

# An Examination of Turkish College-Level Students' Learned Helplessness States in EFL Context

## Türkiye'de Yükseköğretimde Öğrencilerin Dil Öğrenirken Hissettikleri Öğrenilmiş Çaresizliğin İncelenmesi

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### ABSTRACT

Human learning is multi-dimensional and progressive in nature, and it lasts a lifetime, getting influenced through a variety of elements. One of those elements, that is students' own mental lives, nurture and complete this process since students' standpoints pertinent to learning can give a certain shape to their own learning and provide insight into their stance as language learners. Misconceptions or negative beliefs also have a role in shaping this process.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the sense of helplessness felt among the university students learning English as a foreign language and the probable reasons behind learned helplessness in EFL context. The data were gathered from a state university in Turkey and the participants of the study were chosen via "Purposive Sampling". A total of 35 students, which include freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors participated in the study. Data were collected through Learned Helplessness Scale, open-ended learned helplessness questionnaire and grid table. The quantitative data were analysed with the use of SPSS, on the other hand, the qualitative data were subjected to content analysis. Thus, the present study used mixed research design. The study findings pictured two groups of students with and without learned helplessness, and uncovered the students' self-concepts as language learners and beliefs on learned helplessness in learning English.

**Keywords:** Learned helplessness, Language learning, Adult education

### ÖZ

Öğrenme çok boyutludur, doğası gereği sürekli gelişir ve çeşitli faktörlerden etkilenecek yaşam boyu sürer. Bu faktörlerden biri olan öğrencilerin zihinsel yaşantıları öğrenme sürecini besler ve tamamlar, çünkü öğrencilerin öğrenmeye ilişkin bakış açıları kendi öğrenmelerini şekillendirir. Yanlış yorumlamalar veya olumsuz inançların da bu süreçte şekillendirici etkisi vardır.

O nedenle, çalışmanın amacı yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğreniminde üniversite öğrencilerinin yaşadıkları öğrenilmiş çaresizliği ve bunun arkasındaki nedenleri incelemektir. Veri Türkiye'deki bir devlet üniversitesinden toplanmıştır ve katılımcılar amaçsal örnekleme yöntemi ile seçilmiştir. Çalışmanın katılımcıları üniversitede birinci, ikinci, üçüncü ve dördüncü sınıfta okuyan öğrencilerden oluşmaktadır. Veriler Öğrenilmiş Çaresizlik Ölçeği, öğrenilmiş çaresizlik açık uçlu anketi ve konu ile ilgili hazırlanmış nitel bir tablo ile toplanmıştır. Nicel data SPSS programı ile analiz edilmiş olup, nitel veri içerik analizi ile incelenmiştir. Bu yönüyle çalışma, karma araştırma modelini kullanmıştır. Çalışma sonucunda öğrenilmiş çaresizliği olan ve olmayan olarak iki grup bulunmuştur ve öğrencilerin dil öğrenen olarak öz kavramları ile birlikte İngilizce öğreniminde çaresizliğe yönelik inançları sunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Öğrenilmiş çaresizlik, Dil öğrenimi, Yetişkin eğitimi

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## INTRODUCTION

Learned helplessness is an important concept in educational context. Since learning is not only a mental but also an affective process, the sense of confidence and control gains more significance in this process. Exposure to insoluble problems causes human beings to detect a breakdown between events and responses, thus damaging future learning and leading to being passive; in addition, they cannot solve the problem even though there is a solution (Mohanty, Pradhan & Jena, 2015). This is same in achievement situations. Students with learned helplessness lose their hope and confidence in success, and accept failure without striving, which can be tackled through empowering them. As Nakamura (2000) asserts, empowered students do not blame others for negative outcomes, and they try to change for better through communication and cooperation. However, empowerment does not occur on its own, it gets completed through student initiative and control due to the fact that “empowerment is the process in which individuals gain increasing measure of control over their behaviour. Empowered students are taught to rely on their internal locus of control” (Nakamura, 2000: 12). Hence, students fed well inside can take sounder steps in solving encountered in learning language. Therefore, the present study deals with the sense of learned helplessness which can hinder the students’ progress, and aims to raise awareness in this negative feeling within EFL context. Given the problems in language learning in Turkey, this study can provide insight into the potential impact of learned helplessness in learning process. Furthermore, since students’ own beliefs were also included, the study can make the role of student cognitions more explicit. As university students are expected to take sound and conscious steps in their career and to gain the habit of lifelong learning, the study puts the university students at the stage. Better learning skills and more positive self-concepts can also enhance students’ 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in today’s world. All these things considered, this study sets out to make positive contributions to success in language learning in Turkey by paying attention to learned helplessness among EFL university students.

### Literature Review

One of the obstacles students encounter during language learning is learned helplessness. Hall et al. (2008) view learned helplessness as a psychological state through which individuals come to believe that they are deprived of control over unfavourable situation, that their deeds are vain, and that they are helpless. In other words, “when individuals fail under conditions that they perceive to be impossible to reach a goal, they learn that their efforts are futile, which may develop into helplessness.” (Seligman, 1975; Gernigon, Thill & Fleurance, 1999: 403). Saxena and Shah (2008) also depict learned helplessness as a psychological condition where humans or animals lack control and believe the inefficaciousness of their efforts. The authors claim that such kind of belief leads to become passive in case of an exposure to harmful or negative situations, as well. Within school setting, learned

helplessness is a process with mastery orientation at one end and helplessness at the other; accordingly, learned helplessness individuals display less task persistence and less willingness to attain success when the task appears hard. On the other hand, mastery-oriented students incline to hold more persistence in the face of a difficult task and more opportunity to gain success (Reynolds & Miller, 1989). Learned helplessness stems from the mental interpretation of the situation and reflection of it to the behaviour; owing to learned helplessness, an individual not only exhibits a disposition to failure but also he/she may not be aware of his/her abilities from which he/she can benefit (Odabasi, 2013). “Lowered academic achievement involves maladaptive passivity, lowered persistence and deteriorated academic performance as hopelessness behaviours” (Au, Watkins & Hattite, 2010: 127). As Firmin et al. (2004) put forward, situations in which individuals cannot control failure result in learned helplessness, and it causes people to incline to give up easily and show failure at even easy tasks. Learned helplessness, set forth by Seligman, can result from different elements and have bonds with various components in learning process in a general sense. Qutaiba (2011: 2) summarizes Seligman’ model as follows:

- The exposure of an organism to a situation where there is no correlation between its reactions and their consequences causes that organism to try and alter the probability of the reinforcement’s appearance, using its responses.
- After experiencing repeated failures, the organism learns that the reinforcement is uncontrollable.
- The organism formulates lack-of-control expectations regarding the future.
- The organism generalizes its lack-of-control expectations onto a new situation.
- The generalization produces motivational, affective and cognitive disturbances.

