conditions, which aligned with the findings of recent research studies (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Osman et al., 2020). This support was crucial in enabling these learners to overcome the obstacles posed by their limited cultural and economic capital. For instance, Hatice's parents, despite lacking the cultural and economic resources to provide academic support, were a consistent source of emotional encouragement. This emotional support was instrumental during critical moments in her educational journey. For example, she failed the university entrance exam on her first attempt and dealt with significant stress and pessimism. Her parents' unconditional support and encouragement helped her manage these negative emotions and persist in her studies. Finally, she managed to attend a department she always dreamt about and continued to develop her language skills. Their support provided a stable emotional foundation that empowered her to pursue her academic and career aspirations. It is noteworthy here that in another scenario, without such support, Hatice could have ended up as a housewife and in a marriage at a very early age, which was the societal expectations prevalent in her social environment. However, she became a young brilliant English major who had an excellent command of English and had ambitious career goals. All in all, Hatice's story underscored the transformative power of emotional support, even in the absence of material resources (Li, 2019).

Some cases also showed that even though the parents were not supportive in many aspects, the older siblings played a crucial role in learners' SDLL. Pajoluk (2013) highlighted the role of older siblings in enhancing younger siblings' academic success in relation to many factors. A similar situation was also evident in the findings of this study. For example, Nesrin had an older sister who attended university before her. Even though she stayed with the family in her hometown, her pursuit of higher education motivated Nesrin to believe that attending a university was an achievable goal for her as well. Moreover, Nesrin's sister was emotionally supportive of her, which created a sense of solidarity and a shared objective between them, which was to get out of their poor life conditions. This common goal fostered a supportive environment that encouraged Nesrin to pursue her educational aspirations with determination and resilience. In other words,

the presence of a supportive sibling who had navigated the educational system before her provided Nesrin with a valuable role model and maintained her resilience to overcome the challenges associated with their disadvantaged background (Kim et al., 2018). Resilience is resistance to disadvantage (Bottrell, 2009) and an individual's capacity for positive adaptation to overcome recurring adversities. Nesrin's case demonstrated an example of resilience in language learning and underscored the pivotal role of social capital (i.e., emotional support of the older sister) in a disadvantaged but resilient learner's education life (Çelik, 2017; Kim et al., 2018).

Additionally, Sena's case highlighted the importance of the region, especially living in a metropolitan district, to gain social capital through various means. Even though Sena was raised in a community in which she did not have any social ties with individuals speaking English or having a university degree, she ended up learning English after a few critical incidents in her life. Living in a city like İstanbul, which offers a multitude of opportunities and facilities (SEGE, 2017), Sena actively sought ways to enhance her language skills, despite her disadvantaging conditions due to her underprivileged social positioning.

Initially, she enrolled in a reputable private language course thanks to her father's and grandmother's financial support. In that institution, she encountered native English-speaking teachers and interacted with peers sharing a common goal with her, which extended her English-speaking social network. This institution allowed her to gain valuable insights and strategies for language learning through interactions with her teachers and fellow students (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Later in her learning trajectory, she participated in speaking-café events which could be very rare to find in smaller towns, particularly in the Eastern and Southeastern regions of Türkiye. Thanks to İstanbul's multinational social environment and social facilities, she made a lot of foreign friends and other language learners gathering around similar goals: enhancing their speaking skills and socialization. This diverse social network not only enhanced her language skills but also expanded her cultural horizons. Sena's experience demonstrated the significant impact of living in a metropolitan area on language learning opportunities, which was also underlined by another participant from İstanbul, Kübra. The access to high-quality educational institutions, social events, and a diverse community facilitated her SDLL and helped her overcome the limitations of her initial social environment (Dika & Singh, 2002).

Conversely, the learners living in rural areas, especially in Eastern and Southeastern Türkiye, were deprived of those aforementioned opportunities available to their urban counterparts, which underlined the urban-rural disparities that align with the results of EF EPI (2023). Examining the learning journeys of Hatice, Nesrin, and Deniz reveals how regional conditions significantly impacted their access to social capital and, consequently, their language learning experiences. The parents of Hatice, Nesrin, and Deniz already had low levels of education (i.e., at least one illiterate parent) and were not equipped to provide academic support or guidance in addition to their challenging financial situations. This lack of educational and financial support at home meant that these learners had to rely solely on the limited resources available to them through their schools. However, the quality of language education in rural areas was relatively lower, primarily due to under-resourced schools (Mustafa, Nguyen, & Gao, 2024) and a lack of qualified language teachers (Dinçer & Seferoğlu, 2020), which were reported by the participants. Thus, as mentioned earlier, they had access to social capital when they progressed to the tertiary level which was a cornerstone in their language learning trajectory. To sum up, their cases revealed the regional and socioeconomic disparities in their language learning. Despite their determination and perseverance, the lack of social capital hindered or slowed down their progress compared to learners in more privileged settings. These examples underscore the critical need for equitable educational opportunities and support systems to bridge the gap for learners in disadvantaged regions.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

6.0. Introduction

This chapter is the final chapter of this study that provides a comprehensive overview that includes conclusions, pedagogical implications, and recommendations for future research. First, it begins with a summary of the key conclusions from the findings of this study. Next, a number of pedagogical implications are proposed for the stakeholders in language education, grounded in the study's outcomes. Lastly, the chapter offers several future research recommendations which are informed by the study's findings, literature review, and limitations to help further exploration in the SDLL research field.

