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## **RESILIENCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: A STUDY ON PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

*Research Article*

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# RESILIENCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: A STUDY ON PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

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## Abstract

Investigating pre-service teachers' language learning experiences is essential as they have an impact on their learning during their departmental studies and their future teaching practices. Given the fact that there is a growing call for the development of resilience in teacher education programs, this qualitative study aims at exploring what resources pre-service English language teachers have relied on to overcome challenges and obstacles to learning English as a foreign language. To achieve this aim, data were obtained from 23 pre-service teachers enrolled in English Language Teaching program at a university in Istanbul, Turkey in the form of a reflective writing activity. To triangulate data, a focus group interview was carried out with five of the participating pre-service teachers. Data were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Findings revealed that pre-service teachers dealt with a variety of obstacles in their English language learning histories such as ineffective methodologies used by teachers, anxiety caused by examinations, obstacles in language skills especially speaking, and language barriers while staying in English-speaking countries. The pre-service teachers mentioned that they demonstrated agency in the process of overcoming these obstacles and their resilience included both personal protective factors and social/environmental protective factors.

*Keywords:* resilience, positive psychology, teacher education, foreign language learning

## 1. Introduction

There has always been a considerable interest in exploring individual differences in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) as psychology of second language (L2) learners can constitute an essential part in L2 learning process, progress and outcome. Identification of individual differences and investigation of their effects on L2 learning has been a major focus in SLA for decades. More recently, with the rise of positive psychology perspective, there has been a growing interest in exploring the role of resilience in foreign language learning as resilience is viewed as one of the psychological aspects of language learners. The language learning process can often be challenging, and learners may face a range of difficulties while learning an L2. Resilience is likely to be of assistance as an individual difference that support language learners in overcoming difficulties and adversities. Nguyen et.al. (2015) plausibly argue that "to succeed and maintain their well-being, foreign language learners must be resilient, able to bounce back from stress" (p.2).

Non-native pre-service teachers of English, having English learner histories of their own, begin their departmental studies to be enculturated into the teaching profession. Given the fact that the prior experiences pre-service teachers have as language learners exert an impact on the formation of their professional identities and attitudes (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991), teacher educators and

researchers are in the position of providing pre-service teachers with opportunities of reflection on their language learner histories that include accounts of resilience.

Accordingly, understanding how non-native pre-service language teachers succeed in learning English despite facing some obstacles and challenges to learning English is of great value in terms of promoting reflection and developing an awareness of resilience among prospective teachers. However, literature fails to unearth language learning biographies of pre-service English language teachers regarding resilience especially in the Turkish context. Therefore, this qualitative study aims to explore the resources Turkish pre-service English language teachers have relied on to overcome obstacles and challenges to learning English as a foreign language.

## 2. Literature Review

Resilience, a relatively recent concept, is defined as “the process of capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (Masten, Best and Garmenzy, 1990 p.425). Kim and Kim (2017) define resilience as “the sum of an individual’s abilities that allow him or her to bounce back from adversity and even thrive in the face of difficult times” (p.2). Simply put, resilience is what helps individuals bounce back from crises and difficult times. Resilience is commonly viewed as a process which occurs throughout the lifespan of all individuals as we all use specific strategies on the face of obstacles and challenges. These strategies support us to overcome the stressful situations and gain new insights for our future encounters.

There are two trends in defining resilience (Gu & Day, 2007). The first one is resilience as a psychological construct that incorporates personal factors such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation, resourcefulness, and health that are believed to be helpful in being resilient to overcome adversity. The second one is resilience as a complex and multidimensional process. This line of definition includes not only personal factors but also social support systems such as friends, family and community resources. Parallel to these two trends of definition, the findings of research highlight both personal and social factors regarding being resilient. The related literature attributes resilience to personal strengths such as cognitive, social, emotional and moral/spiritual factors (Truebridge, 2015), outgoing personalities, self-esteem, and ability to solve problems (Masten & Obradovic, 2006). The related literature also indicates the importance of social factors in resilience, such as the ability to enlist social support, compassionate relationships, and opportunities for responsible participation (Masten & Obradovic, 2006).

