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Hülya Şen, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey
Mümin Şen, Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University, Ankara, Turkey

Corresponding email address: husen@metu.edu.tr

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Abstract

Advising in language learning (ALL) can be defined as "the process of helping someone become an effective, aware, and reflective language learner" (Kato & Mynard, 2016, p. 1). In order to promote learner autonomy, a learning advisor conducts an intentionally structured reflective dialogue, the purpose of which is to engage the learner in reflective processes so that the learner can reach a deeper sense of understanding and control of language learning (Carson & Mynard, 2012; Kato & Mynard, 2016). The main role of the learning advisor in this process is to "activate learners' reflective processes through a one-to-one dialogue" (Kato & Mynard, 2016, p. 104). To encourage active and critical reflection, learning advisors need to be provided with proper training. The purpose of this paper is to explore the perceptions of the experienced English language teachers regarding the effectiveness of the learning advisory training program (LATP) they have attended and its effects on the teachers' professional and personal lives. To achieve this aim, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through questionnaires and interview findings. The results suggest that the teachers who attended the LATP developed a deeper awareness of how to promote learner autonomy.

Keywords: advising in language learning (ALL), learning advisor, reflective dialogue, training program, learner autonomy.

Learner autonomy in foreign language learning has been defined as "a capacity to take charge of one's own learning" (Benson, 2011, p. 2). Therefore, "an autonomous learner can make informed choices which requires a level of awareness and control of learning processes which can be achieved through reflection" (SALC Handbook, as cited in Mynard & Stevenson, 2017, p. 171). Such a reflection is the cornerstone of ALL.

An early definition of advising is "the system of interventions which aims at supporting students' methodology of language learning by means of 'conversations,' i.e. by using language in the framework of social interaction to help students reflect on their learning experience, identify inconsistencies and steer their own path" (Esch, 1996, p. 42). The dialogue in advising is intentionally structured to support learners'

transformation to make a fundamental change in their learning. In such a reflective dialogue, learners often experience an 'aha' moment as their existing beliefs are often challenged (Kato & Mynard, 2016).

From a constructivist perspective, it is important that language learners are provided with opportunities to reflect and construct and reconstruct their understandings of concepts related to their language learning processes (Adelman Reyes & Vallone, 2008; Von Glasersfeld, 1989). During this reflection process, the role of the learning advisor is far beyond providing learning tips to learners. An effective advisor draws upon a "skilled use of language that extends and enhances the learner's thinking processes and helps him/her to gradually develop his/her way to self-manage learning" (Mozzon-McPherson, 2012, p. 46).

As a newly developing field, ALL incorporates strategies and knowledge from various fields such as humanistic counseling, cognitive behavior therapy, and life coaching (Carson & Mynard, 2012). However, it is important to establish the distinct role of language learning advising and learning advisors within the field of foreign language education. ALL is quite distinct from language teaching, both in terms of the practical skills required and in the discourse employed. Stickler (2001) explains that learning advisors should possess expertise in three categories. The first is being able to guide the learning of languages with particular emphasis on learning strategies. The second is familiarity with the environment of advisees to provide expert information on resources and materials. And the third is having good counselling skills to make the session a learner-centered and empowering experience.

Although language teachers may have a good repertoire of language learning strategies, they have other priorities. These might include conducting a class based on a specific academic area, helping students learn the knowledge and skills of a particular topic, creating lesson plans based on the curriculum and assessing students with grades through tests/assignments (Kato & Mynard, 2016). Learning advisors, on the other hand, work outside the classroom, and they are defined as "specialists either in a language or in independent learning" (Mozzon-McPherson, 2001, p. 11) or as trained experts in language learning, with extensive experience related to resources, activities and strategies. Moreover, learning advisors work with individual learners on personally

relevant aspects of their language learning (Carson & Mynard, 2012). In addition to helping learners identify their needs, learning advisors also guide students in goal setting, strategy training, monitoring and evaluating the learning outcomes as well as the learning process, and deciding future learning paths (Tassinari, 2016). Learning advisors make use of various skills that they may not develop as language teachers. Therefore, Esch (2001) suggests the introduction and development of new perspectives on the tasks to be achieved as well as distinct ways to define the roles of learning advisors. Similarly, Kato (2012) emphasizes the importance of a specific initial and ongoing advising training program. Based on this information, an introductory LATP was offered to a group of language instructors who were willing to pursue their teaching careers to encourage language learners to be more successful and autonomous.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the English language instructors' perceptions of the effectiveness of the LATP they have attended and its effects on their professional and personal lives.