6.1. Overview of Conclusions

This embedded single case study focused on the nine purposively selected self-directed English language learning cases and allowed its readers to have a deeper understanding of the complex, dynamic, and multilayered characteristics of certain cases related to SDLL in a Turkish context (Duff, 2014). This study aimed to profile successful SDLL practices within the sociocultural context, which might allow various stakeholders (i.e., teachers, language institutions, families, and even language learning application or website developers) to offer better support in fostering SDLL practices. It offered insights into the learners' language learning trajectories, their motivational orientations, and identity constructions in diverse educational and social contexts by going beyond the limited view "that language learning happens only within the context of formal learning, to include the wider context of holistic language learning which happens both within and beyond the classroom walls – whether physical or virtual." (Inayati et al., 2024 p. 11).

It also investigated the complex factors and conditions that shape SDLL practices, such as proficiency level, home environment including living conditions, sibling size and technology access, parents' educational level, language teaching policies of institutions, and rural-urban divide, among others, which were not widely and holistically the focus of research in the previous research in this field. Thus, the findings suggested that SDLL is not only an individual attribute but it is a product of structural and cultural realities.

Given that, the findings of this study shed light on the impact of "wider communities" in the SDLL framework developed in a recent systematic review study by Inayati and colleagues (2024).

This study also underlined the significant place of language learners' dispositions (i.e., habitus) and abilities, such as learning needs, learning beliefs, language proficiency, abilities to make use of the resources and past experiences in line with the findings of Lai (2014). Language learners adjusted their language learning practices according to their emerging needs. Their beliefs about the value of English and language skills influenced their practices. Their abilities, such as their digital literacy affected how effectively they used technology for their language learning. Moreover, their life histories and past experiences, in other words, their habitus, shaped their language learning

The existing body of research mostly focused on polarized dichotomies of socioeconomic status as higher and lower and its relation with language achievement or academic achievement in general. However, avoiding categorizing learners in a deterministic manner, this study emphasized the importance of access to different types of capital and learners' agency in transforming their habitus by orienting to their available material, social, cultural, and symbolic capitals. Moreover, this study addressed the research gap in the field of English language education in Türkiye concerning language learners' SDLL with a sociological and critical perspective. It revealed inequalities among language learners and it also showed the resilience of disadvantaged learners' trajectories, especially from Eastern and Southeastern Türkiye, as OECD reports have consistently addressed. In this section, based on the findings of the study, pedagogical implications and future research directions are provided.

6.2. Pedagogical Implications

1. This study revealed that self-directed English language learners often used YouTube as a crucial resource in their language learning procedure, thanks to its accessibility, prevalence, and ubiquity. The platform served multiple roles for the participants regardless of their social class. First and foremost, it functioned as an instructive tool and space where learners could access a vast array of educational content. Learners utilized the platform to supplement their learning with instructional videos that addressed their specific needs at different phases of their learning trajectory, such as grammar or vocabulary

learning and developing pronunciation skills. Second, YouTube provided a window to the broader world beyond their immediate environment. This platform exposed learners to alternative lives, practices, and perspectives all around the world, which expanded their horizons. Engaging with content created by native speakers and learners from different backgrounds helped them gain insights into various cultural practices associated with the English language. Lastly, YouTube facilitated the integration of leisure and learning. Learners engaged with content that was both entertaining and educational.

Given the significant role YouTube can play in language learning, educators and learners need to recognize its educational potential. By going beyond viewing the platform as merely an entertainment tool, they can recognize it as a valuable educational resource. Teachers can make lists of recommended channels and videos that align with their students' learning goals and needs. Teachers can help maximize the effectiveness of self-directed learning by guiding learners toward high-quality, educational content. It is also important to note that especially for learners from disadvantaged family backgrounds with low cultural, social, and economic capital, YouTube can help compensate for their lack of access to expensive educational resources and to social resources. Detecting those students in the classrooms, teachers should help learners utilize YouTube to compensate for the disadvantaging conditions limiting their English language learning. This study presented numerous examples of how learners successfully used YouTube in their self-directed learning. These examples can serve as a guide for teachers and learners to make the most of this platform.

2. Besides YouTube, the participants of this study also utilized a wide range of digital tools and applications in the course of their language learning. They discovered these tools through personal searches on Google or app stores, recommendations from friends, and their teachers' integration of these technologies into classroom activities and assignments. Particularly, when they reached tertiary education, teachers introduced various digital tools and applications as part of their teaching methods. This exposure was critical in helping learners understand how to effectively use technology for educational purposes. Thus, by bridging their in-class and out-of-class learning, the learners extended their repertoire of language learning technologies, which

underlined the pivotal role of teachers in introducing and guiding the use of technology for self-directed learning.

Simply having access to and using technology in everyday life does not ensure that learners know how to use technology for educational purposes. Educators need to avoid making this assumption that the availability of technological devices makes learners automatically use them for educational purposes. Instead, it is essential to provide explicit instruction and training on how to use these tools for learning purposes. Teachers should incorporate digital tools and applications into their classroom activities and assignments. This practice not only enhances in-class learning but also encourages students to continue using these tools independently. They also need to offer guidance on the selection and use of various language learning technologies. Providing lists of recommended apps, demonstrating their use, and explaining their benefits can significantly aid learners. Based on the findings of this study, the following digital tools and applications were commonly used by the participants and can be recommended to other language learners:

1. Language Learning Apps and Websites: Duolingo, Babbel, Memrise, British Council, Engvid for vocabulary and grammar practice.
2. Interactive Platforms: HelloTalk, free4talk, Tandem, and Speaky for conversational practice with native and non-native speakers.
3. Pronunciation and Listening Tools: ELSA and Voscreen to improve pronunciation and listening skills.
4. Grammar and Writing Aids: Grammarly for writing assistance and feedback.
5. Reading Comprehension: Voice of America, British Council to read articles and news.

