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SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD: DEVELOPMENTAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTIONS

ABSTRACT: Self-directed learning is a skill woven through specific life experiences. Based on biographical narratives, this study focuses on the self-directed learning skills of emerging adults who are university students and aims to provide an understanding of the background dynamics of different learning orientations. Theoretical sampling was used to conduct biographical narrative interviews. The Documentary Method was employed to interpret the interviews. The results of the documentary analysis of the narratives put that the autonomy-supportive family structure throughout the life course and the individual's willingness and desire to be autonomous constitute an important and decisive ground for the emotional dimension of self-directed learning skills. The research findings also reveal that self-directed learning is a way of life and a set of continuous processes that require continuity far beyond the boundaries of formal education. The research findings can be convenient in two ways. First, families can recognise and support an adolescent's effort and need to separate and contribute to the relationship dynamics necessary for their children to become self-directed learners. Second, the findings of the research suggest that more than a technical skill within the boundaries of formal education, self-directed learning is a positioning in life, which may lead to a holistic approach in future research on the subject.
KEYWORDS: emerging adulthood, self-directed learning, gaining autonomy.

Introduction

Throughout my teaching career at the university, I have had the opportunity to accompany and observe many students' learning experiences. I noticed that some students find it difficult to manage their learning process, some are very capable of taking responsibility for learning, some are not even aware that they need to take this responsibility, some are focused on their goals and can do what needs to be done, some expect me to spoon feed them. This study was inspired by my curiosity and desire to comprehend the underlying dynamics of these differences in learning orientations.

Learning experiences are heavily influenced by the dynamics of the social structure in which individuals live and by personal characteristics. Individuals participate in a variety of social mediums as they grow into adulthood. Family dynamics, home, work, school experiences, tools, and social environments all have an impact on learning practices and processes (Dennis & Carin, 2011). As Katie Davis (2012) notes, adults' learning is situated in their memoirs as well as the larger socio-cultural environment in which they live.

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This phenomenological qualitative study aims to provide an understanding of the background dynamics of different learning orientations by focusing on self-directed learning skills based on the biographical narrations of emerging adult university students. According to this perspective, the theoretical framework will be followed by the research methodology and then the study findings. The last and conclusion section will reveal how emerging adults interpret their learning processes within the framework of their developmental characteristics and biographical experiences.

Self-Directed Learning as a "Way of Life"

Adults want to be able to direct their learning processes (Lindeman, 1926; Tough, 1979). Malcolm S. Knowles defines self-directed learning as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, to diagnose learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify human and material resources to select and implement appropriate learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes" (Knowles, 1975: 18). Self-directed learning is not only an instructional phenomenon; it is a "basic human competence, the ability to learn on one's own" (Knowles, 1975: 17) and it is a "way of life" (Caffarella, 1993).

Self-directed learning is considered by theorists of the subject as not only a personality trait but also a phenomenon that is determined and developed environmentally, socially, and psychologically. While Donn Randy Garrison (1997) emphasises the cognitive and motivational dimension of self-directed learning, Huey B. Long (1989) defines three dimensions in his model of self-directed learning as sociological, pedagogical, and psychological, and he focuses on the psychological dimension of self-directed learning. Long (1989) argues that the most important dimension of self-directed learning is not the social or educational factor but the psychological variable. Ralph G. Brockett and Roge Hiemstra (1991) also emphasise the importance of the psychological dimension by drawing inspiration from Long's model. They point out that learning takes place in a larger social environment. According to Hiemstra (2003), if the social context is a restrictive environment, it can limit freedom, and this can limit learning. Dynamics of living conditions, according to George E. Spear and Donald W. Mocker (1984), play a "driving" or "trigger" role in a person's self-directed learning skills.

Self-directed learning relies on some fundamental phenomena. In this framework, it is considered a *process*, not an outcome (Bouchard, 2011). According to Paul Bouchard (2011), this process is environmentally determined. The second phenomenon is that self-directed learning relies on is its *continuity* (Candy, 1991; Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). Self-directed learning is not a skill that can be developed overnight; it is a skill that can be developed over time through continuous experiences. The third phenomenon

is *autonomy*, defined by Mark Tennant (2006). Tennant (2006) associates self-directed learning with personal autonomy and willingness. He describes "self-direction" in learning as "personal autonomy, the willingness and capacity to manage one's learning, an environment that allows the learner some level of control, and the pursuit of learning independent of any formal course or institutional support" (Tennant, 2006: 147). Tennant (2006) emphasises also autonomy and links it to the development of the capacity to think rationally, reflect, analyse evidence, and make judgements; to know oneself and be free to form and express one's own opinions; and, to act in the world.