It is apparent that individuals with learned helplessness tend to generalize what they experience to similar and broader contexts. Lieder, Goodman and Huys (2013) support the concept of generalization by specifying that, subjects firstly feel a shortage of control in one situation, and then manifest learning inadequacies when they perform or learn another task in another situation in learned helplessness experiments; hence, generalization lies at the core of the learned helplessness notion. Furthermore, Maier and Seligman (1976) identify cognitive, motivational and emotional deficits within the frame of learned helplessness, and they indicate the steps: The motivation to respond in the case of later deterrent events appears to fade. Furthermore, the subject has a hard time seeing that the response worked even though it produces relief. Finally, emotional balance may be distorted; depression and anxiety may arise.

Learned helplessness appears to have consequences in not just one field, which can also hint at its multidimensional nature. Gernigon, Thill and Fleurance (1999) categorize cognitive consequences as the credence that results cannot

be controlled, motivational ones as decrease in effort and giving up, emotional ones as sense of sorrow, apprehension and hostility. Likewise, learned helplessness theory ascertains that uncontrollable events lead individuals to experience lack of will to control them (motivational deficit), lack of belief that the events can be controlled and if the events are deterrent, individuals feel fear and depression (Winefield, 1979). In addition, Hsu (2011) remarks these deficits within a student perspective in a similar manner and says that students with learned helplessness do not feel confident in controlling their learning process after failure and give up, which explains the motivational deficit, and learned helplessness stemmed from cognitive deficit shows that students cannot apply logical thinking and cognitive flexibilities to the process, which will pave the way for depression; this depression can also result from emotional deficit, which views learning as futile despite efforts.

Even though learned helplessness theory sheds light on the state of giving up effort and belief in ability to learn or control an event as a consequence of experiencing failures, Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale (1978: 49) detected two problems regarding the old learned helplessness hypothesis: "It does not distinguish between cases in which outcomes are uncontrollable for all people and cases in which they are uncontrollable only – for some people (universal vs. personal helplessness), and it does not explain when helplessness is general and when specific, or when chronic and when acute". Therefore, they offered a reformulated learned helplessness based on attributions. Their reformulation suggested that perception of a non-contingency makes people ascribe their helplessness to a cause, which can stable or unstable, global or specific, and internal or external. The authors also claim that these attributions affect the chronicity or broadness of expectation of future learned helplessness. Individuals with a global attributional style ascribe their helplessness to more general reasons; hence, they hold more generalized performance deficits, and their performance is probably affected in both similar and dissimilar situations (Alloy et al., 1984). Tayfur (2012) refer to Abramson et al. (1978) to reveal the four steps in clarifying the development of helplessness: Initially, people they see no connection between behaviour and outcomes. Then (second step), they perceive that behaviours and results are linked to one another neither today nor in the past. In the third step, people explain why behaviours do not yield desired outcomes. Finally, they develop expectations concerning future behaviour-outcome possibility and believe that behaviours would not be connected outcomes in the future, too. In addition to Abramson et al (1978), Nolen Hoeksema, Girgus and Seligman (1986) put forward four important deficiency of original learned helplessness theory: First, it could not explain when helplessness deficits would be stable or unstable in time. Secondly, it could not explain when helplessness deficits would be general to multiple domains or specific to one domain. Thirdly, it could not explain why people would feel lack of self-esteem when they perceived they were helpless. Finally, the original helplessness theory could not explain the individual differences in humans' sensitivity to

helplessness. As Saxena and Shah (2008) remark, reformulated model of learned helplessness by Abramson et al. (1978) offers a base in which classification of attributions can provide insight into the condition of learned helplessness and draws attention to the role of these attributions in case of learned helplessness. What is more, perceived lack of control is of necessity; however, not adequate for the emergence of learned helplessness on account of the fact that people with lack of control do not always feel helpless or manifest passive actions. Attribution or explanatory style constitutes the major element in the rise of learned helplessness. The attributions imply the way people ascribe the cause to bad or good events (Abramson et al., 1978 in Tayfur, 2012). "Formulation of learned helplessness indicates that helplessness is not inherent but learned through the hypothesised chain of events: objective non-contingency, perception of present and past non-contingency, attribution for present and past non-contingency, expectation of future non-contingency, symptoms of helplessness" (Valas, 2001, p.71). As in Valas' statement, attributions occupy a significant place in learned helplessness since how individuals perceive the reasons of the events influences their sense of helplessness or hopefulness.

Learned helplessness is one of the critical factors students bring to the context of learning, and it constitutes an essential hindrance for successful and meaningful language learning. On account of the fact that students feed their thinking with false and pessimistic views in case of learned helplessness, they construct wrong personal theories regarding their own learner identities and language learning itself. Furthermore, they hold the belief that they cannot manage and control their own learning. It constitutes a prevailing problem in language learning, as well, especially in classrooms where English is provided as a compulsory course. Students restrain themselves and hesitate taking further steps in language learning. Likewise, those students quit exerting an effort to learn due to fear of failure, which turns out to be a critical problem in learners' language experiences. Therefore, the present study deals with the issue of learned helplessness in EFL context and addresses the following questions:

1. Do EFL learners have learned helplessness as regards language learning?
2. What are the probable factors that bring out such kind of mind-set?
3. Does the year of university education influence the presence of learned helplessness in EFL students?

## METHOD

The study holds both quantitative and qualitative features. Therefore, mixed research design was used in the study. Participants were comprised of 35 university students, which included freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. They took compulsory service English class at university in their first years. The classes ranged between two or three hours a week. There were no compulsory prep classes during their university education. University education can influence students' life

and, it constitutes an important path to their career; therefore, students from different years in university were selected to detect the probable influence of university education in terms of helplessness in language learning. However, the study did not take the gender and the age of the participants into consideration. The study used different types of data collection instruments including scale, questionnaire and grid table to strengthen triangulation.

### Learned Helplessness Scale

In the study, in order to find out whether students have the sense of learned helplessness in learning language, Learned Helplessness Scale (Quinless & Mcdermott Nelson, 1988; Smallheer, 2011) was administered to the students as a quantitative measure of learned helplessness among the participants. The scale consisted of 20 items, and each statement was organized negatively. It was a Likert scale, with four choices as strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). As Smallheer (2011) remarks, the scale is highly determinative of learned helplessness, and higher scores in the scale are indicative of the increased perception of learned helplessness.

Learned helplessness scale was subjected to several statistical analyses. To portray the students' perceptions of learned helplessness, their responses to the scale items were analysed through giving frequencies and percentages descriptively. In addition, students with and without learned helplessness were identified. Moreover, Kruskal-Wallis analysis was done to detect if there was a statistically significant difference among the students at their 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years at university in terms of learned helplessness.