By integrating these tools into their learning practices, learners can enhance their language skills effectively and independently regardless of their language proficiency.

3. The findings of this study also revealed that many participants integrated their language learning into their interests and hobbies and perceived language learning as a leisure activity. Especially in an exam-oriented education system

where students need to work meticulously for exams, including multiple choice questions, English can be perceived not as a school subject to study for but as a fun activity merged with their interests and hobbies. Thus, learning can be a natural byproduct of daily life activities. Even though teachers might argue that, in the classroom, they are constrained by the short lesson hours, sizable classrooms, and test-based educational policy, so they need to focus on form-focused activities, neglecting meaning-focused activities and communicative skills, they can easily foster interest-based SDLL outside the classroom. Integrating language learning with personal interests and hobbies can significantly enhance learners' motivation and communicative skills. Teachers, despite the constraints of the exam-oriented education system, can play a crucial role in fostering this type of learning by understanding their students' interests, encouraging participation in online communities, and providing relevant resources. This approach not only makes language learning more enjoyable but also more effective, especially within the constraints of an exam-oriented education system.

Teachers may use surveys, informal conversations, or class discussions to understand their students' hobbies and interests. Knowing their hobbies and interests can be the first step in encouraging them to use English outside the classroom. They can encourage their students to join online communities of practice on platforms like Instagram, Reddit, Twitter, or Facebook based on their interests. Moreover, if possible, assignments can be designed to incorporate students' interests. Finally, they can guide learners on how to use TV shows, documentaries, movies, music, and books for their students' English learning and give some further ideas to extend their interests.

4. In this study, all participants were English majors with English-related career goals, such as becoming English teachers or working in international business. They were strongly motivated to excel in English thanks to their understanding of the importance of English for their future career goals. This motivation drove them to engage in SDLL beyond the classroom by not confining themselves to the four walls of classrooms and limiting lesson hours at school, even during the preparatory school where they received intensive language education.

In the Turkish context, proficiency in English is seen as advantageous across various fields, not just in education but also in sectors like engineering, tourism, and international relations. This broad applicability of English in the job market reinforces the motivation to achieve high proficiency levels. Early awareness of the importance of English can significantly impact learners' motivation and dedication. For many students, this awareness developed through interactions with their family members in the early years of their lives. However, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds lacked this early exposure due to their parents' limited cultural capital. By interacting with school and peers in social life, they realized the importance of learning English, which was relatively late compared to their privileged counterparts, and created a critical cornerstone in their learning trajectory. Given that, the school environment was more crucial for those learners to ignite their motivation to learn English.

Therefore, teachers play a significant role in detecting their students coming from lower-educated families and discussing with them the possibilities and opportunities that English will provide in their lives. Teachers, as may be their only contact with education within their immediate surroundings, can act as role models and mentors, expanding students' worldviews and demonstrating the real-world applications of English. Sharing success stories of individuals who have leveraged their English skills to achieve career success can be particularly motivating. Furthermore, facilitating opportunities for students to interact with peers and professionals who use English in their careers can also be beneficial. This can include guest speakers, field trips, or virtual exchanges with English-speaking professionals and peers. Another recommendation can be to engage with parents to help them understand the importance of English proficiency for their children's future. Workshops or informational sessions for parents, especially those with lower social class positionings, can contribute to their students' learning trajectories and future career success.

5. This study also revealed that emotional support from parents, siblings, extended family members, and teachers plays a vital role in motivating learners to engage in SDLL. Even in the absence of financial and academic resources, the encouragement and belief in their potential from these key figures can drive students to pursue their educational goals. The parents' or siblings' unwavering belief in their children's or siblings' potential and their constant encouragement played a crucial role in motivating the learners to

pursue their education and SDLL. Particularly, in the cases lacking familial support, teachers served as significant emotional actors for the learners. Many participants expressed that they had an English teacher whom they felt very close to and who inspired them to learn English. These teachers were seen as role models, and their personal connection with the students often motivated them to strive for success. The emotional bond with teachers provided a sense of security and inspiration, making them pivotal figures in the learners' educational journeys. Based on this finding, some implications could be suggested for educators. Educators can create emotionally supportive classroom environments where learners feel valued and motivated and make an effort to build personal connections with their students. They can try to understand their individual backgrounds, challenges, and aspirations to support them that might impact their whole education life and future careers. Additionally, teachers might inform families about the importance of emotional support in education which might enhance the overall educational attainments of the students.

6. The study highlighted that minimal technological access could narrow the gap between self-directed language learners from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Even with limited resources, access to Wi-Fi and a smartphone can provide underprivileged learners with valuable tools to enhance their language learning practices. For instance, YouTube serves as a vital educational resource that offers a variety of educational content, tutorials, and language practice videos for learners' self-instructive language learning. Additionally, it allows learners to access English content related to their interests and hobbies, integrating entertainment with education. Learners can download various AI-powered language learning applications and tools and use them to structure their language learning in different skills, such as Duolingo, ELSA, Voscreen, HelloTalk, Grammarly, and so on. These AI tools provide personalized, interactive, and efficient ways to enhance language learning and make them valuable resources for self-directed learners. They can also easily get exposed to the target language while listening to music or various podcasts that are freely available online. Engaging in interactive websites, social media platforms, and online

communities connects learners with a global community which might facilitate cultural exchange and language practice.