Methodology

In this section, information regarding the research setting, participants, training and data collection is provided.

Setting

The study was conducted in the Department of Basic English (DBE) at Middle East Technical University (METU), Turkey. In this context, students receive one-year English language preparatory education and are required to take a proficiency test proving they are at least an intermediate level of English to study in their departments as the medium of instruction at the university is English.

The students are provided with basic language skills and general academic English education to bring their English proficiency level to the degree that will enable them to follow and fulfill the requirements of their departments when they start their courses. However, many students lack the ability to manage their own learning as they may not be aware of how to learn a language and which resources to use. The fact that English cannot be taught efficiently and students are faced with various problems both at school and work due to the lack of English language competency in our country is a

current issue. According to the unpublished 2015 report prepared by the School of Foreign Languages, METU, where this particular study was conducted, students encounter difficulties as they start their departmental studies. Still, lower-level preparatory school students have greater difficulty undertaking the requirements of their programs due to inadequate language competence (Akşit & Akıncı Midas, 2015). In order to support students to develop an awareness of their own language learning processes and promote life-learning skills, a language learning advisory service was launched with one advisor in METU DBE in October 2018. By talking to students about their language-related needs, objectives, successes and weaknesses, the learning advisor based in this service aims to support learners in their language learning through reflective dialogue. The learning advisor has carried out about 500 face-to-face sessions that lasted from 30 to 45 minutes with students, mainly in the DBE. When observing the positive effects of language learning advising, many teachers, both within the same institution and in others, showed great interest in this practice, and some teachers volunteered to receive training on ALL.

Participants

Data were collected from 15 teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) who attended the five-week introductory training program on ALL. 14 participants work at the DBE while one participant works at the Department of Modern Languages of the same university. Out of 15 teachers, two were male, and 13 teachers were female with English language teaching experience of 10 to 24 years. Among the teachers participating in the training program, two were PhD candidates, thirteen held a master's degree in ELT, and five teachers had a Delta certificate from Cambridge University at the time of data collection.

Training

The introductory course to ALL was offered to 16 EFL teachers in five consecutive sessions starting from 26 November to 26 December 2019. Bearing the teaching duties of the trainees in mind and to have more interaction with the trainees, two groups were created, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Each group consisted of eight participants and was introduced to the same course content.

The introductory course of ALL began with the origins of learner autonomy and the theoretical underpinnings of ALL. The trainees received input on basic advising strategies, how to formulate reflective questions, as well as hands-on activities and advising scenarios so that they could practice these strategies. Towards the end of the first course, the trainees had the opportunity to participate in a relay advising session with a student in which the trainees worked as a team. Each trainee carried out one part of the advising session and observed their partners performing their part. Trainees were expected to perform one of the following roles: (a) finding out about the learner's background, (b) asking about what language problems the learner has, (c) helping the learner find out what the real issue is, (d) helping the learner come up with a realistic goal, and (e) going over the outcome of the session by helping the learner reflect on the whole process. At the end of this task, the trainees were asked to reflect on their experience and write a paper by analyzing the session.

Data Collection

This study draws upon two major data sources which were collected as part of the training program. To this end, qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments were incorporated to uncover the possible factors that might affect the teachers' perceptions to explore how advising theory relates to practice.