### Learned Helplessness Questionnaire

In order to provide insight into their tendency of learned helplessness, each participant was given an open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of five open-ended questions, each striving to find out hints, if any, about learned helplessness in the participants. The first question dealt with the participants' beliefs about the difficulty or easiness of the English language, asking for its reasons. This question could also act as a reflection of their attitudes or stance towards language. The second question required responses regarding the possibility of learning English with limited class hours. This way, students' self-cognitions were evaluated on the process of learning itself, as well. The third one questioned the participants' choice of easy or difficult subject for the English class. Thus, it could represent their motives, attempts, inhibitions or avoidances. Like the other questions, it also sought for the reasons. Moreover, the fourth question probed the students' feelings or reactions to continuous failure in learning English. Their responses to constant failure had a big role in displaying their struggle or giving-up behaviours, thus learned helplessness propensity. In addition to four questions, as a last one, the fifth question was added to the questionnaire which inquired the moments when the students believed they did not succeed in English and how they felt at those times. In a way, this question investigated their belief in their ability or

inability to learn English as well. All these questions aimed at finding out the presence of learned helplessness, if any, among the participants

The data were subjected to content analysis, and the questionnaire was distributed to the all participants in the study.

### Grid Table

In addition to Learned Helplessness Questionnaire, students were asked to define themselves as language learners in one column of the table. In other words, how students view themselves as a language learner was asked; hence, their self-concepts were investigated. The data were explored through content analysis, and the analysis was performed for all participants without lowering the number of students in qualitative analyses.

## FINDINGS

The study yielded both quantitative and qualitative results, and the findings were presented based on the analysis results of the data collection instruments.

### Findings from the Learned Helplessness Scale

Learned Helplessness Scale (Quinless & Mcdermott Nelson, 1988; Smallheer, 2011) consists of 20 items. All the items are negatively stated; hence, higher scores signal higher perceptions of learned helplessness. Items were not categorized within themselves; however, they reflect students' attributions and sense of control in more general terms. Table 1 below examines the students' responses to the scale in a more detailed manner, and provides the frequencies and percentages concerning students' perceptions of learned helplessness.

Table 1 reveals students' responses to the concept of learned helplessness. One fourth of the students do not have the sense of control over the outcome despite their effort. However, 74.3% of the students do not feel absence of control over the results when they put energy into a task. In parallel with the 13<sup>th</sup> item, a quarter of the students feel that they have little control over the outcomes of their works. Same as the first item, 74.3% of the students do not favour the little control over the results. These findings indicate that students do not suffer from lack of control in their works. Concerning the issue of control, 9<sup>th</sup> item reveals that 20% of the students hold the belief that other people have more control over their success and/or failure that they do. However, 80% of the students think the opposite way, and they are not of the opinion that they have less control on their own success and/or failure than other people. When it comes to problem solving, more than half of the students (54.2%) feel that their own inability to solve problems is the cause of their failures. They attribute their failures to their inability to cope with the problems. Therefore, problem solving skills stand out in the concept of learned helplessness. In contrast, 16 students do not regard their own inability in problem solving as the reason of their failures. However, 32 out of 35 students do not believe that

they cannot find solutions to difficult problems. Only three students feel unable to cope with difficult problems. Therefore, a number of the participants seem to have self-confidence in solving difficult problems. Similarly, almost 86% of the students are positive about their ability to solve most of life's problems as shown in the 6<sup>th</sup> item. They do not hold the idea that they are unable to solve those problems. In addition, almost all of the students (n=33) do not attribute their success to luck. Only two students think that if they complete a task successfully, it is probably because they became lucky. It also provides consistent result with the 19<sup>th</sup> item. Roughly all of the students (97.1%)

are not of the opinion that their success reflects their chance, not their ability. Only one student feels his/her achievement is the reflection of chance; he/she does not attribute success to the ability. Thus, students in general avoid attributing their success to an external factor such as luck. Likewise, more than half of the students (54.3%) attribute their failure to their lack of ability to perform better. Only four students manifested strong disagreement with the attribution of poor performance to lack of ability. Besides, about half of the students (48.6%) feature lack of ability to start with when something does not turn out the way they planned. Concerning the attributions,

**Table 1:** Students' Perceptions Concerning Learned Helplessness

	ITEMS	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	No matter how much energy I put into a task, I feel I have no control over the outcome	4	11.4	5	14.3	15	42.9	11	31.4
2	I feel that my own inability to solve problems is the cause of my failures	6	17.1	13	37.1	15	42.9	1	2.9
3	I cannot find solutions to difficult problems	0.0	0.0	3	8.6	23	65.7	9	25.7
4	I don't place myself in situations in which I cannot	1	2.9	11	31.4	13	37.1	10	28.6
5	If I complete a task successfully, it is probably because I became lucky	1	2.9	1	2.9	16	45.7	17	48.6
6	I do not have the ability to solve most of life's problems	0.0	0.0	5	14.3	20	57.2	10	28.6
7	When I do not succeed at a task I do not attempt any similar tasks because I feel that I will fail them also	2	5.7	6	17.1	15	42.9	12	34.3
8	When something doesn't turn out the way I planned. I know it is because I didn't have the ability to start with	5	14.3	12	34.3	13	37.1	5	14.3
9	Other people have more control over their success and/or failure than I do	2	5.7	5	14.3	20	57.1	8	22.9
10	I do not try a new task if I have failed similar tasks in the past	1	2.9	7	20.0	16	45.7	11	31.4
11	When I perform poorly it is because I don't have the ability to perform better	7	20.0	12	34.3	12	34.3	4	11.4
12	I do not accept a task that I do not think I will succeed in	6	17.1	15	42.9	9	25.7	5	14.3
13	I feel that I have little control over the outcomes of my work	4	11.4	5	14.3	19	54.3	7	20.0
14	I am unsuccessful at most tasks I try	0.0	0.0	1	2.9	22	62.9	12	34.3
15	I feel that anyone else could do better than me in most tasks	3	8.6	11	31.4	12	34.3	9	25.7
16	I am unable to reach my goals in life	1	2.9	1	2.9	15	42.9	18	51.4
17	When I don't succeed at a task, I find myself blaming my own stupidity for my failure	4	11.4	15	42.9	11	31.4	5	14.3
18	No matter how hard I try, things never seem to work out the way I want them to	1	2.9	8	22.9	14	40.0	12	34.3
19	I feel that my success reflects chance, not my ability	1	2.9	0	0.0	20	57.1	14	40.0
20	My behavior does not seem to influence the success of a work group	0.0	0.0	4	11.4	17	48.6	14	40.0