Minimal technological access, coupled with the motivation to use these tools for educational purposes, can significantly empower underprivileged learners to compete with privileged peers by making use of the same resources available to more privileged students and shape their habitus similar to their privileged peers, which results in similar language learning practices. Thus, underprivileged learners can bridge the gap in their educational experiences and outcomes. This finding suggests some implications for teachers and policymakers. Teachers can inform parents about the importance of technology in their children's education, emphasizing how even minimal access can make a significant contribution to their language learning. Schools can also create technology access rooms/spaces to support students' technology use for their learning freely and independently. Government programs might also be initiated and expanded, such as the FATIH project implemented in the earlier years, which provides tablets to students, equips classrooms with whiteboards and other technological devices, and ensures free Wi-Fi access. Implementing teacher training programs focused on using technology in education and supporting students' self-directed learning with technology could be beneficial. Moreover, providing educational data plans can be provided by the government or local authorities to ensure students have access to necessary online resources without additional financial burden. In case of internet problems, particularly in rural areas, educational technology industries should be encouraged to develop platforms that can operate offline and can be compatible with any operating system due to a limited range of technological devices in rural areas. Additionally, those platforms should be user-friendly because rural area learners may not have enough digital literacy to use complex educational technologies. By adopting these recommendations, teachers and policymakers can ensure that students from all socioeconomic backgrounds and regions have the opportunity to benefit from technological resources, thereby enhancing their SDLL and overall educational outcomes.

7. The findings revealed that digital games provide many avenues and affordances for language learners to learn and use English. Through digital gaming, while learners are exposed to English in the games, they also visit game webpages, watch game tutorials, participate in communities devoted to

the games, participate in or organize gamer events, chat with other gamers for experience and information exchange, and so on. Thus, those practices provide language learners with opportunities to practice their language skills without a language focus. Given that, they become language users by going beyond language learners.

Therefore, language learners, their families, and teachers should be aware of the invaluable potential of gaming in English language learning rather than seeing it as mere entertainment. Families and teachers might inform the language learners and gamers about the language learning potential of the games and game-related practices while warning them against the potential dangers of gaming platforms for young people. Language learners can be encouraged to play games where they can use English communicatively and collaboratively and to use games purposefully for their SDLL beyond the classroom.

Moreover, this finding bears relevance indirectly for language learning and teaching researchers, and policy-makers. Governments can provide grants and funds to support research into the educational potential of digital gaming. By examining the use of digital games in the process of language acquisition, researchers might come up with ideas related to quality gaming practices leading to efficient language learning. This research could help policymakers make informed decisions about language education policies and reforms that will lead to more effective and modern practices. Moreover, for teachers to keep up with the up-to-date practices, policymakers might create professional development programs that train teachers about how to use digital games effectively as language learning tools or what type of digital games can be integrated into the teachers' teaching plans.

8. The findings also underscored the autonomy-supportive behaviors of the parents. When children are supported academically, they can take responsibility for their learning from the early phases of their language learning. By encouraging children to set their own language learning goals and make decisions about their learning practices, parents might support their children in choosing which language learning tools and resources to use for language practice or let them decide when and how often to engage in language learning activities. Given that, the creation and distribution of

resources specifically designed for parents to understand the importance of autonomy support in language learning might be helpful. These resources might include practical language learning tips, sample cases of autonomy-supportive behaviors, and information on the potential impact of controlling versus supportive behaviors on language learning. Noteworthy here, parents' excessive controlling behaviors, such as strictly taking control of every decision related to their children's learning might limit learners' independence in exercising agency in their language learning. Even though in the very early phases of their learning, family guidance, and structure could be helpful for language learners, a gradual decrease in those practices can positively contribute to learner autonomy. Thus, parents should ensure a balanced approach between providing support and allowing autonomy by creating a space for children to explore and make their own choices. This balance can help foster self-reliance and confidence in language learning from an early age.

9. Motivation and agency are the keys to successful language learning as demonstrated in the findings of this study. As long as the learners have the motivation to learn English, they can show a great amount of resilience as in the cases of disadvantaged learners having learned English under very adverse conditions and despite a variety of demotivating factors. Moreover, all the participants had positive perceptions related to extending their learning beyond the classroom. Thus, these findings highlight the importance of learner cognition (i.e., beliefs, attitudes, and emotions) (Borg & Sanchez, 2020) and showcase the areas teachers might address while supporting their students' SDLL. These findings imply that the promotion of a positive language learning perception is critical in SDLL. Therefore, the curricula can include activities that help students develop positive attitudes and emotional connections to learning English, which can be achieved by student-centered approaches, project-based learning, and real-world tasks encouraging learners to take ownership of their learning, set personal goals, and reflect on their progress. Moreover, creating initiatives that highlight the value of language learning for personal growth and global citizenship could also be another implication. In this way, learners can view English not just as an academic requirement but as a tool for personal and professional development.