Gerald Grow defines the four stages of becoming a self-directed learner as "dependent, interested, involved, and self-directed" (Grow, 1991: 125). In the dependent stage of Grow's model, students need an expert authority figure to explicitly guide their learning. Moving to the second stage, learners show more interest and want to complete relevant assignments and tasks. In the third stage, learners have both the knowledge and skills to actively participate in their learning, but still need guidance from the instructor. In the final stage, they can take responsibility and set their own goals and standards of achievement. These stages are expected to be sequential and gradual within life development periods. Gradually, considering the characteristics of the developmental period, the person is guided to take responsibility for managing their learning.

Adults are expected to be responsible for their learning processes and to have the ability to manage and monitor these processes. Jeffrey J. Arnett (2000) defines adulthood in terms of three key characteristics: accepting personal responsibilities, making independent decisions, and having financial freedom. Being an adult requires accepting responsibility for one's actions and decisions as well as accepting responsibility for the consequences of those actions and decisions. However, one can become an adult gradually throughout life's developmental stages. Although biological maturation precedes emotional maturation, growing older biologically does not necessarily mean becoming an adult. On the path to growth and independence, Arnett (2000) defines a new and unique developmental stage as emerging adulthood.

Emerging Adults as Self-Directed Learners

According to Arnett (2000), although the range varies depending on the culture, emerging adulthood covers a period of 18-24 years in terms of age and includes unique developmental characteristics. It is a period in which neither the dependencies of childhood are completely abandoned, nor adult responsibility is fully accepted, but rather a period in which different options are available. The main characteristics of this period are identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and opportunity.

The road to adulthood is constructed during childhood, adolescence, and even emerging adulthood. The environment in which emerging adults live should be conducive to the development of the adult skills described by Arnett (2000). Growing up, according to Evie Kins et al. (2009), is associated with the development of autonomous functioning. Authors denote the development of *autonomy* as a central developmental task during adolescence and emerging adulthood. As to Kins et al. (2009), autonomy corresponds to independence from the developmental perspective, that is, independence by distancing themselves behaviourally and psychologically from their parents and taking on more responsibility for their own lives.

Hasan Atak and Figen Çok (2010) identified two main psychological markers to elaborate on emerging adulthood: Margaret S. Mahler's (1971) theory of separation and individuation and Peter Blos' (1967) second individuation process. While Mahler (1971) focuses on the process of separation and individuation in the first two years of a child's development, Blos (1967) views adolescence as the second individuation process. Blos (1967) views adolescence as the second individuation process.

Growth, curiosity, and learning are all interconnected and reciprocal phenomena. According to Paulo Freire (2019), the knowing process is linked to the growth process. Thus, he says, to know, one must grow, and to grow, one must know. Because to grow is also to wonder, and to pursue one's curiosity. Yapi Erten (2019) notes that one invests in what s/he is curious about, enters a fusion with what s/he is curious about, and with this fusion, the self changes, hence growth becomes possible. Erten (2019) also associates learning with taking something from the outside in and states that for learning to take place, it is first necessary to make a place in the inner world of the individual. Erten (2019) sees the prerequisite for making space in the inner world as separation. He associates learning with curiosity and defines curiosity and the pursuit of curiosity and learning as "the most basic mechanism of the dynamics of separation" (Erten, 2019: 83). Similarly, Neslihan Zabçı (2019) states that learning "means growing up; for a child, it is the path towards becoming an independent individual where the help of the other is not absolute" (Zabçı, 2019: 119).

Individuation refers to the mental separation–individuation process that begins in early infancy when the boundary is established "between the 'me' and the 'not-me'" (Levinson, 2011: 32). Adolescence builds upon the developmental achievements of the separation-individuation process in early childhood. Blos (1967) examines identity formation as a psychological battle with parental introjects. According to the second individuation adolescence faces the developmental task of separating from their parents and becoming self-sufficient. Blos' (1967) concept takes this notion into the realm of identity formation but still refers to a psychological struggle with parental introjects. According to Blos (1967), the second individuation involves numerous shifts concerning

drives and intrapsychic reorganisations in ego, superego, and ego ideal structures. These gradual changes enable adolescents to take increasing responsibility for themselves, separate psychologically and physically from their parents, and establish a life (Colarusso, 1992). During the second individuation phase, the adolescent must separate from the internalised figures of the parents to become a member of the adult world. This separation provides an important backdrop for emerging adulthood. In emerging adulthood, individuation and separation is a process that does not either have absolute autonomy that parents withdraw full support from their children or that the emerging adult is as dependent as they were in need during childhood. The degree and dynamics of individuation and separation in each period may be different.

High school graduation and the subsequent university admission process are very important stages in the behavioral and psychological separation of an emerging adult from his/her parents. This period is the first time an adolescent leaves home (Mulder, Clark & Wagner, 2002). As Akin Rengin-Işık, Linda D. Breeman and Susan Branje (2020) point out, the university selection process plays an important role in adolescent life during the transition to adulthood. Such a decisive decision-making process, which has a major impact on the rest of one's life, provides important indicators of a young person's orientation.

