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Research Paper

Mapping the Domain of EFL Teacher Autonomy for Professional Action Through Teaching Experience

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Abstract

As a salient factor in teaching, the multidimensional topic of teacher autonomy (TA) has been investigated in previous studies concerning teachers' control, decision-making, power, freedom, independence, and discretion. However, scant research has been done on the self-direction of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers. To narrow this gap, this case study aims to consider two Iranian EFL teachers' self-directed professional action (SDPA), capacity, and freedom for TA with regard to their teaching experience. The classrooms of two male teachers, one novice and one

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experienced, were observed and video-recorded for eight months. The qualitative content analysis was conducted through deductive and inductive coding of the data from observations and stimulated recall interviews (SRIs). These results unraveled the construct of TA comprising five major categories of curricular, affective, evaluative, instructional, and disciplinary TA, as well as many sub-categories or codes, which have pedagogical implications for the improvement of TA for professional action. Discrepancies in autonomy between novice and experienced teachers provide insights for teachers and institute managers to enhance TA as the basis for teachers' effective teaching.

Keywords: Teacher autonomy (TA), Self-directed professional action (SDPA), Capacity for SDPA, Freedom from control, Stimulated recall interview (SRI), Experienced teacher (ET), Novice teacher (NT)

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1. Introduction

Being grounded on pluralistic definitions, teacher autonomy (TA) cannot be described as a monolithic construct because it has variable dimensions that constitute it (Lundström, 2015). These dimensions include teachers' being in control or having freedom in their decision-making on their practices, capacity for professional development and action, and their agency for action (Erss, 2018; Jackson, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2022; Ortega, 2024; Parker et al., 2021; Smith, 2003; Vangrieken & Kyndt, 2020). Teachers' perceived autonomy has been indicative of their work satisfaction, reduced turnover, and fewer disciplinary troubles (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Furthermore, it is a determining factor in curriculum policy to allow teachers to rely on their own professionalism and transform the content into meaningful lessons through a purposive approach or to be offered more obligations (Haapaniemi et al., 2021). The prominence of this pivotal concept would be more evident when we analyze its connection with other key factors such as teacher identity and success (Derakhshan et al., 2020), teacher cognition (Hacker & Barkhuizen, 2008), and teacher motivation (Daniels, 2017). Moreover, TA is

also linked to learner autonomy, reiterating teacher and learner autonomy as two sides of the same coin (Kong, 2022).

As a multidimensional and transformable pedagogical phenomenon, TA has been well-researched in the past decade (e.g., Burkhauser & Lesaux, 2015; Erss, 2018). Although there is extensive literature on the subject, no absolute solution to deal with autonomy has been found, and various multiple attempts have depended on space and time (Wermke & Forsberg, 2016). Along with the broad line of research on TA, a few researchers have scrutinized TA in relation to teaching experience or self-direction for professional action (SDPA). In terms of SDPA, although professional action has been approached in multiple ways in the literature (e.g., Biesta, 2015; Brandt et al., 2022), one encounters scant traces of research on self-directed teaching. Soodmand Afshar et al. (2017) and Saeb et al. (2021) explored teachers' professional development, which was defined as a subset of professional action by Smith (2003). Despite numerous efforts to conceptualize TA theoretically, practical inquiry to unravel teachers' autonomy status by putting theory into practice and investigating the qualitative evidence is rare. Furthermore, almost no research has qualitatively investigated teachers' SDPA and SDPA capacity in relation to teaching experience. Therefore, the current research drew on Smith's (2003) model to explore the SDPA of an experienced and a novice teacher.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teacher Autonomy