With an aim to investigate the perceptions of the experienced English language teachers regarding the effectiveness of the LATP, and its effects on the teachers' professional and personal lives, the researcher who also carried out the LATP designed a 10 item Likert-scale questionnaire in which 5 represented strongly agree, 4 agree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 2 disagree, 1 strongly disagree. After the researcher constructed the items by bearing the objectives and content of the training program in mind, the questionnaire was evaluated for its reliability by being proofread by five different experts who carried out similar advising training programs before in other countries. After the piloting process, a few minor changes were made to the instrument. Since it was an introductory course, participants were expected to have a general awareness about the concept; therefore, instead of saying "…develop deeper empathy with my students" in the second item of the questionnaire, for example, the sentence was edited as "…develop more empathy with my students". Similarly, the expression

"deeper" was removed from the eighth item as "…gain awareness of the differences between teaching and advising".

At the end of the training program, small group reflection meetings were carried out with the advising trainer and participants. The aim of the meetings was to develop an understanding of strategy use in advising practice in the institution that can be influenced by particular cultural, contextual and individual factors and give the trainees the opportunity to explain their feelings and concerns related to strategy use in greater detail. In order not to limit the flow of reflections, the participants were guided to share a reflection in the form of a short presentation towards the end of the training program on their development as a learning advisor. These reflections were about something they noticed in an advising session, practice activities, or something that shifted their perspective. In order to analyze the data gathered from the reflection meetings, the information obtained from the participants was grouped under certain themes such as expectations from the training course, challenges and 'aha' moments experienced during the training sessions, use of metaphors for advising, and the effects of advising on teaching and private life.

To outline the content categories systematically, the content analysis technique was utilized. A content analysis was performed on the data examining topics, categories of topics and patterns within the feedback. First, data from the recorded feedback sessions were coded and charted for each participant. Next, an across-group content analysis was conducted, and the results were charted in order to discover major themes. Thirdly, all data were analyzed and described according to codes and themes. Finally, the data were interpreted and analysed by the researchers by considering the data from the quantitative and qualitative tools to gain a more accurate insight.

Results

In this section, the results regarding the questionnaire and the small group reflections are presented. Overall, the findings from the questionnaire and the small group reflections indicate a positive attitude towards LATP and the details are presented below.

Questionnaire Responses

The findings of the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively through frequencies and percentages for each item in the questionnaire. As can be seen in the first question of Table 1, nearly 93% of the participants agree that they can formulate better questions to promote reflective thinking. In addition to theoretical input regarding questioning skills, in the advisor training, we had hands-on tasks. The trainees produced relevant questions first in scenarios where they worked in groups to produce reflective questions for certain contexts. Then, they had the chance to carry out real sessions with students and reflect on their questioning skills. However, no matter how long the duration of such training is, learning advisors develop their questioning skills during the actual advising process. The key point here is to continue training and developmental activities after the initial training by analyzing actual advising cases so as to have a better understanding of the frequency of strategies used (Kelly, 1996; McCarthy, 2010; Morrison & Navarro, 2012; Mynard, 2012) or to find out how directive an advisor is (Thornton & Mynard, 2012).

As can be seen in the second question of Table 1, 80 % of the participants agree that, with the five-week initial advising training, they have developed more empathy with their students in their foreign language learning process. The shift in roles from conducting a class based on an academic area to conducting reflective dialogue to help students become more autonomous learners enables learning advisors to empathize with the students.

The third question in Table 1 shows that 93% of the participants agree that the LATP has enabled them to develop more effective ways to support their learners in their language learning processes. Since ALL is defined as a system of interventions to support students' ways of language learning (Esch, 1996), such an intervention will enable the learners to be able to steer their own path and become more successful language learners.

As can be seen in question four, all the participants believe that they have developed an awareness towards being a more effective listener, which will ultimately lead the learners to have deeper reflections about their learning processes and as they keep reflecting, they will challenge their existing beliefs and make fundamental changes in the nature of learning (Kato & Mynard, 2016).