There is only a handful of studies that explore resilience in SLA, most of which highlights learners. One of the most recent studies is carried out by Kim et al. (2018). Their study explored the components influencing English as a foreign language learning (EFL) demotivation and resilience. It was revealed that the major demotivators were teacher’s lack of clear delivery, excessive afterschool workload, and lessons focusing on grammar rather than speaking. It was also found out the participants overcame the negative impact of these demotivators by social support, emotional regulation, a clear learning goal and perseverance with EFL learning. Another recent study is of Nguyen et.al. (2015) that investigated the relationships and predictability between experiencing storytelling as a child and adult resilience. Their findings identified five protective factors for resilience used by international college students while learning Chinese or English as an L2. Social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, sense of purpose and use of storytelling emerged as protective factors used by second language learners. Nguyen et al. (2015) suggested that the coping strategies regarding the challenges of learning a foreign language can be learned through storytelling and this might have a long-lasting effect on learners’ academic performance.

Oxford et.al. (2007) carried out a study on L2 learners' psychological reactions and the power relations in the sociocultural context. The findings of the study revealed that the participants overcame the L2 crises by gaining greater self-knowledge, increasing competence and regaining internal control as they exhibited the harmony of self-determination, autonomy, relatedness, intrinsic motivation, and competence. In a more recent study Oxford (2014) presented two L2 learners' language learning histories within the framework of learner well-being in positive psychology. The findings of the study revealed that the degree of well-being takes a key role in the development of proficiency and adoption of lifelong attitudes.

Drawing on a number of studies on building resilience in pre-service teachers, Cornu (2009) suggests that learning communities' model of professional experience has the potential to build resilience in pre-service teachers, especially through peer support and explicit teaching of particular skills and attitudes. Patterson, Collins and Abbott (2004) carried out a study with eight experienced teachers working in rural schools and identified strategies that teachers adopt in the face of obstacles as decision-making, seeking professional development, problem-solving, relying on colleagues and friends, and being flexible. Gu and Day (2007) examined the role of resilience in teacher effectiveness through a four-year longitudinal study. The findings of their study revealed that strength and determination of teachers contributes strongly to their resilience.

A quick review of EFL literature indicates that more attention to resilience is needed as it is a promising factor in the field of L2 learning. As non-native pre-service teachers experienced difficulties in their EFL learning histories, it is worth inquiring how they overcome learning challenges and obstacles from the perspective of resilience. Therefore, this qualitative study aims to explore the resources Turkish pre-service English language teachers have relied on to overcome obstacles and challenges to learning English as a foreign language.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Research Context and Participants**

This study was carried out in English Language Teaching (ELT) program at a university in Istanbul, Turkey. The participants were non-native pre-service teachers taking Approaches and Methods course during 2017-2018 academic year. The total cohort of the study was 23 sophomore ELT students (17 female, 6 male), aged between 20 and 38. The participant selection was based on the convenience sampling method which is a type of non-random sampling technique based on the criteria of being readily available, accessible, and willingness to participate (Creswell, 2012). For ethical considerations, written consent was obtained from the participants and they were also given an extra credit in Approaches and Methods course for their participation of the research. As anonymity of participation was promised by the researcher, pseudonyms have been used for each participant in reporting the findings of the study.

#### **3.2. Research Design**

In order to unearth language learning histories of pre-service English language teachers and gain an in-depth understanding of what resources they have relied on to overcome the obstacles and challenges to learning English as a second language, the qualitative research design and data collection methodologies were adopted in this study. Creswell (2012) defines a qualitative study as "an inquiry process understanding a social or human problem, based on building a

complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in natural setting” (p.2).