In seeking to elaborate on the concept of TA, one does not find a clear-cut and inclusive definition that remains stable over time. Thavenius (1999) defined autonomous teachers as those who have the ability to select educational materials, manage lessons, and plan curricula. Little (2004) interpreted TA as teachers' capacity for self-directed teaching, taking control of educational and reflectively designed activities. The definition of TA has evolved over time, reflecting changes in educational systems. Kuchah and Smith (2011) described the attributes of the autonomous class, incorporating two features: (a) the physical setting or frame, and (b) prominent issues concerning the ongoing processes and activities. This shows that having an autonomous class is impossible unless the institute manager gives some

control power to teachers (Wang, 2017). Therefore, there is a link between the educational setting and promoting autonomy where there is a need for the academic manager to shift control over to teachers. Gülşen and Atay (2022) referred to TA as teachers' empowerment in the community, school, and classroom, leading to professionalism and instructional efficacy that contribute to pedagogical decision-making, which many teachers lack due to institutional restrictions. Even later, TA was referred to as decision-making and control in relation to state governance (Lennert da Silva, 2022).

Multifold frameworks and approaches toward TA provide researchers with theoretical bases for practical explorations. One influential theory dates back to Smith's (2003) study, which distinguished the bipolar dimensions of TA as self-direction in professional action (teaching) and self-direction in development (teacher-learning). The first dimension includes SDPA, SDPA capacity, and freedom from control. While SDPA is the teachers' actual teaching behavior, SDPA capacity is more psychological and technical. Finally, freedom from control is a more political notion. The second dimension refers to "self-directed professional development" or SDPD, "SDPD capacity," and "freedom from control over professional development" (Smith, 2003, p. 4). To explain self-directed professional action, Smith refers to teaching based on the teacher's own decisions rather than the dictates of the textbook or external authorities/syllabus.

Wermke and Höstfält (2013) developed a model for various forms of TA in different contexts and at various times, ranging from a service individual perspective (describing teachers' choices in their practice in schools and classes) to an institutional perspective (regarding collective facets such as teachers' salary, rights, tasks, status, and roles in society). They regarded both as restricted and extended. In their model, restricted institution autonomy concerns state-regulated measurement and standards (product evaluation), efficiency legitimation in achieving goals and results, accountability, and the principal (the manager or admin who controls teachers). Restricted service autonomy is considered the regulated use of content and resources and teachers' professionalization (process evaluation). At the extended institution level, they considered sovereignty in setting standards, didactic legitimation, responsibility, collegial standardization/control (ethical codes/professional

culture), and the principal (head teacher integrating and controlling teachers). Finally, at their extended service level, TA refers to teachers' freedom of instructional content selection, resource use, and professionalization.

From the theoretical perspective of government, Frostenson (2015) referred to teachers acting as a professional organization or group to decide on framing their jobs in terms of general professional autonomy through legislation, teacher education, or curricula. In contrast to the norms, he defined collegial professional autonomy as the teachers' cooperative freedom to decide on and influence practice at the school level. Finally, he referred to individual autonomy as the individual's chance to influence the controls of educational practice frames and contents of their teaching practice. Another theoretical framework containing TA includes a curricular perspective in Levi's (2016) approach. She referred to curriculum approaches in terms of a spectrum from fidelity to autonomy, including imitation and copying, implementation, adaptation, and structuring. In the first, detailed, structured, and officially validated materials are delivered to students without the teachers' influence. The second approach, also called the implementation or fidelity orientation, favors commercially published, pre-formulated, preplanned materials that require teachers to execute learning-teaching situations; it necessitates the teachers' loyalty to models and theories offered in the curriculum. The adaptation approach requires the teacher to adapt the manual's curriculum and settings according to the target group's needs. The last or structuring approach (Grass Roots Development) is autonomous and open. The syllabus is open for autonomous creative teachers with no obligations. The teacher chooses sequences and presents particular topics on the basis of students' interests and needs.