According to question five, about 67% of the participants agree that the training has enabled them to discover new things about themselves and their teaching. Reflective thinking, which is defined as "thinking deeply, often from different perspectives and involving active, persistent and careful consideration of beliefs and knowledge" (Dewey, 1933, p. 18), is the common practice in advising training and an essential skill both for the teachers and the learners as effective learning cannot take place without it.

In question six, about 93% of the participants agree to the effectiveness of having a non-directive approach during advising. This way, learners can be empowered to make conscious choices and take greater responsibility for their learning, as highlighted by Kelly (1996).

In question seven, about 93% of the participants agree that LATP helped them engage in more productive dialogues with their colleagues, family members and friends. The basic advising strategies we practiced during the training are utilized to encourage the speaker to reflect deeply, which ultimately improves the quality of the dialogue.

As can be seen in question eight, all the participants agree that they have gained awareness of the differences between teaching and advising. ALL is quite distinct from language teaching, both in terms of the practical skills required and in the discourse employed. As all the trainees are experienced language teachers, experiencing the major shift in roles is quite a challenge for them. Still, it is essential to gain this awareness "to help learners identify their needs, set learning goals, reflect on strategies for achieving these goals, monitor and evaluate learning outcomes and the learning process, and make decisions for further learning" (Tassinari, 2016, p. 77).

In the ninth question in Table 1, about 73% of the participants agree that they have gained new perspectives about how to promote learner autonomy. Since advising is about supporting learners to take responsibility for their learning rather than disseminating knowledge, it is worthwhile to gain this perspective.

As can be seen in the final question in Table 1, almost 87 % of the participants agree that they have become familiar with the process of carrying out an advising session. By acquiring this new role, the experienced language teachers will give control to the learner, a scenario that is not very unlikely in a traditional classroom environment.

Table 1

Questionnaire Responses

Questions	Percentage				
	1	2	3	4	5
The five-week training program I have attended has enabled me to…					
1. …formulate better questions to promote reflective thinking.	-	-	6.7	46.7	46.7
2. …develop more empathy with my students in the process they go through while learning a foreign language.	-	-	6.7	13.3	80
3. … come up with more effective ways to support my students in their language learning process.	-	-	6.7	40	53.3
4. … develop interest and awareness towards how to be a more effective listener.	-	-			100
5. … discover new things about myself or my teaching skills.	-	-	6.7	26.7	66.6
6. … find out that it is more effective to be supportive rather than being prescriptive to foster learner autonomy.	-	-		6.7	93.3
7. … get engaged in more productive dialogues with my colleagues, family members and friends.	-	-	6.7	53.3	40
8. … gain awareness of the differences between teaching and advising.	-	-		20	80
9. … gain new perspectives about how to promote learner autonomy.	-	-		26.7	73.3
10. … become familiar with the process of how to carry out a language learning advisory session.	-	-		13.3	86.7

Overall, based on these findings, we can say that the participants have found the LATP effective in general, both for their professional and personal lives.

Small-Group Reflections

The data from small group reflections were categorized under the headings as expectations from the training, the biggest challenge they have faced and the 'aha'

moment they experienced, the metaphor they use for advising, and the effects of the training program both on their professional and personal lives.

Expectations from the Course

The first common theme in the small group reflections is about the participants' expectations from the training program. The participants who volunteered for this training course are quite experienced, as the minimum teaching experience in the training group is ten years. However, what attracted them to this program was that they had the chance to observe some students in their classes display positive attitudes towards learning a foreign language and improved their academic success after seeing a language learning advisor for some time in the previous year. The language learning advisory unit had been launched in the institution in 2018, one year before the training started, and the teachers had the chance to observe the transformation the students went through in this process. One of the participants described the transformation of some students who used the language learning advisory service in her class as:

> "I remember referring some students to learning advisory unit when they approached me with their language learning issues. I could observe their transformation from learners who were unaware of their learning processes and needs to individuals who started to question their learning methods, reflect on their actions and who after all started to enjoy the learning process rather than seeing it as a painful one as these students had to repeat the same program as they had failed the proficiency exam and they were having a really tough time at first." (Participant 4)