### 3.2.1. Data Collection and Analysis

The present study is a retrospective study in the sense that pre-service teachers were asked to reflect on their own English language learning histories. They were expected to write a reflective essay on the obstacles and challenges to learning English as a second language and share the resources they have relied upon to overcome them. The participating pre-service teachers were given a week to complete the reflective writing activity and they were informed about the fact that there were no right, wrong or expected answers. After the submission of the reflective essays, five of the pre-service teachers were invited to attend to a focus group interview during which they were asked to elaborate on the strategies and resources depicted in the reflective writing activity. The focus group interview was audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis was carried out to analyze the obtained data. In the first stage of the analysis, the reflective writings and the transcription of the focus group interview were read several times. In the second stage, the patterns emerged in the form of chunks were initially coded. In the last stage, the initial codes were reviewed and labelled under themes.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, some measures were taken following the principles of qualitative research design. The data were triangulated to ensure internal validity by using multiple data collection tools such as reflective writing and focus group interview. In this sense, the findings showed parallelism across both data sources. Additionally, pre-services teachers were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point they want. Regarding the external validity, comprehensive descriptions were provided about the participating pre-service teachers, data collection and analysis. Direct quotations were included to support the interpretations of the researcher fully and depict the reflections of the pre-service teachers vividly.

## 4. Findings

The purpose of the present study was to uncover language learning histories of pre-service English language teachers and gain an in-depth understanding of what resources they have relied on to overcome the obstacles and challenges to EFL learning. The analysis showed that participating pre-service teachers faced a variety of obstacles and challenges to learning English as a foreign language. Initially, the obstacles and challenges that pre-service teachers shared will be reported. Later, the findings regarding the resources will be presented under the following themes: (i) personal protective factors (autonomy, problem-solving skills, positive emotions); (ii) social/environmental factors (peer support, teacher support, family support).

### 4.1. Obstacles and Challenges to English Language Learning

Data obtained through a reflective writing activity and a focus group interview revealed that the participating pre-service teachers dealt with a variety of obstacles in their English language learning histories such as methodologies used by teachers, examinations, obstacles in language skills especially speaking and language barriers while staying in English speaking countries. In order to have a better understanding of resources of resilience used by pre-service teachers, a short description of each obstacle will be provided below.

Nearly all of the pre-service teachers made specific reference to the methodologies used by some of their English language teachers. They reported that these teachers’ tendency to

implement grammar-based instruction in their lessons created boredom among learners and thus these teachers were unable to create interest towards English language learning. Too much dependence on grammar-based methodologies were viewed as ineffective in creating an optimal EFL learning environment. Another obstacle mentioned by pre-service teachers was examinations. A majority of the participating pre-service teachers touched upon exams, especially the university entrance exam as a challenge they faced during their language learning histories. The anxiety aroused due to examinations were seen as an inhibiting factor to language learning success.

Most of the pre-service teachers also reported that their language learning histories include memories of obstacles in language skills especially speaking. Reflecting on the critical moments in their language learning journey, pre-service teachers expressed the difficulties they encountered while speaking English and they reported critical moments during which they felt stressful due to being unable to communicate in English. The last but not the least obstacle pre-service teachers stressed was language barriers they faced while staying in English speaking countries. The difficulties arising from the lack of knowledge about target language culture references and the inability to socialize with native speakers were highlighted as a challenge by all of the pre-service teachers who visited English speaking countries when they were learners themselves.

## 4.2. Protective Factors

Regarding the resources pre-service teachers relied on to overcome the abovementioned obstacles and challenges to English language learning, two categories of protective factors were revealed i.e. personal protective factors and social/environmental factors. The frequency distribution of both categories emerged in the data set is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Frequency distribution of protective factors*

Protective Factors			
Personal Protective Factors	f	Social/Environmental Factors	f
Autonomy	23	Peer Support	12
Problem Solving Skills	10	Teacher Support	10
Positive Emotions	7	Family Support	4
Total	40		26

## 4.3. Personal Protective Factors

Data have shown that pre-service teachers commented mostly on the personal protective factors concerning their ability to overcome the obstacles and challenges to English language learning. Three sub-themes (autonomy, problem-solving skills, and positive emotions) were identified under the personal protective factors theme. The sub-themes together with selected quotes from pre-service teachers' reflective writings and focus group interview comments are reported below.

### 4.3.1. Autonomy

Autonomy emerged as the most reported protective factor in the data set. The majority of the pre-service teachers acknowledged to themselves that they had achieved overcoming obstacles and challenges to learning English on their own. They emphasized that it was their decision to find a way to learn English as they realized that the education they were receiving was not sufficient enough to enable them to master the target language i.e. English. This

realization led to relying on their own capacity to come up with coping strategies to remedy the shortcomings of the language education they were receiving. For instance, March, while commenting on how she learned English, said that “I believe I have achieved that on my own”. Another pre-service teacher, June stated that “I cannot deny the education I had in my prep year, but I helped myself the most”.