In Paulsrud and Wermke's (2019) categorization, TA is exercised at different levels for teachers as individuals in the class or as a collective in schools in numerous domains with regard to their decision-making in terms of educational, social, developmental, and administrative issues. In another classification by Grant et al. (2020), TA conception ranges from freedom and independence to influence and power. They referred to TA through particular lenses, such as decision-making, to be applied to specific contexts at school-wide or classroom levels. They considered TA at two levels: (a) the teachers'

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degree of power, independence, freedom, discretion over teaching, curriculum, and assessment (in class), and (b) school organization, operations, and staff development (at the school level). The themes of their TA framework for measuring TA were derived from a teacher evaluation framework and incorporated four sections: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities, ranging from low to mid and high levels of TA.

2.2 Research on TA

In analyzing TA, a substantial body of research drew on teachers' perceptions of their autonomy. Azimi (2013) compared novice and expert teachers' perceptions and reported no significant difference between their ideas in terms of unethicity or ethicality of assessment practice. Wermke et al. (2018) investigated and compared the perceptions of Swedish and German teachers regarding their professional autonomy using a grid and viewed teacher autonomy like a multidimensional phenomenon occurring in different domains (social, educational, administrative, and developmental) and at different levels (school, classroom, and profession). The findings indicated that the instructors interviewed in Sweden and Germany valued autonomy in various dimensions and domains differently, even though there were many similarities. They perceived themselves as very autonomous in the educational domain, in particular concerning the choices of content and method. In the classroom setting, autonomous work was also seen at the core of the teaching profession. Overall, the German instructors perceived themselves as prominently involved in more areas of their vocation and more frequently referred to decisions to be made, whereas the Swedish teachers were more worried about control. In a similar vein, EFL teachers' self-direction for professional development and the capacity for it were investigated by Yasaei et al. (2021) by analyzing novice teachers' audio diaries and interviews. Their findings revealed many activities done by autonomous teachers, including peer coaching, peer observation, using technology, action research, attending workshops, reflection, and reading books.

An overview of research reveals the investigation of TA from a curricular perspective. The extent of reliance on the textbook and the teachers' choice of

how to approach texts has been the focus of many studies (e.g., Bakken, 2019; Bakken & Lund, 2018). With regard to the redefined educational policy considering teachers' extended space for exerting professional autonomy, Bakken (2019) pointed to the English teachers in Norway who enjoy considerable freedom in selecting classroom texts following the aims of the national curriculum. Using their professional judgment, teachers select the modes and means of teaching on the basis of local needs. Concurrently, recent pedagogical legislation demands that teachers exercise autonomy as participants of professional communities to guarantee common teaching standards, assuming responsibility for the students' learning. Bakken construed the research question as whether the reset space for teachers' professional autonomy corresponded to their understanding of that kind of autonomy. The crucial discourse analysis of interviews suggested two positions about the instructors' reasoning about their autonomy and text choice. The former promoted their choice of freedom, and the latter was the view that textbooks represented the authoritative interpretations of the syllabi purposes accompanied by the teachers' common planning. While teachers spoke in favor of selecting texts freely, few of them said they exploited that freedom beyond selecting texts in textbooks. Finally, the researcher argued that the instructors' discursive practices regarding that domain might limit their space for exerting professional autonomy rather than extending it.

Moving beyond these research lines, some researchers have addressed TA from a quantitative approach to measure the construct. Evers et al. (2017) measured TA by a multi-dimensional scale based on four theoretically related dimensions of TA. They tested the psychometric characteristics of the instrument among a sample of Dutch teachers working in vocational, secondary, and primary education. The confirmatory factor analysis revealed four factors, namely participation in decision-making at school, primary work processes in the class, professional development, and curriculum implementation. TA appeared to predict workplace learning, reflecting, experimenting, and school development. They found that transformational leadership can facilitate TA. The instrument was suggested to be used by policy makers and managers to monitor autonomous behavior. Moreover, some researchers considered teacher identity and motivation in relation to TA. Dikilitaş and Mumford (2018) highlighted the need to promote more

informal and personal processes in TA. Through focus group discussions and think-aloud protocol, they explored the effect of reading teacher research on university teachers' autonomy development. Gaining agency, gaining awareness of a more democratic form of teacher development, and developing motivation emerged as sub-themes of TA. Teachers who had been provided with freedom and conditions for autonomy development selected and interpreted comprehensible texts differently, emphasizing various aspects of agency, motivation, and identity. They concluded that providing opportunities according to individuals' developmental needs by the task led to the emergence of TA.