According to Erik H. Erikson (1982) and Blos (1967), the most effective way out of the crisis is the search for autonomy. The emerging adult can be curious, pursue their curiosity and learn to manage their learning processes. A self-directed learner can become a self-directed learner if the emerging adult's inherent in his/her willingness to grow and to individuate, become independent, and gain autonomy can flourish in the contact and relationship dynamics of their lives.

Method

In this phenomenological qualitative research, I reached participants through theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). The participants are emerging adult university students. I conducted interviews about Fritz Schütze's (1992a; 1992b) theoretical foundations through narrative biographical interviews. Interviews were interpreted using the Documentary Method (Bohnsack, 2014; Nohl, 2010).

Participants of the Study and Procedures

The participants of the study were university students (emerging adults) enrolled in an undergraduate programme. I started with sequential sampling, then switched to purposive sampling, and finally to theoretical sampling as concepts emerged.

The announcement of participation in the study was made to students studying in the last year of the same undergraduate program. Forty-six senior students indicated that they wanted to participate in the study and filled out the consent form. The students who expressed their willingness to participate were divided into four groups according to their gender, academic achievement (GPA), the form of residence during their education, and financial resources (Table 1).

Table 1. Dimension and Categories of Participants

Dimensions	Categories
Gender	Female Male
GPA/4	0-1.99 2.00-2.99 3.00-4.00
Residence during their education	Dormitory, Co-residing with family Shared flat with friends
Financial Sources	Working part-time-partial financial support from family Full financial support from family

Forty-six students volunteered to participate in the study and 35 of them were interviewed. Of these 46 volunteers, those who withdrew from the interviews when the scheduled interview time arrived, those who lived both in the dormitory and mostly in various houses of their friends, and those who were older than 24 and studying at their second university were not included in the study. Interviews were conducted with 35 participants (Table 2).

Table 2. Participants of the study interview

GPA/ Financial Source	0-1.99/4	2.00-2.99/4	3.00-4.00/4	total
Works Part Time (Case group 1)	1 ♂* (1D**)	4 ♀ + 3 ♂ = 7 (2D, 3F, 2S*)	6 ♀ + 7 ♂ = 13 (1F, 8D, 4S)	10 ♀ + 11 ♂ = 21 (11D, 4F, 6S)
Family Financial Support (Case group 2)	1 ♀* + 2 ♂ = 3 (2D, 1F**)	3 ♀ +2 ♂ = 5 (2D, 2F, 1S)	4 ♀ + 2 ♂ = 6 (2D, 4 F)	8 ♀ + 6 ♂ = 14 (6D, 7F, 1S)
total	1 ♀ + 3 ♂ = 4	7 ♀ + 5 ♂ = 12	10 ♀ + 9 ♂ = 19	**18** ♀ **+ 17** ♂ = 35

* ♂: Male, ♀: Female
** D: Dormitory, F: Family, Shared: Shared flat with a friend(s)

Data Collection: Biographical Narrative Interview

Narrative interviews allow the researcher to record the perspectives of the interviewees (informants) by allowing them to talk about their life stories and experiences (Nohl,

2010). Based on the work of Fritz Schütze (1992a), Gabriele Rosenthal (2004) defines two periods of narrative interviewing. The first period is the main narrative period. In this phase, the interviewer asks the first narrative question, avoiding any thematic constraints. The second period is the elaboration of some points mentioned in the main narrative that is important for the research topic.

In this study, the first narrative was triggered by the question: "Can you tell me your life story from the beginning to today?". At the end of the first main narrative, questions about learning experiences were posed to elaborate on issues relevant to the research. These questions focused on the participants' learning experiences throughout their biography, including the definition of learning for them and the teachers who most influenced them in their life.

Interpretation of Interviews: Documentary Method

Turkish interviews were transcribed and interpreted following the principles of the Documentary Method (Bohnsack, 2014; Nohl, 2010). Two types of meaning emerge through interpretation: immanent meaning and documentary meaning. The direct meanings expressed by the interviewee during the interview are called immanent meanings. Documentary meaning is the knowledge underlying the tacit dimension (Bohnsack, 2014). Documentary meaning is not about what social reality is from the actors' point of view; rather, it is about how this reality is produced or realised in practice by these actors, *i.e.*, in what orientation they address the issues and problems of life (Nohl, 2010).

In this study, special attention was given to the participants' narratives about their adolescence and learning experiences in their biographies. Comparative analyses also helped to identify common patterns in various biographical narratives (Nohl, 2010). By comparing biographical narratives in terms of various demographic characteristics (gender, academic success, residence during their education), processes that are not specific to a particular region or social group, *i.e.*, generalisable to some extent, were identified and typified.