While speculating on the reason for attending this course, another participant mentioned talking to some students in her class who attended advising sessions about what learning tips or resources the learning advisors had recommended. The students seemed to be more attentive and motivated in class than before. When the students admitted that they had not been provided with specific learning resources by the advisor, the teacher was surprised. As an EFL teacher with a degree in psychology, it reminded her of the theories of learning she had studied in her undergraduate years and her initial tendencies as a language teacher at the beginning of her teaching career. She used to

think that each student's needs and learning goals were unique and providing the students with standard recipes for learning may not work for everybody. That experience encouraged the teacher to participate in the training program.

Another reason why some teachers volunteered for the training program is related to the program's name, LATP. As the term "advising" might be a misnomer, many teachers expected to be provided with ready-made solutions for possible problems language learners may come across, and they were planning to share them with their learners. Below is the reflection of a trainee who had a similar expectation before attending LATP:

> "I had great expectations about advising before I started this training: I will be provided with the best ways to solve my students' learning problems, e.g. how to improve vocabulary, ready-made solutions. You would give us the prescriptions. However, I was mistaken and surprised at the very first session when I was supposed to imitate the gestures of my partner. I tried not to be weird, but I was indeed, and my partner couldn't guess my mission after all. I found out later on that we were trying to improve our effective listening skills." (Participant 15)

At the end of the introductory course, however, almost all of the participants believe that to improve learner autonomy, it is more effective to be supportive towards the learner by providing options among which the students can choose from rather than being prescriptive and telling them what to do. One of the participants worked with repeat students who failed the language preparatory program and had to attend the same program in the second year to reach the expected proficiency level to start their academic studies in their departments. This trainee worked with repeat students to identify the reasons for their failure in language learning and find out about their perceptions of themselves as language learners for her master's thesis. While reflecting on the training, she confessed that if she had taken this course before writing her thesis, she could have helped the students better as she told them what to do. She said she was the information provider as she provided ready-made solutions, which may not lead to learner autonomy.

Challenges and 'Aha' Moments

Another common theme the participants chose to reflect on was the main challenge they have faced, which was usually accompanied by enlightenment. One of the participants reflected on a session in the training in which we invited experienced learning advisors from another institution. In this gathering, they could observe the advising scenarios the trainees constructed to provide instant feedback and share their experiences regarding advising practice, as is seen in the following comment:

"My aha moment was when we had guests from YBU: I was carried away with the learning problems of the advisee. When I felt exhausted by giving solutions, I told myself I cannot do this as I cannot have all the answers to give solutions. Then, the observer told me that what I was doing was advise giving, not advising. I felt relieved as I am not supposed to come up with solutions. I am the guide who will support the learners reflect on their learning and find their own path." (Participant 1)

Another 'aha' moment was reported to take place in the very first session, in which the theoretical background of learner autonomy and advising practice were discussed. The trainee admitted realizing that teaching is not a one-sided process:

"All teaching that takes place in the classroom does not cause student learning. Students learn when they are ready in their own pace. We should come up with alternative lesson structures that allow for self-directed, inquiry-based learning. Advising in language learning enables us as teachers to focus on the needs of the learners more. The learner becomes the center of all the teaching activities." (Participant 13)

A couple of participants chose silence as the biggest challenge they faced as experienced language teachers used to being information providers. The 'aha' moment one of the participants shared was that he recognized he had never truly listened to a learner before but tried to guide the student in the direction he had in mind.

Use of Metaphors for Advising

Some of the participants came up with metaphors to explain their shift in perspective with the training. The reason for this tendency might be due to the fact that one of the advising strategies the participants practiced was to encourage the learner to use a metaphor in an advising session to bring clarity to the issue. One of the participants chose a *metal jacket* as a metaphor for her tendency to provide advice prior to training. However, after the training, she prefers to give scissors to learners so that they can make their own jackets themselves. According to another teacher, advising resembled *functional medicine* as opposed to conventional or standard ones as:

"…we approach the students individually in advising practice, individual differences are taken care of. They become life-long learners." (Participant 10)

Four participants chose *the transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly*. The common theme of butterfly might be due to the transformation we emphasized throughout the training, both for the advisor and the advisee. This metaphor relates to Kato and Mynard's (2016) transformational advising, in which an advisor supports a learner in going beyond improving language proficiency. The learner's existing beliefs are challenged in order to raise awareness of learning, translate the learner's awareness into action, and finally, make a fundamental change in the nature of learning.