more than half of the students (54.3%) blame their own stupidity for their failure when they do not succeed at a task. In contrast, 16 students do not take a self-blaming approach when they fail at a task. As to the concept of persistence, one fourth of the students do not attempt any similar tasks when they do not get successful in a task because they feel that they will fail those tasks, as well. It appears that they generalize the failure to the further tasks, which leads them to stop trying. Likewise, a number of students (77.1%) are against not trying a new task if they failed similar tasks in the past. However, again a quarter of the participants are influenced by the negative past experiences. Nevertheless, the students would prefer to be sure of the success, which implies their control to some extent owing to the fact that more than half of the students claim not to accept a task that they do not think they will succeed in. Similarly, almost 35% of the students avoid the situations in which they will fail. When it comes to self-belief about personal traits, about all of the students do not deem themselves as unsuccessful at most task they try. Only one student has negative self-concept about his/her success ability. Accordingly, only two participants consider themselves as unable to reach their goals in life. Therefore, it can be said that most of the participants possess positive self-beliefs about fulfilling their objectives. Yet, the number increases when they compare themselves with others. 40% of the students are of the opinion that anyone else could do better than them in most tasks. In addition, about one fourth of the students hold the belief that things never seem to work out the way they want no matter how hard they try. Therefore, those students seem to underestimate their effort or not to take most of out their endeavours, which may lead them to stop trying in time. In addition to all these, with regard to group work, only four students think that their behaviour does not seem to influence the success of a group work. Students' responses showed consistency in a general sense. The number of the students with and without learned helplessness was identified through statistical calculation and further analyses were conducted accordingly.

Different groups as 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students constituted the participants of the study. Kruskal Wallis analysis, which is a non-parametric test, was performed to identify whether these groups differ in terms of their learned helplessness scores in a statistically significant manner. Higher scores in the scale reflect higher learned helplessness among the students. Therefore, Table 2 below displays the findings of Kruskal-Wallis analysis for learned helplessness.

**Table 2:** Learned Helplessness Scores in Different Groups

Groups	N	Mean Rank	$\chi^2$	df	P
1 <sup>st</sup> year	10	19.90	1.520	3	.678
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	11	17.18			
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	6	20.50			
4 <sup>th</sup> year	8	14.88			

Kruskal Wallis analysis results in terms of learned helplessness scores among 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students are presented in Table 2. According to the findings, different groups have differences in terms of their inclination to learned helplessness; however, this difference was not found statistically significant ( $p>.05$ ). Concerning the mean ranks, 3<sup>rd</sup> year students can be thought to have more tendencies for learned helplessness. In terms of high scores, 1<sup>st</sup> year students come after the 3<sup>rd</sup> year students. However, 4<sup>th</sup> year students have the least scores in learned helplessness. Consequently, comparing the mean scores of all the groups it can be noted that 3<sup>rd</sup> year students seem to incline to learned helplessness most whereas 4<sup>th</sup> year students appear to have the least disposition towards the learned helplessness.

### Findings from the Learned Helplessness Questionnaire

Learned Helplessness Questionnaire includes five open-ended questions, aiming to explore students' disposition towards learned helplessness. Responses to each question were presented in tables below. The first question concerns students' beliefs of English as easy or difficult language. Different views emerged as a result of analysis as displayed in Table 3 below.

Table 3 mirrors how students consider the English language in terms of easiness and difficulty. Students who view English as an easy language voice necessary personal traits. Effort (16 citations) bears the priority, which implies that learning requires effort.

Excerpt 1: *"Learning English is easy because it can be easily learnt through a good study and continuous review."*

Other features involve interest (four citations), persistence (four citations), patience (three citations), positive attitude (two citations), perseverance (two citations), awareness (one citation), aptitude (one citation) and self-confidence (one citation). Students who deem English as easy remark some non-personal requirements, as well. To illustrate, a repertoire of vocabulary (three citations), syntactical knowledge (three citations), time devotion (two citations) and practice (two citations) seem to make that learning process easier. Apart from these, decent education, availability of resources, repetition work, increase in familiarity with the language and good educational background, each cited once, are regarded as facilitating factors. In addition, love for English (six citations) and will to learn (four citations) appear to lead to students' thinking of English as an easy language.

**Table 3:** Students' Perceptions of English as Easy or Difficult Language

n	TITLES	THEMES	F
1	Easy	<b>Necessary Personal Traits</b>	
		• Effort	16
		• Interest	4
		• Persistence	4
		• Patience	3
		• Positive attitude	2
		• Perseverance	2
		• Awareness	1
		• Aptitude	1
		• Self-confidence	1
		<b>Non-Personal Factors</b>	
		• A repertoire of vocabulary	3
		• Syntactical knowledge	3
		• Time devotion	2
		• Practice	2
		• A decent education	1
		• Availability of resources	1
		• Repetition work	1
		• Increase in familiarity with the language	1
		• Good educational background	1
		<b>Intrinsic Motivation</b>	
		• Love	6
		• Will to learn	4
		• Happiness of learning something new	1
		• Interest in different cultures	1
		• Will to communicate with foreigners	1
		• No view of TL learning as an obligation	1
• Importance to TL learning	1		
<b>Extrinsic Motivation</b>			
• View of English as a requirement	3		
• View of English as a component of everyday life	2		
• View of English as global language	1		
<b>Nature of English</b>			
• Simple language	1		
• Easy grammar	1		
2	Difficult	<b>Individual Factors</b>	
		• Reluctance	1
		• Inadequate target language background	1
		• Lack of vocabulary	1
		• Lack of effort	1
		<b>Non-Individual Factors</b>	
		• Unnatural environment for learning	2
		• Something new	1
		• Faults in education system	1
		• Unconscious education programs	1
		<b>Requirements</b>	
		• Practice	2
		• Intense process	1
		• Long process	1
		• Memorization	1
		• Repetition	1
		• Persistence	1
• Background	1		
• Interest	1		
<b>Nature of English</b>			
• Different from Turkish	3		
• Words and phrases with multiple meanings	1		
<b>Total</b>			<b>94</b>

Excerpt 2: *“It is easy since we exert an effort and show interest when we love doing anything; thus, it seems easy to us. English seems easy to me maybe because I love it.”*

Intrinsic perspective include happiness of learning something new, interest in learning different cultures, will to communicate with a foreigner, no view of target language learning as an obligation and giving importance to target language, as well. Looking from an extrinsic angle, view of English as a need (three citations), view of English as a component of daily life (two citations) and view of English as global language seem to give shape to students' mind-set referring English as an easy language. By its nature, the fact that English has simple grammar (one citation) was also expressed. When it comes to the view of English as a difficult language, individual factors such as reluctance, inadequate target language background, shortage of vocabulary and lack of effort present themselves in the first place. As to non-individual factors, it is apparent to detect the unnatural environment for learning (two citations), unfamiliarity (one citation), faults in education system (one citation) and unconscious educational programs (one citation) as reasons for view of English as a difficult language. English learning also requires practice (two citations), intense (one citation) and long (one citation) process, memorization (one citation), repetition (one citation), persistence (one citation), background (one citation) and interest (one citation). Concerning the nature of language, three citations refer to its difference from Turkish, and one citation hints at the words and phrases with multiple meanings.