The documentary analysis revealed two different orientations. The first one includes participants who have self-directed learning skills, and the second one is the limited self-directed skills. In the following, these two frameworks of orientations will be elaborated through representative cases.

Background Dynamics of Different Learning Orientations

The background dynamics of learning orientations in emerging adulthood will take part in three subtitles family dynamics, the pattern of leaving home, positioning within

learning and experiencing the teacher, as well as the interview statements and fragments representing the orientations.

Family dynamics: Is it possible to be re-born from the psychic womb?

Just like a toddler's excitement and curiosity about walking away from his/her primary caregivers (mostly parents), an adolescent is in the process of trying and striving to leave the home where he/she has grown up psychologically and spatially with all kinds of emotional changes in his/her growing body. In some family structures, this growth is seen, recognised, and supported. In some families, it is ignored and perhaps prevented. It may require someone to have the courage to strive for separation, to be curious, and to pursue what she is curious about. Showing this courage is not only related to personal characteristics, but also to the favorability of the psychological atmosphere of the field of experience for showing this courage. For example, Buse[1] (female, age 22) talks about the psychological atmosphere of her family life with the following statements:

Buse: Since I was little, in the home environment, it has been more of a comparison with my brother, because we are very opposites. He is introverted, but I am more extroverted, I want to see different places, I want to go out, and I want to move a lot on my own. Time passed with conflicts about this, but I grew up with a family structure that was more respectful, and more accepting but set some boundaries.

Buse emphasises the character differences between her and her brother in her family and the acceptance of these differences. She treats conflicts arising from these differences as normal. Buse characterises the dynamics within the family as respectful and acceptable and elaborates on her parents with the following statements:

Buse: My mother is a conservative person, she tried to direct me that way. But my father tried to offer me every opportunity in a completely free way, he tried to guide me in the direction I wanted as much as he could. And now he says, you did what you wanted, you can do it in the best way, he supports me. There were points where both could meet at a common point and points where they could not.

In the interview excerpt above, Buse states that her mother was more restrictive, and her father approached her in a way that did not hinder Buse's autonomy. She treats the conflicts within the family as normal, she puts these conflicts into a rational context by doing her internal reflection and separates herself from these dynamics and her parents' conflicts. Like Buse, Onur (male, age 22) says: "I was hostile to my father for four years with the fever of adolescence, things were very bad between me and my father. Now my

[1] All information about people, cities, and institutions has been anonymised and does not include real names.

relationship with my father is perfectly good" and characterises the challenging period with his father during adolescence. Expressing that they were "enemies" with his father during this period, Onur states that his relationship with his father has transitioned to another preferable dimension in emerging adulthood: "My father and I are very good now... the other day we sat together and had a drink of alcohol... He always supports me. He told me to go and work and learn about life...". These expressions exemplify that Onur's father, just like Bus's, established a supportive relationship with Onur's autonomy and accepted that Onur was growing up.

Pelin (female, age 22), who represents a different orientation than Onur and Buse, elaborates on the dynamics within the family in the following interview fragment:

Pelin: I am the only child in my family, I mean I don't have any other siblings, but two other children were lost before me, so I can be called the third child. With the effect of this, I can say that I have a lot of affection. That's why I always went to the same school from primary school to high school. The administrators were relatives of my parents. The only reason for this is that I live very close to my family. ... My father is already working out of the city, he can only be with us on weekends, we chose the university where I am studying now so that we can be with my mother during the weekdays. We are a family structure that is a bit too attached.

In Pelin's narrative, it is seen that her family raises Pelin in a very protective manner due to their previous losses. Even though her university was determined by the fact that her mother should not be alone, we also hear that her family and relatives always influence her choice of schools. She felt the presence of the family, and wherever she was she could not find an autonomous existence during adolescence. We understand that family dynamics and decisions are the benchmarks in Pelin's decisions. She elaborates on her mother in the following interview fragment:

Pelin: I am not someone who does housework or anything like that. Because my mother doesn't work, she is a housewife and she has devoted her life to me, I can't leave the house, maybe I don't want to leave this comfort. I don't think I am an adult much.

We see that Pelin's mother does not give Pelin any responsibility. For her, leaving the comfort zone in which she was put by her mother – we can also think of it as a "psychic womb" – means that she cannot get out of this comfort zone, as it would entail separation from her mother who devoted her life to her. Pelin, unable to separate from her mother, does not want to leave this psychic womb. She is aware that her inability to separate, this state of clinging, prevents her from growing up. Nazlı (female, age 23), who has a similar orientation to Pelin, refers to her very "close-knit" family ties and expresses that she cannot separate from her mother in a very similar way to Pelin with the expression "there is no time when I don't get help from my mother, I lean on her". It is understood that Nazlı's mother, like Pelin's mother, feeds her like she feeds a baby

with the expression "my mother always lives according to me, she never makes a sound so that I can study in the evenings, she still brings me my fruit while I study".