10. Another important finding was the role of institutional policies that regulate and facilitate language teaching approaches used by the teachers, which in turn influences learners' SDLL practices beyond the classroom. While the institutional policies focusing on exam-oriented language teaching approaches protect language learners from taking a holistic language learning approach and lead them to focus on accuracy rather than meaning, the others requiring a holistic approach to language learning and teaching let learners develop their communicative language competence. This finding underlines the importance of institutional policies in learners' SDLL practices outside the classroom. Therefore, institutions should promote assessment methods that value communication and comprehension rather than only focusing on written exams evaluating learner's comprehension skills and linguistic knowledge. To this end, policies should encourage methods that emphasize meaningful language use, fluency, and real-world communication skills and policy-makers should figure out strategies to ensure that their policies are practiced appropriately in real classrooms.

6.3. Limitations and Further Research

The current study focused on nine English majors enrolled in the ELT department at a Turkish university. Thus, the participants demonstrated intensive SDLL practices shaped by their academic identities and in line with their immediate learning requirements and future professional aspirations. Thus, this focus limits the study's empirical generalizability even though it reached a maximum variation after its rigorous sampling procedure. Further studies are encouraged to recruit a more diverse range of participants with different profiles, such as non-English majors, individuals from different age groups, and varying levels of language proficiency across multiple EFL contexts. This approach may provide a more comprehensive understanding of SDLL practices and the variety of learner profiles and settings.

This current study employed a retrospective approach examining the life histories of learners and their experiences across various phases of their learning journeys. While this approach offers valuable insights, it remains limited in scope. A longitudinal research study examining learners over extended periods and multiple learning phases might offer a more in-depth understanding of how SDLL practices evolve in response to complex and

dynamic conditions. Such a design might allow researchers to observe changes in learners' autonomy and their SDLL practices over time and provide a richer picture of their learning processes. The data for this study was primarily collected through interviews and surveys which are self-reported data instruments, even though supported with external informant interviews to provide a more objective perspective. However, for a more nuanced understanding of the habitus of SDLL learners, future research is suggested to involve the researcher's direct observation of home environments and tracking SDLL practices, as well as interviews with parents and siblings. This would enable a deeper and more objective insight into the factors and conditions influencing learners' SDLL practices beyond the classroom.

This study also examined the impact of various social actors, or stakeholders, on learners' SDLL practices and, more broadly, their overall academic journeys. Those social actors included parents, peers, teachers, siblings, extended family members, and other acquaintances. However, the literature review revealed a notable gap in research, specifically focusing on the role of siblings, extended family members, and other acquaintances in the context of SDLL, even though the roles of parents and teachers are relatively well documented. To deepen our understanding of these critical yet understudied social actors in language learning, further research is necessary to explore their specific influences and contributions to learners' language development and learning process outside the classroom.

One of the key findings of this study was that a learner's social class positioning significantly influences their SDLL practices because it affects their access to human, material, and symbolic resources, as well as shaping their habitus. Despite its critical place in one's language learning, there is a limited amount of research exploring the role of social class in this context. Further research is recommended to illuminate the potential effects of social class on language learning and to identify strategies for addressing inequalities arising from social class disparities. This could lead to more equal language learning opportunities for all learners, regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds. In this way, social stratification through education can be avoided, which might be, however, still a far-fetched goal in a highly centralized and exam-oriented education system governed by neoliberal policies.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Learner background survey

Öğrenen Bilgi Formu

Kendiniz ile alakalı bilgileri lütfen doldurunuz

1. İsim: _____

2. Yaş: _____

2. Cinsiyet: Erkek ____ Kadın ____

3. Üniversitedeki Yılınız: 1. sınıf___ 2. sınıf___

4. Memleketiniz: _____

5. Kardeş sayısı ve kardeş sıranız:

6. İlköğretim ve Ortaöğretimi okuduğunuz il(ler) _____

7. Okul Türünüz:

Devlet_____ Özel_____ Diğer_____

8. Hiç özel bir dil kursuna gittiniz mi?:

Evet_____ Hayır _____

9. Evinizde hangilerine erişiminiz var?

İnternet___ Masaüstü Bilgisayar___ Dizüstü Bilgisayar___ Tablet___ Cep Telefonu ___

10. Evde sadece size ait olan teknolojik ürünler nelerdir? _____

11. Yurtdışı tecrübeniz var mı?

Evet_____ Hayır _____

12. Yurtdışına gittiyseniz nereye ve ne şekilde gittiniz? Lütfen açıklanınız:

_____

_____

_____

13. Üniversite sınavı, İngilizce bölümünde 80 soruda kaç net yaptınız? _____

14. Girdiğiniz ilk hazırlık sınavında kaç puan aldınız? _____

15. Hazırlık okudunuz mu?

Evet_____ Hayır _____

16. Okumaktan hoşlandığınız kitap türü ve en sevdiğiniz yazar: _____

17. En çok zaman geçirdiğiniz sosyal medya aracı nedir? _____

18. İngilizce öğrenmek için hangi dijital araçları kullandınız? Lütfen belirtiniz

Elektronik Sözlük	□	Sosyal Medya (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn)	□
Blog	□	Forum (e.g. Dilforum)	□
Podcast	□	Intelligent Tutoring Systems (e.g. ELSA, Busuu, Duolingo, Dyned)	□
Otomatik Konuşma Algılama teknolojisi (e.g. Siri)	□	Online İngilizce Öğrenme Siteleri (e.g. BBC English Learning)	□
Gramer Düzelticiler (e.g. Grammarly)	□	Online İngilizce Kursları (e.g. Akın Dil Online)	□

19. İngilizce öğrenmek için takip ettiğiniz YouTube kanalları ve İnstagram sayfaları mevcut mu? Varsa nelerdir?