Many studies have used TA as a proxy construct as it indicates different perspectives. Haapaniemi et al. (2021) used TA as a construct expressing the curricular approach for professional development. While implementing integrative teaching, teachers in their study maintained their autonomy in teaching activities and marked possible professional development. Lennert da Silva (2022) approached TA from a governance perspective (teachers' capacity to make informed decisions and judgments that influence their job and roles within the frame of resources and regulations). She explored TA at three levels: (a) Scale satisfaction with classroom autonomy (to rate their extent of autonomy in determining content, selecting methods, assessing, disciplining, and assigning homework); (b) Scale professional cooperation among teachers (team teaching, providing feedback to other teachers, engaging in joint activities, and participating in collaborative learning); and (c) Scale perceptions of policy and value (the extent teachers perceive policymakers and media value their views and influence on educational policy).

In view of the paucity of research on teachers' status of autonomy in terms of self-directed teaching and their capacity for SDPA, particularly in relation to teacher experience and professional action, this study sought to attend to the gap through Smith's (2003) comprehensive model including technical, psychological and political aspects of TA as a sine qua non to be probed in educational contexts. In this regard, the research question below was raised:

RQ. Within the same space of freedom from control, is there any difference between a novice and an experienced teacher's TA in terms of their SDPA and SPPA capacity?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

This study is part of a larger study including four male and female participants in the qualitative phase and 300 participants in the quantitative phase. The manager of an accessible language institute invited teachers to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. Both teachers were male to neutralize the gender effect. As the teaching experience variable was to be taken into account, a novice and an experienced teacher were selected. With the pseudonyms Ahmad and Ali, the teachers were 30 and 21 years old, respectively. They were EFL teachers at the elementary and intermediate levels. Both teachers had a BA degree. Although attending some classes, Ahmad left the university before receiving his M.A. (in TEFL), believing it would not be detrimental to his vocation. Both teachers had pre-intermediate students studying the “American English File” series as their main textbooks. The study used convenience sampling based on the teachers’ willingness to participate, availability, and the non-probability method of purposive sampling (Riazi, 2016). The authors picked participants with particular attributes that would help the study meet its goals. From the educational background perspective, they were EFL teachers who had studied English language teaching and passed teacher training courses. Freeman's (2001) criteria of teaching less than two years for a novice teacher and more than five years for an experienced teacher were used to define novice and experienced teachers. The participants expressed their consent to attend and cooperate in the study, and they became aware of the purpose of the study, the desired time, and the remuneration to be paid. They were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their data to be used only for research purposes.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Name	Gender	Age	Teaching experience	Educational level
Ahmad	Male	30	10	BA

Ali	Male	٢١	2	BA
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3.2 Instrumentation

The study drew on classroom observation through the audio-visual recordings of classes and stimulated recall interviews (SRIs) as methodological triangulation to collect the two teachers' perceptions of their autonomy during their teaching practice.

3.2.1 Classroom Observation

The observation was used to obtain rich data and to provide a multilayered and deeper understanding of the participants' behavior in the context over time (Mackey & Gass, 2015). To analyze the teachers' actual SDPA in the classroom setting, all the events, actions, interactions, and relationships needed to be observed moment by moment in detail. Observation was necessary as the focus of the study was to explore the teachers' self-directed actions and to provide data that might not be elicited through other research instruments.