Even though they are in the same age as Buse and Onur, Pelin and Nazlı cannot position themselves in a position of independence from their families or receive encouragement from their families for this. We see that their families maintain this protective space – a kind of *psychic womb*. Pelin and Nazlıcan's mothers still want to keep their children in the womb. While Pelin and Nazlıcan continue to stay in there even though they know they must come out in their emerging adulthood period. On the other hand, we understand that Onur and Buse's fathers accept that they are growing up – in a way, coming out of the psychic womb – and that they find it appropriate to have contact – as drinking alcohol together – that represents this growth. We also see that Onur's father supports this state of growth and separation, he guides Onur to become autonomous by encouraging him to work part-time. Buse's father neither supports nor acts to prevent it. For Onur and Buse, there is a space where growth is allowed. In Onur and Buse, we do not see a structure preventing growth and automatisation like in Pelin and Nazlıcan.

With the holistic interpretation of the biographical narrative interviews, two different orientations have become evident: emerging adults who are given space to grow emotionally and emerging adults who are not given space to grow emotionally and who continue to be kept in the psychic womb. The following section elaborates on these two orientations. While Buse, Onur, and Ahmet represent the first orientation of self-directed learners. Halil, Pelin, and Nazlıcan characterise the second orientation as other-directed. Details of each orientation will be presented with two subtitles: positioning in life as well as positioning in learning experiences and experiencing the teacher along with the representative cases.

Positioning in Life: Home Living Patterns

The inability or courage to leave the sheltered growth space (psychic womb) also plays a decisive role in the process of leaving home. The transition to university, the separation from home and thus from parents, and the way in which this separation may or may not occur symbolise the form of separation of the individual at the beginning period of emerging adulthood. However, individuation becomes visible in this period. In the process of leaving home, mustering the courage to risk conflict with the family, if necessary, plays a decisive role in the emerging adult's ability to individuate. Buse, who has an autonomy-supportive relationship with her father, elaborates on the process of leaving home after the university preference period in the following interview fragment:

Buse: There was not much desire from my family for outside İzmir (researcher note: family lives in İzmir). I softened it, I told them I wanted it this way, I demanded it, there was no softening ... My parents divorced at that time. This time I had to deal with something on my own. ... They said that if I went out of town, they won't support me. At that moment they needed an object to reflect their anger. ... I thought that this anger towards me would pass. .... I decided the same way again, and I came here by asking them to respect me, it was a difficult process for me because everyone was against me...There was always prejudice against Istanbul, like what would happen if a girl child left, what could happen...Istanbul was considered a terrible place, they were expecting her to break her rope there, especially on my mother's side. My father was with me, he was only with me de facto, I knew he still does not want to.

In the interview fragment above, we see Buse's struggle for her existence in the challenging period the family went through. Buse, realising that she cannot be the reason for the anger directed at her, separates herself from her parents emotionally. In this psychological atmosphere, her insistence to live in a different city from her family comes to the fore. As a result of her persistent effort, she experiences a separation from her family and leaves for another city for her own autonomous life choice. The consequences of this separation attempt brought along a challenging period for Buse: "It was very difficult for me. I had resentments with my mother... But she softened afterward". But she accepts the consequences of this decision. We hear that she made a very intense effort to leave the house emotionally and spatially in a psychological atmosphere where her mother was obstructive, and her father was not obstructive but not supportive either. Demonstrating an example of willpower, despite her mother's emotional coercion and punishment of cutting off communication, she persists and does not give up her desire to study in the city where she studies for her undergraduate degree. Buse details her search for support during her unsupported university preference period in the following interview fragment:

Interviewer: Can you tell us about your university selection process?

Buse: Our guidance unit was not very active, but my English teacher encouraged me to research departments; she advised me to research departments and see what suited me... I went to the guidance units of other schools, not the guidance unit of our school, but the guidance unit of a good school. I visited XYZ High School, which is equivalent to a science high school. The teachers welcomed me very warmly. Then they supported me, and the guidance unit applied the same tests to me that they applied to their students.

Buse exemplifies how she takes initiative based on her self-direction skills and the support of her teacher. She identifies the lack of support and then goes to the source that can meet her needs with the facilitation of the necessary resources and makes an inference from all the information she collects. Buse did not delegate responsibility to another person or institution. She sought qualified resources on her initiative and made her own decision with a holistic approach by including the recommendations of these

resources. According to Buse's accounts, she attempted to seek help for herself from qualified resources. Her family did not hinder (but did not support) her autonomous attempts (such as visiting another school guidance office); the gaps were filled by her efforts.