Most of the pre-service teachers reported that they demonstrated agency and found a way to use English out of class. Attempting at finding ways of using English in meaningful and authentic ways, pre-service teachers took charge of their own L2 learning and transcended the limitations of the classroom-based language learning that they reported as grammar-based and ineffective. They often framed technology as an opportunity for helping them become more autonomous in L2 learning. The out-of-class contexts they used English were the virtual social networks, the internet, and online digital games. The pre-service teachers mentioned that they used to play computer games such as Sims, and Tomb Raider, read online newspapers, watch TV series, YouTube videos and TedTalks. Some of the examples related to the way pre-service teachers became autonomous EFL learners to overcome the limitations of the classroom-based learning were:

The role play community was crowded. People from all over the world, including two fifteen-year olds from Turkey, were pretending to be fictional characters and chat with each other. As I felt more comfortable behind my computer screen, my grades started to get slightly better. (June)

At the age of 16, I discovered my biggest hobby: make up. One day I came across a YouTube video of a woman called Chloe Morello filming a make-up tutorial and then I kept watching hundreds of them. Today when a friend of mine asks me how I improved my English, I tell them to reinforce the information they learn from school by watching YouTube videos. (July)

At high school I wanted to improve my English-speaking skills. However, the English classes were too boring and ineffective. Therefore, I started to speak with foreigners on the online games. I had so many friends from all around the world and their English skills were different. Some were native or near-native and some were beginners. We were not actually correcting our mistakes, but we learned English from each other as we typed or spoke. Although we were not using “the perfect English” the school holds as a model, we were communicating, and this was so much more important for me than perfection. (August)

#### 4.3.2. Problem-solving skills

The second personal protective factor emerged in the data was problem-solving skills. A number of pre-service teachers focused on their problem-solving skills explicitly while reporting the way they overcame the obstacles and challenges to EFL learning. The pre-service teachers’ memories in relation to their problem-solving skills involved identifying problems, planning solutions, and thinking reflectively.

The pre-service teachers expressed that the first step of overcoming the challenges was identifying the problems. The reflective writings included several examples of anecdotes revealing their realization of learning problems especially regarding the shortcomings of the educational context they were trying to learn English. Rather than being overwhelmed with the shortcomings, pre-service teachers mentioned that they channelled their energy to find ways of improving their English language proficiency on their own. Some of them created learning materials such as posters, games and flashcards and some of them carried out self-regulated

learning activities such as rehearsing making speech in front of the mirror and doing extra exercises at home. For instance, November recalled “In order to overcome those difficulties, to remember the rules better, I created posters and put them on the walls of my room.” Another pre-service teacher, Meteo, remembered the difficulties he was experiencing in speaking and stated, “I knew I had to do something to improve my speaking. Not long after than this realization, I started to practice English in front of the mirror at home”. One of the pre-service teachers, August, also regarded identifying problems as a necessary step in overcoming language problems while staying in an English-speaking country. She described a turning point in her language learning history. Her memory involved how she recognized what she lacked in order to communicate in English successfully.

I have encountered the most formidable obstacle in my English learning journey when I moved to NCY. I had a full-time job there, and although I was obviously much more fluent compared to my first time abroad, complications still persisted. I still had to struggle with confusing idioms and startling cultural references which made no sense to me. I came to realization that listening was one of my weakest skills since I was afraid to appear like a clueless newbie, panicked. I found it especially dreadful to understand phone conversations. (April)

Data revealed that pre-service teachers were not only skillful at identifying problems and planning solutions but also reflecting on their English language learning. Some of the pre-service teachers expressed that they were becoming more aware of themselves as language learners and their language learning process, as they tried out new ways of improving their proficiency. They found it important to be aware of how they learn English. For example, August expressed that though his parents, relatives and teachers were all negative about the time he spent on playing video games, he was aware of the fact that he was learning English especially being immersed in the target culture with the help of playing video games. In his own words:

My parents, relatives and teachers were worried about my obsession with video games. They always said that the games would have negative consequences for my future life. Although I was a child, I definitely knew that those fast-moving forms on the screen helped me build up many skills. One of those skills was to immerse myself in a foreign language and culture. Another was to make me feel competent in using the language.