Excerpt 3: *“Learning English is difficult since learning another language except for the language a person uses- whatever language it is- is not easy at all. For me, any language I will learn except for Turkish is hard. English is hard for me, as well. However, I would like to learn English much despite its difficulty.”*

To sum up, students hold beliefs on both sides; however, the frequency of citations related to its being an easy language seems to be higher than that of citations favouring English as a difficult language. In addition to the concepts of easiness and difficulty, students' responses were elicited regarding the sufficiency of two or three-hour English class a week as given in the following table.

Table 4 displays the students' perceptions of the adequacy of two or three-hour English class a week. Students' responses differed in term of sufficiency of the related time of class. However, students who view it as sufficient also identify some supporting factors, which are thought to add contribution. For instance, movies (two citations), visuals (one citation) and stories (one citation) constitute the material-related supporting factors. That is, two or three-hour English class is considered to be sufficient if it is supported by these materials. In a similar manner, practice (four citations), independent study (three citations) and regular study (three citations) contribute to its adequacy, as well.

Excerpt 4: *“English can be learnt through a 2 or 3-hour regular study. However, it is not sufficient to attain the sufficient level. It is of necessity for a student to devote time after class.”*

Within the same category, study for a long time, effort and persistent study, each cited once, form the study-related supporting factors. Other contributing factors include limit in the subjects to be learned, importance of purpose of learning, good educational background, effective teaching, study at Language Department and interest in personal development. When it comes to views referring to the inadequacy of two or three-hour English class, students voiced educational obstacles such as other school subjects (two citations), exposure to the same things each year (two citations), lack of resources (one citation), learning English in an unnatural environment (one citation), wrong education system (one citation) and stereotyped teaching (one citation). Moreover, students mentioned the requirements of learning English as the reasons for inadequacy of two or three-hour English class a week. These requirements reflect the need of making practice (six citations) in the first place. For some, learning English also necessitates independent (three citations), intensive (three citations) and regular (two citations) study. Effort (two citations), repetition (two citations) and memorization (one citation) is deemed as the factors that require more time for learning English. One citation refers to lifelong learning, which reflects the belief in the need to continue learning in whole life.

Excerpt 5: *“I do not think that learning English occurs within a certain period of time. We can learn English more easily by using it in our lives continuously. Certain structures can be gained through 2 or 3-hour study; however, how sufficient and effective it would be is controversial.”*

Similarly, the notion of experiential learning is expressed by one student as the reason for the need in more time of studying. Another one citation frames the self-improvement, which can be thought to require more time. Other than these, reading book (one citation), knowledge of vocabulary (one citation) and dictionary work (one citation) seem to be requirement of learning English. Besides, English learning seems to require more time to be settled in the brain (citation) and, two or three-hour class English is viewed inadequate if there is not good educational background (one citation). Furthermore, some aspects of language are considered to be inhibitive factors such as multi-dimensional nature of English (two citations), easy-to-forget subjects (one citation) and difference from Turkish (one citation). Even though differing views were put forward, the students who regard two or three-hour English class as insufficient outnumber the ones who disagree with them. In addition to their views on the adequacy of the time mentioned above, students' choice of easy or difficult tasks were also investigated as offered in the following table.

Students' preferences for easy or difficult tasks are given in Table 5 above. For those who prefer easy tasks, sense of success (one citation) and lack of interest (one citation) seem to cause them to choose easy ones. These constitute the internal factors. Considering the external factors, low level of English, desire for good grades, avoidance of negative teacher attitude, time-saving nature of easy tasks, difficulty of making presentations, each cited once, appear to lead to choice of easy task. In contrast, students who prefer difficult task list



**Table 4:** Students' Perceptions of the Sufficiency of Weekly Class Hours

n	TITLES	THEMES	F
1	Sufficient	<b>Material-Related Supporting Factors</b>	
		• Movies	2
		• Visual aids	1
		• Stories	1
		<b>Study-Related Supporting Factors</b>	
		• Practice	4
		• Independent study	3
		• Regular study	3
		• Study for a long time	1
		• Effort	1
		• Persistent study	1
		<b>Other Supporting Factors</b>	
		• Limit in the subjects to be learned	1
		• Purpose of learning	1
• Good educational background	1		
• Effective teaching	1		
• Study at Language Department	1		
• Interest in personal development	1		
2	Insufficient	<b>Educational Obstacles</b>	
		• Other school subjects	2
		• Exposure to the same things each year	2
		• Lack of resource	1
		• Unnatural environment for learning	1
		• Wrong education system	1
		• Stereotyped teaching	1
		<b>Requirements</b>	
		Personal Strategies	
		• Practice	6
		• Intensive study	3
		• Independent study	3
		• Repetition	3
		• Effort	2
		• Regular study	2
		• Lifelong learning	1
		• Experiential learning	1
		• Self-improvement	1
		• Reading book	1
		• Knowledge of vocabulary	1
		• Dictionary work	1
		• Memorization	1
		Other	
• Absorption of what is seen	1		
• Good educational background	1		
<b>Aspects of Language as Inhibiting Factors</b>			
• Multidimensional nature	2		
• Easily forgettable subjects	1		
• Difference from Turkish	1		
• A new language	1		
<b>Total</b>			<b>64</b>