We have already seen that Pelin, unlike Buse, has a very protective family structure by not trying for separation. In the following interview quote, Pelin expresses her university preference period and the justification for her choice of university:

Pelin: My father was a graduate of Ege University. His dream was always to study in Izmir. Normally he thinks that he doesn't affect anyone, but in fact, he is someone who always directs them to get what they want. But then he told me that his field was not a field for women because he saw how difficult it was for women engineers to work in his environment. He guided me later. My father is someone who always loves his job. So, when I saw him, I thought I could do it too.

We see that Pelin decided on her university based on her father's desires and wishes. She draws attention to the fact that her reason for choosing the school was determined based on its proximity to the house where she lived with her family. Unlike Buse, we see that Pelin does not think outside the boundaries her family draws for her. If we compare Buse and Pelin, Buse directs her actions in an autonomous and self-directed manner with her insistence and effort to go to another city despite her mother's resentment and threats to withdraw financial support, and with the acceptance of the consequences of this action. On the other hand, Pelin directs her actions under the determination of her father's desires, wishes and directives.

Representing a common orientation with Pelin, Halil (male, 22 years old) described the university preference period and the roles he attributed to his mother and guidance counsellor with the expressions: "I can't tell you that my guidance counsellor was supportive, I can say that my mother made those extra preference lists. I didn't do much. I wasn't aware or involved at the time". Halil does not believe that the school guidance counselor gave him enough support and uses this as a reason for not being able to "go" to a university. In this process, his mother filled the gap left by the guidance counsellor. As can be seen, Halil refuses to take responsibility for this important turning point in his life. He puts the responsibility of decision-making on his mother or the school counsellor.

If we compare Buse and Halil, while Halil's family does not allow Halil to have an autonomous decision-making process during the university selection process, Buse's family enables her to carry out the university selection process autonomously despite the conflicts within the family. While Buse is insistent and eager to study at a university in the city of her choice, Halil has no such desire. Onur (male, age 22), who has a similar orientation to Buse and whose father has established a relationship that supports his autonomy, explains his university selection process with the following statement:

"I could not prepare for the exam in my last year and as a result, maybe I could have gotten into higher schools, but I am here". Unlike Halil, Onur develops his narrative by accepting responsibility for "not being prepared enough" instead of focusing on the lack of help from others. According to Onur's narrative, it is Onur's responsibility that he was not sufficiently prepared for the university exam, neither his guidance counsellor nor his family as in Halil's case.

Positioning in Learning and Experiencing Teacher

Positioning at important life milestones such as university choices has a similar pattern to positioning in learning experiences and experiencing teachers. Those who cannot be in a family structure that supports their autonomy and who cannot make their university choices under the decisive guidance of their families confine their learning processes to classroom/school experiences. Moreover, this orientation positions the learner as a passive recipient of the material presented in the absolute and decisive presence of the teacher. In the following interview, Pelin defines learning based on her personal experiences:

Interviewer: For example, what kind of teaching process comes to your mind? Can you describe it? What is the first thought that comes to your mind?

Pelin: It depends on the content. I learn much more easily when it's a subject that I'm interested in, that I like or that stimulates me. But if I've conditioned myself, if I'm too worried about how I'm going to achieve it, if I've already started or quit it, it's more difficult for me.

Pelin defines learning as "depends on the content" within the physical and psychological boundaries of the classroom. As a result, she delegated the task of stimulating herself to other subjects. Pelin's learning priority is to "have fun and feel good" and she cannot do this unless someone else creates an atmosphere in which she feels good. The way Pelin describes her learning processes is like the way she describes the teachers who had an impact on her in her past life. Pelin describes her primary school teacher as having a great impact on her life: "She raised us all with love and treated us all the same. We saw her as our mother". She describes how she expected her teacher to love her like her own mother and how her teacher fulfilled this wish. This two-subject framework envisions emotional involvement and attributes a vital role to educators in motivating.

Nazlıcan (female, age 22), who has a similar family structure to Pelin, defines learning in the same way as Pelin. Nazlıcan states her expectation from learning with the expression "The characteristics change according to the instructor; I think it depends on whom you learn from". Like Pelin, she defines learning within the boundaries of the classroom-school course. She positions the teacher as the person who transfers

knowledge in a way that is appropriate for her with the expression "I think, she has to motive me in order for me to join the course".

Like Pelin and Nazlıcan, Halil, who left all the decision-making responsibility to his family during the university preference process, associates the most effective learning environment with taking notes and being complimented by someone ("When someone compliments me or says, 'You can do it', 'I get even more fired up'"). As can be seen, Halil needs the acceptance and encouragement of another subject in his learning experiences as in other processes.

Pelin, Nazlıcan, and Halil define the dynamics of learning within the confines of formal education and place themselves as the recipient of the content as a learner and the fundamental determining actor as an instructor. They established priorities, such as the teacher patting him/her on the back, motivating or complimenting him/her, and being merciful to everyone during the learning process.