#### 4.3.3. Positive emotions

One personal protective factor brought up by pre-service teachers was positive emotions which incorporated positive attitudes towards English, being hopeful and self-confident. No matter how difficult situations pre-service teachers found themselves to be, they did not lose their hope and they were determined at succeeding in learning English. For instance, July stated that “English seemed like an ocean and I only had a glass of it. But I did not become hopeless. On the contrary, I felt I needed to work so hard because it was my primary goal and passion.” Another pre-service teacher, August, reflected on her interest in learning English and reported that “I started to show interest in English language because I started to consider it as a need.” Regarding the importance of having positive expectations for overcoming obstacles and challenges to English language learning, one pre-service teacher, Egeo, stated that “I knew that I was going to improve my English”



#### 4.4. Social/Environmental Factors

Social/environmental factors have emerged as being central to overcoming the obstacles and challenges to learning English as a foreign language in the reflective writings and interview comments of pre-service teachers. Three sub-themes (peer support, teacher support, and family support) were identified under the social/environmental factors. These sub-themes together with excerpts from the data are reported below.

##### 4.4.1. Peer support

Peer support emerged as the most reported social/environmental factor regarding overcoming the obstacles and challenges to learning English by pre-service teachers while reflecting on their own language learning histories. Pre-service teachers' recollections of their memories of peer support emerged in two categories. The reflections grouped under the first category were in the form of practical support such as consulting friends and receiving direct help from peers. Pre-service teachers expressed the direct help they received from their friends when they could not achieve tasks on their own. Some of the statements made by the pre-service teachers related to peer support in the first category are presented below:

Our teacher assigned us writing an essay and she told us that she would not spend time on how to write essays as we already knew it. I did not know how to write an essay. It was the first time I was asked to write an essay. So, I asked help from my friends. They shared their notes with me and commented on my essay before I submitted it. (January)

I became afraid to speak in the classroom. Instead of asking teachers, I spent my years correcting my English by asking my friends when I was stuck in an exercise or a task. (September)

The reflections grouped under the second category were related to psychological support provided by friends. Some pre-service teachers reported that engaging more closely with friends helped them in developing resilience at the face of obstacles to English language learning while they were themselves language learners. The friendly engagement viewed as being central to socializing with and in the target language. In order to minimize the pressure of learning and using English as a foreign language, pre-service teachers reported that they relied on the peer support not only in educational contexts but also in English speaking contexts in the real world. The reflections under the second category mainly focused on feeling at ease with the social support of peers and helping each other going through difficult situations. The pre-service teachers expressed the negative impact of missing their families and friends. They reported the importance of having friends abroad as being socialized with people supported them at overcoming the feeling of being isolated. The socialization in abroad also resulted in improvement in pre-service teachers' L2 use. Some of the comments related to peer support in the second category are reported below:

The prep was exhausting, both mentally and physically. The English I thought I knew meant almost nothing there. I started my high school education as a mediocre student in English. As months passed, I started to make friends and feel more at ease. I guess, in order for me to be successful, I really need to feel comfortable. (June)

I went to Malta. At first, I did not talk much. I waited to feel sure of myself. The first month was the hardest because you feel alone in a different country. Then I started to

connect to the people. I started to make friends. I tried to express myself and understand them. (October)

The first blow came right after I landed at Heathrow. I could not even understand the announcements. I had such a difficult time in telling the purpose of visit to the passport officials. Conversing with real people in real life was nothing like speaking to the teachers in a classroom. Even when I could figure out what was being said, by the time I managed to formulate a sentence good enough, the topic had changed. Eventually, I decided to mingle with people. I started to have friends. (April)

#### 4.4.2. Teacher support

As one of the social/environmental factors brought up by pre-service teachers, teacher support was reported almost as much as peer support. Pre-service teachers noted teachers as a source from which they solicited support to overcome obstacles and challenges to EFL learning. The pre-service teachers mentioned that they asked some of their teachers the ways of improving their English. The teachers they mentioned in their reflective writings had offered them practical support in the form of specific suggestions such as watching TedTalks, keeping a journal and reading unabridged books. For instance, November stated:

I registered to an English language school to get ready for the university entrance exam. It was very hard for me because all teachers were native, and they never spoke in Turkish. I asked one of my teachers to develop my speaking skill and she told me to watch TedTalks.