_____

_____

20. İngilizce öğrenme serüveninizde, işinize en çok yarayan dijital araç nedir? Neden?

_____

_____

21. İngilizce öğrenme serüveninizde size en çok (maddi veya manevi) destek veren kişi(ler) kimler? Lütfen bu kişileri ve destek şekillerini açıklayınız.

_____

_____

_____

<u>Yaşadığınız ortam ile alakalı bilgileri lütfen doldurunuz.</u>

1. Konut Tipi: Müstakil___ Apartman Dairesi: ___ Villa: ___ Diğer: _____

2. Mülkiyet Durumu: Ev: ___ Araba: ___ Yazlık: ___ Diğer: _____

3. Isıtma Sistemi: Soba___ Kalorifer ___ Klima ___ Diğer_____

4. Evde size ait bir oda mevcut mu?

Evet___ Hayır___

Evet, fakat kardeşlerim ile paylaşıyorum___

5. Evde kendinize ait bir çalışma masası veya ortamı mevcut mu?

Evet___ Hayır___

Aileniz ile ilgili bilgileri lütfen doldurunuz.

1. Meslek

Anne: _____ Baba: _____ Kardeş(ler)_____

2. Aylık Gelir

Anne: _____ Baba: _____ Kardeş(ler)_____

3. Aylık bütçe dağılım şekli (yüzde olarak belirtebilirsiniz)

Mutfak Masrafı:_____ Faturalar: _____ Ev Eşyası:_____

Kıyafet:_____ Teknoloji:_____ Eğitim:_____

Sağlık_____ Eğlence/Sosyal Aktivite:_____ Diğer:_____

4. Eğitim Seviyesi (İlkokul, Lise, Ön Lisans, Lisans, Lisansüstü)

Anne: _____ Baba: _____ Kardeş(ler)_____

5. Ebeveynlerin Medeni Durumları

Evli: _____ Boşanmış: _____

Başkaları ile Evli: _____

6. Ebeveynler tarafından satın alınan/okunan yıllık ortalama kitap sayısı:

_____

_____

7. Ebeveynlerin katıldıkları sosyal aktiviteler

Sinema____ Konser ____ Tiyatro ____ Opera ____ Sergi____ Spor müsabakaları_____Diğer_____

8. Ebeveynlerin takip ettikleri dergi ve gazeteler:

_____

_____

9. Ailecek tatile gider misiniz?

Evet_____ Hayır_____

Gidiyorsanız, ne tür bir tatil ve nereye gidersiniz?

_____

Yılda ne sıklıkla tatile giderseniz?

_____

11. En sık yaptığınız hafta sonu aktivitesi nedir?

_____

12.

İlerleyen çalışmada bulunma isteği

Eğer çalışmanın devam eden aşamalarında katılım göstermek istiyorsanız, lütfen iletişim bilgilerinizi doldurunuz.

E-mail Adres:

Telefon Numarası:

Learner Background Survey

Please fill in the information about yourself

1. Name: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Gender: Male ____ Female ____
4. Your Year at University: Freshman___ Sophomore___
5. Hometown: _____
6. Number of siblings and your birth order: _____
7. The city/cities where you attended primary and secondary school: _____
8. Type of School:
   - Public_____
   - Private_____
   - Other_____
9. Have you ever attended a private language course?
   - Yes_____
   - No _____
10. Which of the following do you have access to at home?
    - Internet___
    - Desktop Computer___
    - Laptop___
    - Tablet___
    - Mobile Phone ___
11. What technological devices do you own personally? _____
12. Do you have any international experience?
    - Yes_____
    - No _____

13. If you have traveled abroad, where and in what manner? Please explain:

    _____

    _____

    _____

14. How many correct answers did you get out of 80 questions in the English section of the university entrance exam? _____
15. What score did you get on your first placement test? _____
16. Did you attend preparatory school?
    - Yes_____
    - No _____
17. What type of books do you like to read, and who is your favorite author?

    _____
18. Which social media platform do you spend the most time on?

    _____

Which digital tools did you use to learn English? Please specify

- Electronic Dictionary □
- Social Media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn) □
- Blog □
- Forum (e.g., Dilforum) □
- Podcast □
- Intelligent Tutoring Systems (e.g., ELSA, Busuu, Duolingo, Dyned) □
- Automatic Speech Recognition technology (e.g., Siri) □
- Online English Learning Websites (e.g., BBC English Learning) □
- Grammar Correctors (e.g., Grammarly) □
- Online English Courses (e.g., Akın Dil Online) □

19. Do you follow any YouTube channels or Instagram pages to learn English? If so, which ones?_____

20. Which digital tool has been the most useful in your English learning journey and why?_____

21. Who has been the most supportive (financially or emotionally) in your English learning journey? Please explain the support and the person(s)._____

Please fill in the information about your living environment.

1. Type of Residence:
   - Detached House___
   - Apartment: ___
   - Villa: ___
   - Other: _____
2. Ownership Status:
   - House: ___
   - Car: ___
   - Summer House: ___
   - Other: _____
3. Heating System:
   - Stove___
   - Radiator ___
   - Air Conditioner ___
   - Other_____
4. Do you have a room of your own at home?
   - Yes___
   - No___
   - Yes, but I share with my siblings___
5. Do you have a study desk or area of your own at home?
   - Yes___
   - No___

Please fill in the information about your family.