Unlike Pelin, Nazlıcan, and Halil, Onur defines learning as the "self-processing of knowledge" and identifies learning in out-of-school environments. In addition, he evaluates his learning experiences by positioning himself as an active subject who develops a new product such as "producing musical notes". While Onur positions the other subject in the learning process (in this case his friend) in a position to provide *feedback*:

Interviewer: So, what aspects of learning appeal to you? The learning process or the learning experience, whatever you call it…

Onur: Learning is the processing by a person of knowledge that is already available in the environment .... Let me give you a few examples: for example, on the guitar, if I produce my notes after practicing, I get notes instantly. I immediately turn on my computer, open Guitar Pro and write down all the notes I get from there. I share it with my friends, they give me feedback and I edit it again. It is important to learn from feedback because you will present it to someone and if you get positive feedback from someone, it is not forgotten quickly, it stays in your mind more constructively.

In the interview section above, Onur emphasises learning experiences outside the school/classroom/course boundaries in learning processes and positions himself at the center of the learning dynamics. In addition, he seeks help/facilitation from his friends by requesting them to provide feedback when necessary. Different from Pelin, Nazlıcan, and Halil, Onur's friends act as facilitators rather than the fundamental determinants in learning processes.

To define learning, Onur uses the expression "If something is being talked about, and I have no idea, I go straight to Google and look it up" for his learning experiences. As seen his primary motivation for learning is his curiosity. Like Pelin and Nazlıcan, he does not describe a learning environment created and determined by external factors by instructors. He defines learning as a lifelong and prolonged process. Like Onur,

Buse considers herself the primary and determining subject in the learning processes ("I think learning means transforming, not only in my behaviour but also emotionally, in all circumstances"). She considers learning as a comprehensive transformation process. She says that the most effective learning environment is: "My first demand for learning is to be free. When someone tells you this, I don't believe it is effective. If s/he says you are supposed to learn this, but I will not". These statements show Buse's willingness towards self-directed learning processes, as she did during her university preference period.

Like Onur and Buse, Ahmet (male, age 24) describes learning as a "flowing stream" and describes it as an action that gives him "satisfaction". Ahmet also describes learning as "a never-ending stream, flowing forever, adding something to everyone, so that you can be fed forever". Similarly, to Onur, Ahmet also states that learning is continuous in life, that he does not expect for someone to tell him "Well done" as Halil does, and that he does not wait for another subject to motivate him like Pelin and Nazlıcan. He considers himself the primary and determining subject in learning processes.

While Ahmet's approach to learning is like that of Buse and Onur, his pattern of experiencing the teacher is also similar. Ahmet focuses on the contributions of his two teachers, saying "I gradually learned to use my brain and started to question in their lessons". He states that his teacher increased his capacity to use his mental abilities and taught him to "question". As seen, he enjoys the learning environment in line with the autonomy skills he has acquired. He prioritises the development of his skills as thinking, questioning, and increasing his autonomy. As seen Onur, Buse, and Ahmet accept learning as a continuous process and emphasise the expectations of the instructors to increase their autonomy.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study focuses on the self-directed learning skills in college-aged emerging adults through biographical narratives and intends to give an understanding of the underlying dynamics of their learning orientations. The comparative analysis of cases from different academic levels, the form of residence, and gender allows for a broad perspective on the background dynamics of self-directed learning skills. In this perspective, two different frameworks of orientations have emerged: those with self-directed learning skills and those with limited self-directed learning skills.

According to the results of the study, self-directed learners (Buse, Onur, Nazlıcan) describe learning experiences within the framework of out-of-school experiences, they do not limit their learning experiences to formal education. Their curiosity, the

pleasure they get from learning, and the satisfaction they feel from producing are the main sources of motivation in their learning experiences. As self-directed learners, they experience teachers as facilitators and prioritise relations that increase their autonomy. At an important turning point when choosing a university, they make decisions based on their own wishes and desires and accept the consequences of these decisions. On the other hand, the learners whose self-directed learning skills are not sufficiently developed (Pelin, Halil, Nazlıcan) define their learning experiences within the boundaries of school and the classroom. They focus on determinants such as passing the class, getting grades, and getting the teacher's approval in terms of their learning experiences. In their relationships with the teacher, they prioritise emotional inclusion and expect the teachers to motivate them. Decisions and actions taken during the university preference period are mainly determined by their families.

The research findings show that these two different orientations' underlying dynamics lead us to the emotional dimension of self-directed learning. It emerges that the emotional dimension of self-directed learning is justified by two intertwined, mutually nourishing components. The first component is the autonomy-supportive structure within the family where one is allowed to grow and gradually become autonomous from a very young age. This family structure allows not only for physical maturation but also for emotional growth, even if there are breaks from time to time. The second dimension is the effort and the will of the individual to grow and differentiate emotionally within the family structure. This willingness is inherent in the courage to be persistent on emotional and spatial separation, drawing strength from personal characteristics as well as the first component (the family structure that creates space for autonomy). These two mutually nourishing and intersecting dimensions form an important ground for the emotional dimension of self-directed learning.