The pre-service teachers also mentioned that they felt a bond of love and trust with some of their teachers whom became the significant other in their EFL learning histories. For example, Sandy described the important role her teachers played in overcoming the difficulties of EFL learning and said that “My difficulty with English surprisingly faded away with the help of my teachers. They were really special to me. Arpi, Denca and Gediat... They are the reason why I started to believe in miracles. I am really thankful to them.” Similarly, Halley, another pre-service teacher, reported one of her teachers as a role model and expressed that “Mrs. Xyz, honestly, she was the only person who believed in me. I would not be here studying ELT if it was not for her.”

#### 4.4.3. Family support

As a final sub-theme that emerged under the theme of social/environmental factors, family support was emphasized by four pre-service teachers. Among these four, three of them referred to their sisters and one referred to her parents. Pre-service teachers who received family support from sisters described the way their sisters functioned as a teacher at home. They vividly explained the teaching strategies their sisters employed in order to support them for vocabulary learning and grammar revision. For instance, December recalled:

I always had a hard time in school in my exams. Therefore, my sister helped me. She placed a big emphasis on making me memorize vocabulary. She made me, and my twin sister memorize words by preparing games and little competitions for us. She also prepared vocabulary cards that I needed to study before going to bed.

The only pre-service teacher that expressed social support from her parents reported the stress she was experiencing due to being away from her family and hometown to study at a private high school in which she received intensive English language instruction. Though she

was about to give up studying at that school, her parents functioned both as a counsellor and a teacher and helped her to overcome both the emotional and educational problems she was experiencing. The following excerpt elaborates on the family support February received:

I was afraid when I moved to İzmir to go to a prep school. I thought I would fail and I said to my family “I want to give up and turn back to my home.” They did not deprive me from their support. They wanted me to write to them about how my days passed. I kept daily notes in English. In time my writing scores increased.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

This qualitative study aimed to explore what resources pre-service English language teachers have relied on to overcome challenges and obstacles to EFL learning in their language learning histories. To achieve this aim, first the obstacles and challenges pre-service English language teachers faced during their language learning histories were identified. The resources they have relied on were identified later.

Data analysis indicated that pre-service teachers dealt with a variety of obstacles during their English language learning histories. In particular, the most reported obstacle was the ineffective methodologies used by teachers. The pre-service teachers reported that their EFL teachers’ tendency to carry out lessons focusing only on L2 grammar exerted a detrimental effect to their EFL learning. Similar to the findings of this study, Kim et al. (2018) found out that the dominant EFL learning demotivator for the Korean elementary school students was associated with EFL teachers. Parallel to the finding of this study, Kim and Lee (2014) pointed out that one of the dominant demotivators for junior high school students was dissatisfaction with the learning atmosphere. In line with the findings of this study, for high school students who participated the study of Kim et al. (2018), lessons that focused on grammar and extensive vocabulary were reported to be the most detrimental components of their EFL learning.

Another obstacle brought up by pre-service teachers was examinations. The pre-service teachers expressed that the anxiety caused by exams especially the university entrance exam was a demotivator in their language learning histories. Obstacles in language skills especially speaking was another sub-theme found in the data. The pre-service teachers reflected on demotivating instances in which they felt the pressure of not being able to communicate in English. The last challenge mentioned by the pre-service teachers with abroad experience was the language barriers they faced while they were staying at English speaking countries. The specific obstacles the data analysis revealed were the lack of knowledge about the target culture and the inability to socialize with native speakers. Similarly, the international college students who took part in the study of Nguyen et al. (2015) reported the challenges of moving to a foreign country and not speaking the target language fluently. They too shared their experiences of missing their families and friends and the social isolation they felt

This study found out that in order to overcome the obstacles and challenges to EFL learning, pre-service teachers relied on both personal protective factors such as autonomy, problem-solving skills and positive feelings, and social/environmental protective factors such as peer, teacher and family support.