1. Occupation
   - Mother: _____
   - Father: _____
   - Sibling(s)_____
2. Monthly Income
   - Mother: _____

- Father: _____
- Sibling(s)_____

3. Monthly budget distribution (you can indicate in percentages)
   - Grocery Expenses:_____
   - Bills: _____
   - Household Items:_____
   - Clothing:_____
   - Technology:_____
   - Education:_____
   - Health_____
   - Entertainment/Social Activities:_____
   - Other:_____
4. Education Level (Primary School, High School, Associate Degree, Bachelor's Degree, Graduate)
   - Mother: _____
   - Father: _____
   - Sibling(s)_____
5. Parents' Marital Status
   - Married: _____
   - Divorced: _____
   - Married to others: _____
6. Annual average number of books purchased/read by parents:

   _____
7. Social activities participated in by parents
   - Cinema____
   - Concert ____
   - Theater ____
   - Opera ____
   - Exhibition____
   - Sports events_____
   - Other_____
8. Magazines and newspapers followed by parents:

   _____

9. Do you go on vacation as a family?
    - Yes_____
    - No_____
10. If yes, what type of vacation and where do you go?

    _____
11. How often do you go on vacation annually?

    _____
12. What is your most frequent weekend activity?

    _____

Willingness to participate in future work

If you would like to participate in the ongoing phases of the study, please fill in your contact information.

- Email Address:
- Phone Number:

Appendix 2. Learner autobiography

Öğrenen Otobiyografisi

Hedef: Dil öğrenenler olarak kim olduğumuzu ve geçmiş deneyimlerin dil öğrenme alışkanlıklarımızı ve becerilerimizi nasıl şekillendirdiğini keşfetmek.

Örnek: https://sites.google.com/site/daniellefulchereportfolio/learner-autobiography

Aşağıda, deneyimlerinizi hatırlamanıza yardımcı olacak bazı sorular bulunmaktadır. Bunları kullanıp kullanmamakta özgürsünüz. Fakat bu soruları metin içinde cevapladığınız sürece, kendi öğrenme geçmişinizi kapsayıcı bir şekilde yazmış olacaksınız.

Kullanıabileceğiniz bazı anahtar kelimeler: öğretmen, öğretmen davranışları, sınıf arkadaşları/akranlar/arkadaşlar, aile, teknoloji/bilgisayar/cep telefonları, öğrenme planları, öğrenme ortamları.

Bize dil öğrenme hikayenizden bahsedin:

1. İngilizce öğrenmeye ne zaman başladınız? İngilizce öğrenmeye nasıl karar verdiniz?
2. Okuldaki dil eğitiminizin dil gelişiminize nasıl bir etkisi oldu? Sınıf ortamı, öğretmenleriniz, ve arkadaşlarınız sizin İngilizce öğrenmenizi nasıl etkiledi?
3. İngilizcenizi geliştirmek için ders dışında hangi etkinlikleri yaptınız? Bu etkinlikler öğretmen tarafından mı yürütüldü yoksa kendiniz mi yönettiniz?)
4. Sizi İngilizce öğrenmeye motive eden faktörler nelerdi? (Örn; ödevler, sınavlar, iyi bir meslek sahibi olma isteği, kendi ilgi alanlarınız veya oyunlarınız.)
5. İngilizce öğrenme kararınızı etkileyen biri veya önemli bir olay var mı? Eğer öyleyse, kim, nasıl veya ne?
6. İngilizce öğrenmedeki başarınızda/başarısızlığınızda ne gibi etkenler rol oynadı? Neden?
7. Zaman içinde İngilizce öğrenme motivasyonunuzu nasıl sürdürdünüz?
8. İngilizce öğrenirken hangi araçları/materyalleri kullandınız? (Örneğin, Gramer kitapları, Google translate, Dualingo, ELSA, İngilizce sözlükler, Kelime defterleri vb.)
9. İngilizce öğrenirken hiç kimseden ve ya bir kurumdan yardım aldınız mı? Biriyle işbirliği yaptınız mı? Evet ise, nasıl? (Örn; bir arkadaş, ebeveynleriniz veya öğretmeniniz vb.
10. İngilizce hayatınızda ne kadar önemli? İngilizce öğrenmek size ne ifade ediyor?

11. Teknolojinin dil gelişiminize etkisi oldu mu? Evet ise, öğrenmenizde teknolojiden nasıl yararlandınız? Lütfen açıklayınız
12. Neden ingilizce öğretmenliği okumak istediniz? Gelecekte bu mesleği yapmak istiyor musunuz? Gelecek planlarınız nelerdir?

Learner Autobiography

Goal: To discover who we are as language learners and how past experiences have shaped our language learning habits and skills.

Example: https://sites.google.com/site/daniellefulchereportfolio/learner-autobiography

Below are some questions to help you remember your experiences. You are free to use them or not. However, as long as you answer these questions in the text, you will have written a comprehensive account of your learning history.

Some keywords you can use: teacher, teacher behavior, classmates/peers/friends, family, technology/computer/mobile phones, learning plans, learning environments.