**Table 5:** Students' Choice of Easy or Difficult Tasks

n	TITLES	THEMES	F
1	Easy Subject	<p><b>Internal Factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sense of success</li> <li>Lack of interest</li> </ul> <p><b>External Factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low level of English</li> <li>Desire for good grades</li> <li>Avoidance for negative teacher attitude</li> <li>Time-saving</li> <li>Difficulty of making presentation</li> </ul>	<p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p>
2	Difficult Subject	<p><b>Intrinsic Motivation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enjoyableness</li> <li>Sense of pleasure</li> <li>Happiness</li> <li>Love for English</li> <li>Interest</li> <li>Will to learn</li> </ul> <p><b>Positive Outcomes</b></p> <p>Behavioural</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effort</li> <li>Search</li> </ul> <p>Mental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gaining knowledge</li> <li>Working the brain</li> <li>Retention</li> <li>Becoming inquisitive</li> <li>Raising awareness</li> </ul> <p>Language-Related (Improving):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vocabulary</li> <li>Understanding</li> <li>Level of English</li> <li>Speaking</li> <li>Permanency in learning</li> </ul> <p>Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More attentive listeners</li> <li>Becoming better than others</li> </ul> <p>Affective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-confidence</li> <li>Increase interest</li> <li>Motivation</li> </ul> <p><b>Tendency for Difficulty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being different</li> <li>Loving the "difficult"</li> <li>Giving importance to attaining the "difficult"</li> <li>Learning "easy" ones in a short time</li> <li>Showing reluctance to study familiar (easy) subject</li> </ul> <p><b>Conditions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive teacher attitude</li> <li>Knowledge and interest in the subject</li> </ul>	<p>4</p> <p>2</p> <p>2</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>5</p> <p>4</p> <p>9</p> <p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>3</p> <p>3</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p>
3	Neither Easy nor Difficult Subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is important is to complete the task by making the necessary effort</li> </ul>	1
<b>Total</b>			<b>70</b>

the intrinsic elements such as enjoyableness (four citations), sense of pleasure (two citations), happiness (two citations) and love for English (two citations) as the factors contributing to their choice. Besides, interest (one citation) and will to learn (one citation) are among the intrinsic components causing the tendency for difficult tasks. Students also voiced positive outcomes of choosing a difficult task, which seem to give shape to their choice. To illustrate, effort (five citations) and search (four citations) arise out of choosing a hard task. Gaining knowledge (nine citations) forms another positive outcome of dealing with a difficult task.

Excerpt 6: *"I prefer the hard task since I love the difficult. More effort is put into the difficult one and more knowledge is gained in this process. More searches are performed, more information is gathered and more favourable effort is made. This makes both my teacher and me happy. Therefore, I always prefer the difficult".*

Moreover, working the brain (three citations), retention (two citations), becoming inquisitive (one citation) and raising the awareness (one citation) constitute the positive mental results of preferring a difficult task. From a linguistic perspective, some students believe engagement with a difficult task improves vocabulary (three citations), comprehension (three citations), level of English (one citation), speaking (one citation) and permanency in learning (one citation). Besides, a difficult task is thought to bring about more attentive audience (one citation) and getting better than the others (one citation). Self-confidence, interest and motivation are considered to be enhanced by inclination to a difficult task. In addition, choice of difficult task is considered to cause being different (four citations). Giving importance to attaining difficulty, loving the "difficult", learning easy ones in a short time and showing reluctance to familiar subject, each cited once, appear to result in tendency for a hard task. Other than these, choice of difficult task seems to be based on some conditions such as positive teacher attitude (one citation) and knowledge and interest in the related subject (one citation). Only one student stated that h/she prefers neither easy nor difficult task since, according to him/her, what is important is to complete the task by putting the necessary effort. However, from a general perspective, more students seem to prefer difficult tasks. Apart from the choice of easy or difficult tasks, the questionnaire elicited students' reactions against continuous failure in learning English as depicted in Table 6 below.

Table 6 describes how students act in case of perpetual failure during English learning process. They claim to pose both negative and positive reactions; however, perpetual failure seems to produce more negative outcomes. For instance, constant failure in learning English causes students to feel bad (19 citations) and even terrible (two citations). They also experience loss of motivation (four citations). Besides, continuous failure appears to lead students to give up (two citations), and thus most probably to feel unable to learn (two citations) and to lose hope (one citation).

Excerpt 7: *"I give up learning English since seeing my efforts go for nothing makes me really upset."*

Perpetual failure results in losing interest in English (one citation), in running away from English (one citation) and in getting afraid of it (one citation), as well. Constant failure seems to pave the way for the sense of pain (one citation) and depression (one citation). Moreover, perpetual failure appears to lead to the construction of negative self-concepts such as feeling insufficient (two citations), stupid (one citation), problematic (one citation), worse than others (one citation), having the feeling to have a problem with verbal intelligence (one citation) and self-blame (one citation). All these constitute the negative affective reactions. Considering the negative behavioural reactions, putting inadequate effort (one citation) and having difficulty present themselves. In addition to negative reactions, perpetual failure seems to contribute to positive reactions. To illustrate, four citations refer to not giving up, and two citations imply the sense of encouragements. Therefore, it can be viewed as a triggering factor. In parallel with these, finding the ways to cope with the problem (11 citations) and continuing learning (two citations) are expressed by the students.

Excerpt 8: *"I do not give up even in the face of perpetual failure. I search for the reasons of failure and question myself more clearly. I do not use such sentences as I gave up learning due to my failure or there is nothing to do". Of course, I feel sad owing to failure; however, I do not give up the opinion that learning English is enjoyable."*

Putting more effort (one citation) is also in line with not giving up and trying to tackle with it. Furthermore, motivating oneself, thinking positively, feeling good, having pleasure and ignoring the failure, each cited once, constitute the other positive outcomes. All in all, negative citations have more frequency for the reactions against perpetual failure. Even though there are positive responses, there seems to be tendency for learned helplessness for some students. Accordingly, together with their probable reactions, the moments when students feel unable to learn English were obtained and presented in the following table.

Table 7 sheds light on whether students feel unable to learn English and, if so, when they experience such a sense. The table reflects that there are more citations for the answer of "yes", that is to say, the frequency of citations is higher in feeling unable to learn English. Students posed different reasons for feeling not to be able to learn it. In the first place, there are language-related factors. For instance, lack of vocabulary (two citations), words not read as they are written (one citation), the subjects' getting harder (one citation), inadequate knowledge of English (one citation) and exposure to two foreign languages simultaneously (one citation) seem to lead to the sense of inability to succeed in English. Social effects such as friends' being better (three citations), others' speaking better (two citations), people's not understanding what the students says (one citation) and others' getting prepared for difficult exams (one citation) appear to cause the belief in inability to learn English. Furthermore, perceived self-inadequacies are viewed to lay the ground for the sense of inability to learn. For example, incapability in speaking (four citations) and especially to a

foreigner (two citations) causes to develop negative beliefs. Hsu (2011) also states that inability to use English to speak to a foreigner causes distress for students. Likewise, difficulty in understanding (three citations) raises the sense of incapability to learn English.

Excerpt 9: *"I sometimes feel unable to learn English. For instance, when teacher says a sentence and I cannot understand it, I feel that way"*.