Benson (2011) defines autonomy as “the capacity to control or take charge of one’s learning” Learner autonomy is widely used in independent learning and as highlighted by Oxford (2008), it is widely associated with independent learning than with the classroom learning (p. 42). This study exposed that pre-service teachers used to dedicate energy and time to bring about the out-of-class conditions necessary for them to overcome the shortcomings of their actual EFL learning contexts when they were learners. Simply put, they demonstrated agency and took charge of their own EFL learning. The findings showed that pre-service

teachers set goals for themselves and made use of technology resources available to them to achieve their EFL learning goals. They put their learning efforts in technology and enjoyed its affordances with respect to creating meaningful and authentic language use. Richards (2015) stresses the recent role technology performs in the changing face of language learning and states that “the internet, technology and the media, and the use of English in face-to-face as well as virtual social networks provide greater opportunities for meaningful and authentic language use than are available in the classroom” (p. 5).

The pre-service teachers in this study reported several memories in which they utilized their problem-solving skills which incorporated identifying problems, planning solutions, and thinking reflectively. Nguyen et al. (2015) highlighted that “people who are able to come up with solutions to a problem are better able to cope with problems rather than those who cannot” (p.11). In their study, similar to the findings of the present study, most of the participants developed coping strategies for the shortcomings of the language education they were receiving. The pre-service teachers also mentioned about the positive emotions which incorporated positive attitudes towards English, being hopeful and self-confident. Similarly, Oxford (2014) found out that the participants’ positive emotions transferred desperation into hope and success. Oxford argued that the participant’s positive emotions linked with his strategic problem-solving skills and dedication enabled him to carry on irrespective of the obstacles and challenges.

According to Olsson et al. (2003), relationships with others performs an essential role in coping with life challenges. The findings of this study found out that peers, parents and teachers provided emotional support to help pre-service teachers overcome obstacles and challenges to EFL learning and that social support played a similar role in enhancing their EFL learning resilience. It is worthy of attention that teachers not only offered emotional support, but they also provide inspiration for continuing EFL learning and choosing ELT as a profession. Collie et al. (2015) argued that when learners are aware of the social, human-relational resources they can use and of the emotional support they can get from teachers or parents, they are more likely to overcome obstacles and challenges. Kim et al. (2018) has also discussed that “when learners recognize the presence of reliable social support, this provides a solid foundation for enhancing their EFL learning resilience” (p.62). In their study teachers and peers were reported to provide academic assistance by suggesting practical solutions. Additionally, parallel to the findings of this study, the learners in the study of Ngyuen. et al. (2015) also reported that social competence enabled students to make friends, improve their language skills and learn how to move between cultures and thus overcame the obstacles to living and learning EFL abroad.

The sample size of the current study was small and not randomly selected. Therefore, the findings of this study should be validated with different participants in different contexts. Despite these limitations, the findings of this retrospective study capture obstacles and challenges to EFL learning together with personal protective and social/environmental protective resources for EFL resilience from the perspective of non-native pre-service English language teachers. The insights gained from this study offer teacher educators and pre-service teacher supervisors some reasonable opportunities for improving pre-service teacher education. First, teacher educators can and should incorporate reflection regarding resilience into teacher preparation programs. Second, this incorporation can be carried out by the means of discussion forums, blog assignments, interview projects and peer-support groups. Finally, and most importantly, teacher educators must enable pre-service teachers with a variety of backgrounds to learn from one another and look for collective strategies to build resilience for their professional development. Gu and Day (2007) cited the valid assumption made by Henderson and Milstein (2003) that “it is unrealistic to expect pupils to be resilient if their teachers ...do not demonstrate resilient qualities”. Parallel to this assumption, the findings of the study echo the importance of building the capacity of resilience among pre-service teachers

and reflecting on the resilience resources they relied on when they were language learners as they will be role models to their prospective students in the near future.

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