Concerning the underlying emotional dimension of self-directed learning, the research findings confirm Spear and Mocker (1984), Long (1989), Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), and Garrison (1997) that self-directed learning is not only related to personal characteristics but also related to *social interaction* that individuals experience. The orientation with self-directed learning skills tends to be not only more courageous and autonomous as personal characteristics but also the family dynamics within the scope of this study are supportive of this courage and individuation. Considering this, another dimension confirmed by research findings is that self-directed learning is a *process* that requires *continuity* (Candy, 1991; Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). It is revealed that the areas of experience that encourage self-directed learning, the family's opening of space for autonomy from an early age, and the necessity of continuity of this support in each developmental period of life considering the features of the developmental period have a significant and determinative role. It is also evoked that self-directed learning

is a skill that is gradually and continuously developed and knitted and flourishes from an early age.

Research findings reveal the mutual balance (Erten, 2019; Zabçı, 2019) between separation, growth, curiosity, and learning. We see that the self-directed learner orientation is the orientation that is curious, dares to wonder, demonstrates the will to pursue his/her curiosity, and can psychologically separate from the family in this process. This separation, as in Blos's (1967) second individuation process, also brings autonomy to life. This autonomisation attempt and its result, as Rengin-Işık, LiBreema and Branje (2020) state, becomes visible in the pattern of the university preference process. The positioning of self-directed learners in this process represents an example of self-directedness. Self-directed learning skills stand out with their efforts to become existentially autonomous in life. This process also confirms self-direction is not limited to only the ability to manage instructional processes but also *a way of life* and position in life as Long (1989), Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), Caffarella (1993), and Hiemstra and Brockett (1994) argue.

Like Tennant's (2006) conceptualisation, the research findings reveal that *autonomy* and self-directed learning are two important phenomena that are intertwined. However, autonomisation may not occur sequentially and linearly, as in the stages of self-directed learning described by Grow (1991). The stages that Grow describes may not be a once-in-a-lifetime progression, but rather a progression that is renewed at each developmental stage. According to the findings of the research, being able to distinguish between "me and not me" (Levinson, 1978) from an early age can be possible within relationships that allow this separation to be made. Developmentally, the seeds of autonomisation are sown continuously from the first years of life. An emerging adult may not be expected to be as autonomous as they are a middle-aged adult because he/she is still attached to his/her family economically. On the contrary, s/he is not supposed to be as dependent on his family as an adolescent. Therefore, the level of self-directed learning skills may be unique to the dynamics of each developmental stage.

In order to be a self-directed learner, the biologically growing individual must also gradually separate from the psychic womb that s/he grows. It is possible to associate this leaving the womb, this emotional separation, with the growth that Freire (2019) points to. Within the appropriate psychological atmosphere and opportunities, everyone can gradually learn to take responsibility for his/her own learning and actions within the framework and scope of the characteristics and competencies of his/her developmental period. However, this course may not always follow. Disregarding the biological age and developmental period, a growth environment in which the adolescent is not allowed to individuate may cause the individual to remain in the first stages of Grow (1991).

As Hiemstra (2003) points out, this research shows that a restrictive context – in this study the family structure – can limit learning and attempts at autonomy.

The result of the documentary analyses put that the second process of individuation described by Blos (1967) is a decisive ground for self-directed learning. The adolescent's courage and willingness to leave the emotionally protective psychic womb and the role of the mother/parent in facilitating the adolescent's exit from this womb constitute an important and decisive ground for the emotional dimension of self-directed learning skills. This period of separation during adolescence inevitably reflects the dynamics of the individuation processes that have been taking place since the person's birth.

Research findings can serve as the foundation for developing learning designs in formal and nonformal educational institutions by considering learners' learning orientations. On this basis, educational designs can be developed to encourage learners to be self-directed learners, rather than assuming that learners are hypothetically self-directed learners based on their biological age. Besides this, as per research findings, families might be conscious of the adolescent's separation effort and need particularly in adolescence, and they can attempt to foster the essential parental relationship for their children to acquire and improve their self-directed learning skills.

Depending on the position of the researcher, further research can be considered in terms of lifelong learning (Field, 2000), human agency (Bandura, 2001), attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979), and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Future research may interview families of individuals with self-directed learning skills to learn more about how they handle the process when their children reach adolescence. This study was conducted with emerging adults who are university students during their undergraduate education; further research can be conducted with emerging adults with different demographic characteristics or graduate education. The findings of the study show that self-directed learning is more than just technical skills, it is a phenomenon that needs to be approached holistically. By pointing to the holistic and deep aspect of self-directed learning, these findings may serve as an impetus for further research that deals with self-directed learning only in its technical dimension within formal education.

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