Besides, experiencing failure (two citations) conduces feeling of inability to attain learning English. Forgetfulness (two citations), assignments (two citations), individual study without any support (one citation), incapability in adapting to the lesson (one citation), incapability in solving the questions (one citation), incapability in translating (one citation) and miss of an easy question (one citation) appear to cause construction of negative beliefs in inability to learn English. In contrast, there

seem to be students who claim not to feel unable to learn English. On the one hand, intrinsic elements including love (two citations), interest (one citation), positive thinking (one citation), self-motivation (one citation) and sense of need to be more careful (one citation) are regarded as hindering the sense of inability to learn. On the other hand, extrinsic elements such as effort (five citations) and sense of success (two citations) are viewed to relieve the moments of feeling unable to learn English.

Excerpt 10: *"I have never felt this way since English has always been a lesson that I love and succeed in. I believe that I can learn English as long as I make effort."*

Appropriate study (one citation), teacher support (one citation) and improvement through learning (one citation) are considered to inhibit the belief in inability to learn English, as well. However, the frequency of citation is higher for the

**Table 6:** Students' Reactions against Perpetual Failure in Learning English

n	TITLES	THEMES	F		
1	<b>Negative Reactions</b>	<b>Affective</b>			
		• Feeling upset/bad	19		
		• Losing motivation	4		
		• Giving up	2		
		• Feeling not to be able to learn	2		
		• Feeling terrible	2		
		• Feeling insufficient	2		
		• Feeling stupid	1		
		• Feeling pain	1		
		• Losing interest in English	1		
		• Running away from English	1		
		• Feeling depression	1		
		• Feeling to have problem with verbal intelligence	1		
		• Feeling problematic	1		
		• Feeling worse than others	1		
		• Getting afraid of English	1		
		• Feeling hopeless	1		
• Blaming oneself	1				
2	<b>Positive Reactions</b>	<b>Behavioural</b>			
		• Putting inadequate effort	1		
		• Having difficulty	1		
		<b>Affective</b>			
		• Not giving up	4		
		• Feeling encouraged	2		
		• Motivating oneself	1		
		• Thinking positively	1		
		• Feeling good	1		
		• Having pleasure	1		
		<b>Behavioural</b>			
		• Finding solutions to cope with it	11		
		• Continuing learning	2		
		• Putting more effort to learn	1		
		• Ignoring failure	1		
		<b>Total</b>			<b>70</b>

moments of feeling unable to learn than the reasons for not feeling the sense of inability in learning. To sum up, despite positive remarks, negative remarks hint at the inclination towards learned helplessness.

### Findings of Grid Table

Table 8 demonstrates how students perceive themselves as language learners. Their views on the self were analysed in three parts. The first part is composed of their positive self-concepts. While 11 citations refer to intrinsic motivation, only two citations express extrinsic motivation. Therefore, it is safe to say that internal reasons for learning English dominate external factors on part of more students.

Excerpt 11: *"I view myself as successful in English because I love English. I deal with something I love and make effort, which brings success."*

In line with this finding, they deem themselves as willing (nine citations) to learn English, which is also in parallel with the sense of motivation. Another positive self-concept appears as self-confidence (10 citations), which mirrors low possibility of learned helplessness. Moreover, eight citations show that those students see themselves as good in English; they hold the sense of sufficiency (three citations), as well. Diligence (seven citations) constitutes the other positive self-perception, which indicates that they believe they put an effort in learning English. In spite of low frequency of citation, interest (three citations) in learning English presents itself among the positive self-beliefs.

**Table 7:** Moments When Students Feel Unable to Learn English

n	TITLES	THEMES	F
1	Yes	<p><b>Language-Related Factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of vocabulary</li> <li>Words not read as they are written</li> <li>Words with multiple meanings</li> <li>Grade and sequence of the subjects</li> <li>Inadequate knowledge of English</li> <li>Exposure to two languages simultaneously</li> </ul> <p><b>Social Effects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Friends' being better</li> <li>Others' speaking better</li> <li>People's not understanding me (my accent)</li> <li>People's preparing for difficult exams</li> </ul> <p><b>Perceived Self-Inadequacies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incapability in speaking</li> <li>Difficulty in understanding</li> <li>Experiencing failure</li> <li>Incapability in speaking to a foreigner</li> <li>Forgetfulness</li> <li>Assignments</li> <li>Individual study without any support</li> <li>Incapability in adapting to lesson</li> <li>Incapability in solving questions</li> <li>Incapability in translating</li> <li>Miss of an easy question</li> </ul>	<p>2</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>4</p> <p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>2</p> <p>2</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p>
2	No	<p><b>Intrinsic Elements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Love</li> <li>Interest</li> <li>Positive thinking</li> <li>Self-motivation</li> <li>Feeling the need to be careful</li> </ul> <p><b>Extrinsic Elements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effort</li> <li>Sense of success</li> <li>Appropriate study</li> <li>Teacher support</li> <li>Improvement through learning</li> </ul>	<p>2</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>5</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p>
<b>Total</b>			<b>50</b>

**Table 8:** Students' Self Perceptions as Language Learners

n	TITLES	THEMES	F
1	<b>Positive self-concept</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intrinsically motivated</li> <li>• Self-confident</li> <li>• Willing</li> <li>• Good</li> <li>• Diligent</li> <li>• Sufficient</li> <li>• Interested</li> <li>• Extrinsically motivated</li> <li>• Perseverant</li> <li>• Capable of speaking to a foreigner</li> <li>• Inquisitive</li> <li>• Ambitious</li> <li>• In search for different techniques</li> <li>• Never giving up</li> <li>• Improving</li> <li>• Watching movie</li> <li>• Improving vocabulary</li> <li>• Good at listening</li> <li>• Able to learn</li> <li>• Active</li> <li>• Consulting others</li> </ul>	11 10 9 8 7 3 3 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1
	<b>Negative self-concept</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being unsuccessful</li> <li>• Putting inadequate effort</li> <li>• Being insufficient</li> <li>• Having difficulty in understanding a foreigner</li> <li>• Lacking practice</li> <li>• Temporary learning</li> <li>• Not being ready</li> <li>• Viewing as difficult lesson</li> <li>• Being unwilling</li> <li>• Not being perseverant</li> <li>• Lacking interest</li> <li>• Being an average student (neither good nor bad)</li> </ul>	3 2 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1
	<b>To do's</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doing more</li> <li>• Enhancing memorization ability</li> </ul>	5 1
<b>Total</b>			<b>88</b>

In addition, being perseverant, good at communicating with a foreigner and at listening, inquisitive, ambitious and in search of different techniques, consulting others and never giving up, each cited once, are the labels the students use to describe themselves as language learners. However, some students feature negative self-concepts in terms of learning English. For instance, three citations display that some students see themselves as unsuccessful in learning English. Sense of insufficiency (two citations) is clear to see in the table, which is consistent with their sense of sufficiency which has higher frequency in the positive concepts. In a similar manner, two citations imply that they lack adequate effort, which also signifies a parallel with their sense of diligence which has higher frequency of citation in the positive self-beliefs. It is apparent to detect that having difficulty in understanding a foreigner,

learning temporarily, lacking practice and readiness, viewing English as hard lesson, not being perseverant, interested and willing and being an average student form the characteristics the students depict themselves as learners even though they have one citation. Despite negative self-views, students also identified things they should do; therefore, another category emerged on what to do more. To illustrate, it can be said that students feel the need to do more (five citations) and enhance their memorization ability (one citation).