1. Tell us about your language learning story:
2. When did you start learning English? How did you decide to learn English?
3. How did your school language education affect your language development? How did the classroom environment, your teachers, and your friends influence your English learning?
4. What activities did you do outside of class to improve your English? Were these activities led by a teacher or self-directed?
5. What factors motivated you to learn English? (e.g., assignments, exams, desire for a good career, personal interests or games.)
6. Is there anyone or any significant event that influenced your decision to learn English? If so, who, how, or what?
7. What factors contributed to your success or failure in learning English? Why?
8. How did you maintain your motivation to learn English over time?

9. What tools/materials did you use while learning English? (e.g., Grammar books, Google Translate, Duolingo, ELSA, English dictionaries, Vocabulary notebooks, etc.)
10. Did you receive help from anyone or any institution while learning English? Did you collaborate with anyone? If so, how? (e.g., a friend, your parents, or your teacher, etc.)
11. How important is English in your life? What does learning English mean to you?
12. Has technology impacted your language development? If so, how did you use technology in your learning? Please explain.
13. Why did you choose to study English teaching? Do you want to pursue this profession in the future? What are your future plans?

Appendix 3. Initial interview/semi-structured interview protocol

Initial Interview/Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Time: Date: Location:

Interviewee:

Introduction

Hi [name of participant], my name is Tuba. Thank you for participating in this research project. As you know, the aim of this project is to investigate the self-directed language learners' learning practices, and based on your answers to the background survey and learner autobiography, I wanted to do an interview with you to elicit more information about your language learning practices. I'd like to chat with you about the ways that you have learned English and about your family and the people around you affecting your learning procedure.

I would like to remind you that your participation in this project is voluntary and confidential, and you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time you wish. Would you mind if I record this conversation so that I can listen to you rather than take notes?

Before we start do you have any questions for me?

Interview Questions

Referring to the learner background survey and autobiography:

1) You are coming from (the city), what do you think about this city and its opportunities and how it has affected your language learning?
2) You are the first, middle, last child of the family/only child of the family/have many siblings, how do you feel about that? Do you think it affects your way of learning?
3) I see that you studied at a public/private school, how was the language education there and how did it affect learning?
4) How did you study for the university entrance language exam?
5) You (did not) studied at prep class at this university. What was the reason? How did it affect your language learning?

Technology access and their use of technology for language learning and entertainment (Capital, Habitus, Field)

1) What technological tools do you use frequently in daily life?
2) How do your parents use technology?
3) For how long do you have access to the technological devices you have access to?
4) How did you use the digital tools and platforms (you indicated here) for your language learning?

Family and Social Environment (Capital, Habitus, Field)

1) Can you talk more about your family? (Asking questions based on the information on learner background survey and autobiography)
2) What is the role of your family in your education in general/ in your language learning?
3) How is the financial situation of your family? How does it affect your language learning?
4) How does the educational background of your family affect you and your language learning?
5) Is there anyone who played a significant role in your language learning (e.g., parents, teachers, friends etc.)? Who is s/he? How?

Language Learning Procedure

1) Except for the schoolwork, do you still keep learning English? If yes, how do you learn?
2) Do you think you have some weaknesses in English? How do you work on those weaknesses?
3) Do you think you have some strengths in English? How did you manage to be good in those aspects?
4) How do you identify your learning needs and plan your learning?
5) How do you monitor and evaluate your language learning?

Appendix 4. Photo-elicitation interview protocol

Sample Photo-elicitation Interview Protocol

Time: Date: Location:

Interviewee:

Introduction

Hi again, [name of participant]. Thank you for participating in this session. As you know, in this session, we will talk about the pictures you took for this project. These pictures describe the way you learn English and your learning practices, show details about your family and home, and lastly, describe your personality and identity.

I would like to remind you that your participation in this project is voluntary and confidential, and you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time you wish. Would you mind if I record this conversation so that I can listen to you rather than take notes?

Before we start do you have any questions for me?

Interview Questions

1) Why did you choose this picture to bring here?
2) How can you describe this picture to me?
3) What objects or people are important to you in this picture?
4) What is special about this place/person/object for you?
5) How does this picture identify your personality or identity?

Appendix 5. Ethics approval

T.C
ERZİNCAN BİNALİ YILDIRIM ÜNİVERSİTESİ
İNSAN ARAŞTIRMALARI EĞİTİM BİLİMLERİ
ETİK KURULU KARARI

Etik Kurul Toplantı Tarihi	31/01/2022
Protokol No	01/05
Araştırma Başlığı	Türkiye'de Öz Yönetimli Biçiminde İngilizce Öğrenen Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Sınıf Dışındaki Öğrenme Uygulamalarının Araştırılması: Sosyolojik Bir Bakış
Araştırma Türü	Nitel-Diğer (Vaka çalışması)
Araştırmacılar	Arş. Gör. Tuba IŞIK (Sorumlu Araştırmacı) Prof. Dr. Yonca ÖZKAN (Danışman)
Karar	Başvuru dosyanıza ait araştırmanız etik açıdan uygun bulunmuştur.
Açıklama: 1. *Etik Kurul Onayı, uygulama ve/veya veri toplama için araştırmacının ilgili kurum veya kuruluşlardan izin alma sorumluluğunu ortadan kaldırmaz.* 2. *Kurul üyelerine ait araştırma önerileri görüşülürken, ilgili yönerge gereğince, öneri sahibi üye görüşmelere katılmamış ve oy kullanmamıştır.*	

e-imzalıdır

Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Hüsnü BAHAR
İnsan Araştırmaları Eğitim Bilimleri
Etik Kurul Başkanı