The Effects of Advising on Teaching

Most of the participants believe that advising training will contribute to their teaching career. They claim that the practice of advising will help them develop more empathy with their students in the process they go through while learning a foreign language. It also helps them to develop an awareness about how to promote learner autonomy. One of the participants stated that she developed more empathy with her students in the process they go through while learning a foreign language and claimed that advising should be taught at the undergraduate level as a must course in the departments of foreign language education.

Some of the participants explicitly stated their willingness to carry out advising practice along with their teaching duties:

"Advising and teaching are hand-in-hand. For my future career, I would like to incorporate the two to improve my teaching. I would like to continue teaching and carry out advising sessions at the same time by planning my program accordingly." (Participant 4)

The Effects of Advising on Private Life

In addition to receiving advising training on their profession, participants perceived advising training as an opportunity to improve their personal lives. By developing interest and awareness towards how to be a more effective listener, they claimed to be engaged in more productive dialogues with their colleagues, family members and friends. One of the participants shared her reflective dialogue she carried out with her 10-year-old daughter after we studied certain strategies to be employed in an advising session in the training:

"In order to carry out one of the assignments in LATP, I chose my 10-year old son and asked him whether he experiences any problems at school. Normally he is not a kid that can open up easily, but he started to talk about the difficulty remembering signs in traffic. As the dialogue unfolded, he was able to find his own solution to the problem; to draw the signs he encounters in traffic, as he is good at drawing. By only showing a genuine intention to listen to my son and asking him the right questions by using the effective listening strategies we practiced in class, my son had a major discovery about his learning." (Participant 12)

Conclusion

This study sheds light on a teacher training program in which the focus is on activating learners' reflective processes in language learning through one-to-one intentionally structured dialogues so that learners can discover their unique ways to achieve their language-related goals.

In this study, the participants of the LATP experienced the positive effects of this program on both their professional and personal lives. One positive result of the study was that almost all the participants stated that the advising training enabled them to gain various skills that can contribute to their professional development as teachers. These

skills included effective listening skills to promote reflective thinking of students, developing deeper empathy with students in the process they go through while learning a foreign language and gaining new perspectives about how to promote learner autonomy. What is more, some of the participants want to work as learning advisors in their institution in the upcoming years. Another positive result of the study was that participants perceived LATP as an opportunity to improve their personal lives. By developing interest and awareness towards how to be a more effective listener, they mentioned being engaged in more productive dialogues with their colleagues, family members, and friends.

The reflective teaching movement helped to legitimize teachers' ways of knowing and ways of coming to know by highlighting the importance of reflection on and inquiry into teachers' experiences as mechanisms for change in classroom practices (Johnson, 2006). Teachers should be given the opportunities to acquire the theoretical knowledge of advising practice and gain the skills to better relate to learners. Alternatively, ALL can be a course students will study in the departments of foreign language education and become an important component of teacher training programs for the development of teachers' skills in the 21st century.

Notes on the Contributors

Hülya Şen, holding an M.A. in English Language Teaching on language learning strategies from METU, Turkey, and Learning Advising Certificates from KUIS, works as an EFL instructor at METU-SFL. Her interests include language learning strategies, learner autonomy, and advising in language learning.

Mümin Şen is an EFL instructor, a learning advisor, and the director of AYBU-SFL, Turkey. He holds a Ph.D. degree in special education. His research interests include language learning strategies, self-determination, problem-solving skills, learner autonomy, advising in language learning, and individualized education plans.

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