Excerpt 12: *"I love English; however, I need to focus on it more."*

All in all, low frequency of negative self-concepts and higher frequency of positive self-concepts indicate that students embody more favourable self-attitude towards themselves as language learners.

## DISCUSSION

The study bears the purpose of raising awareness on the concept of learned helplessness; thus, the research looked at the matter from different perspectives through different data collection instruments. Through the statistical analyses, it was detected that 11 students seem to have tendency to learned helplessness, on the other hand, 13 students do not appear to show inclination towards it. Therefore, it is safe to say that not all the participants had the sense of helplessness, which is consistent with the findings of Learned Helplessness Scale. To illustrate, only about a quarter of the students claim to feel no control over the outcome no matter how much energy they put into the task. The notion of control bears value within the learned helplessness scope since as Holt (1980) asserts that passivity or reduction in persistence occurs due to the loss of control over situation not because of loss of rewards. It is possible for the psychological condition generated from uncontrollability to impair response initiation quite mostly (Maier & Seligman, 1976). In parallel to the fact that situation similarity constitutes a significant indicator of generalization of learned helplessness concept (Tiggemann & Winefield, 1978), in this study higher number of students do not give up trying a new task in the case of a failure in similar tasks in the past. This finding can reflect the importance of coping skills in preventing failures. Sense of control, which is a part of non-helplessness, has also bond with problem solving since the study by Kennett and Keefer (2006, p.441) revealed that “students who reported engaging in academic self-control behaviours possessed a better-developed repertoire of general self-control skills, believed in their academic ability to succeed, applied more effort in response to academic setbacks, valued learning something new in class more than merely getting good grades, and actually obtained higher grades”. When their reactions against perpetual failure in English were asked, students voiced both negative and positive responses. Even though negative senses outnumber their positive stance, there were responses reflecting the avoidance of giving up and the effort to cope with the problem. Recursive academic failures may lead to self-protective strategies, sense of helplessness and distortion in psychological adjustment (Valas, 2001). Their negative reactions involved feeling bad, loss of motivation, giving up, feeling unable to learn, losing hope and interest in English, running away from English, getting afraid of it, putting inadequate effort, senses of pain and depression, and construction of negative self-concepts. As Au, Watkins and Hattie note (2010, p.126) “when students face prolonged academic failures, have low self-efficacy and low school values, then they are likely to develop hopelessness and are vulnerable to a cluster of academic deficits such as lowered self-esteem, ineffective use of learning strategies and deteriorated performance”. As Jarvis (2006: 183) puts forth “in precisely the way that our early experiences affect our ability to learn throughout our lives, negative experiences curtail the opportunities to learn later in life”. Bandura (1994) also remark that individuals who are not confident about their abilities abstain from difficult tasks and deem these tasks as personal

threats; thus, they easily give up in case of a difficulty, and they regard inadequate performance as insufficient aptitude. However, easy tasks are not expected to change sufficiency expectations and be efficient in relieving personal helplessness (Friedlander & Chartier, 1981). Additionally, sense of helplessness can have a negative role in influencing students’ lifelong learning dispositions. As Gernigon, Thill and Fleurance (1999) claim, conditions that individuals cannot control induce motivational inadequacies which turn into the decrease in practice in future tasks. There were also positive responses including not giving up, sense of encouragement and trying to find a solution. These findings also indicate that some participants show signs of propensity for learned helplessness in different forms while some prefer tackling with it. The findings also display that students feel unable to learn English especially when they lack vocabulary, they have difficulty in understanding and speaking, and others seem to better than them. It should be noted that learned helplessness may stem from a variety of factors; therefore, these factors underlying learned helplessness should be focused more. In a more general sense, Gebka (2013) suggests designation of elements that poses a contribution to learning outcomes can enhance the educational quality. The probable reasons contributing to the state of learned helplessness may provide a direction for producing solutions to it. Teachers should be more attentive to the students who show signs of giving up or develop a belief in their inability to learn English. “Teachers need to have a clear understanding of the language being taught and student beliefs, because learners with realistic and informed beliefs are more likely to behave productively in the class, work harder outside the class, and (crucially) persist longer with language study (Hosseini & Pourmandnia, 2013: 70). In contrast, there are also some elements that can be considered to weaken the development of learned helplessness as stated by the students who asserted not to feel unable to learn English in the Learned Helplessness Questionnaire. To illustrate, effort, love, sense of success, interest, positive thinking, self-motivation and teacher support were expressed by the students without the sense of being unable to succeed in English. Accordingly, McAdams (2001 cited in Jarvis, 2006) summarizes the sources of belief in ability as previous successes or failures, seeing other people’s performances, others’ persuasion that we can succeed and our own affective stimulation. Likewise, negative emotions, especially about the self, can build big obstacles to learning, influencing perceptions negatively, preventing correct interpretation of the events and weakening the motivation to show persistence (Jarvis, 2006), and low self-concept as regards the general academic skills and non-realistic conceptions about language learning can lead to foreign language anxiety (Ortega, 2009); therefore, conceptions and feelings of students should not be ignored in language learning process.

## CONCLUSION

Failure is inevitable in learning process; however, it is not failure that stops learning, but it is learner’s reaction to failure that shapes his/her learning. Disbelief in success conduces to lack of energy, motivation and effort to continue, thus

failure. Therefore, learners should be assured that problems and mistakes are important and quite natural components of learning. A change in students' mind-sets can change many things for better in their educational lives. Likewise, self-concepts influence students' stance towards learning. They should be guided and encouraged to develop realistic and sound perceptions about themselves as learners. Moreover, teachers should give clear and constructive feedback to students to eliminate uncertainty in their minds. Students can also be provided materials and tasks suitable to their level; this can prevent students from constructing false beliefs about themselves and language learning. As a consequence, students should be trained to develop coping skills instead of focusing on failure immediately in order to make their learning journey more fruitful and conscious.

Since learning starts very early in human life, it is of importance to shape learning in early phases of our educational life. Hence, similar studies can be conducted among elementary students. Early detection of potential learned helplessness can allow students to have more successful academic experiences.

Small sample of the study constitutes a limitation for statistical testing. A similar study can be carried out with a larger sample.

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