3.2.2 Stimulated Recall Interviews

The two teachers participated in SRIs immediately after each class to avoid forgetting details. In SRIs, the participants explain the practices in their teaching and help the researchers to interpret and understand their actions (Vesterinen et al., 2010). During the SRI, the first researcher paused the video and asked questions regarding their actions, their reasons for their actions, thoughts, and abilities to delve into the teachers' SDPA capacity. Participant interviews using video SRIs were conducted to identify descriptive categories predefined and inferred through thematic analysis. SRIs were conducted in the participants' native language in face-to-face sessions and were audio-recorded.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The observed data were first collected by the first researcher's observations of audio-visual recordings of classes using field notes and a semi-structured

checklist based on the literature review and Smith's (2003) framework regarding the two teachers' SDPA and capacity for SDPA factors. Data were collected over eight months to enhance credibility and ensure the participants behaved naturally. An aggregate of 30 teaching sessions was video-recorded for each teacher without the presence of the researcher in the classroom to avoid influencing the participants' behavior and observer effect. The two instruments were complementary. Fifteen SRIs, focusing on Smith's model for TA, were conducted; each was audio-recorded and ranged from 30 to 90 minutes. The participants viewed video episodes of their own teaching and were asked to reflect on their SDPA and SDPA capacity as questions related to their specific actions were raised to unravel their thoughts.

3.4 Data Analysis

All SRI data were transcribed. Thick descriptions and full details of the data on which the interpretations were based were provided to preserve the data analysis's transferability and confirmability (Mackey & Gass, 2015). While a priori themes (categories) from Smith (2003) were considered, the categories shaping the design of the semi-structured checklist were also used for data analysis, permitting codes to emerge as the teachers addressed unpredicted issues. The findings were constantly revised to ensure the consistency of the interpretation of the data. After the initial coding, the results were reported for each teacher. The data were then reviewed and recorded. After the first author's data analysis using the inter-coding process, triangulation through rigorous discussions and vital challenges from the two other authors facilitated data interpretation. Content analysis of data was done both deductively and inductively. Emerging codes and related categories were identified after reading and re-reading the transcripts. For example, considering Smith's framework, under the curricular category, the code *textbook adhesiveness* was ascribed to the novice teacher, and *extension* was ascribed to the experienced teacher. Finally, member checking (Riazi, 2016) was conducted to enhance the dependability of the analysis, with the participants provided with transcriptions, codes, and interpretations. To do so, the participants were provided with descriptive transcriptions extracted from the observations of their actions and SRIs of their thoughts, and the probable interpretations of them to give feedback and approve their accuracy.

4. Results

The analysis of the data drawn from the SRIs showed that while the teachers had freedom from control, five categories were extracted about their autonomy and SDPA capacity. Table 2 displays these categories of TA, including curricular, affective, evaluative, instructional, and disciplinary TA.

Table 2
TA Categories

TA Categories
Curricular TA
Affective TA
Evaluative TA
Instructional TA
Disciplinary TA

Note. *TA considered as SDPA and SDPA capacity

Content analysis of data led to the emergence of five major categories for TA. First, curricular TA is related to the overall content and syllabus. Second, affective TA refers to emotional and mental conditions. Third, evaluative TA is related to evaluation, testing, and assessment. Fourth, instructional TA deals with various kinds of teaching methods and activities. Finally, disciplinary TA indicates the teacher's general discipline in behavior or conduct.

4.1 Curricular TA

Table 3 presents the participants' codes for their self-directed teaching, ranging from improvisation to taciturnity:

Table 3
Codes for Curricular TA

Categories	Participants	Codes
Curricular TA	Both	1. Improvisation
	Ahmad	2. Extension
		3. Creation
		4. Augmentation
		5. Cultural discussion
	Ali	6. Textbook adhesiveness
		7. Skipping content
		8. Taciturnity

Improvisation. Teachers sometimes made use of some unexpected speech and action to teach a topic. Improvisation shows teachers converting impromptu situations into instructional episodes (see excerpt 1).

Excerpt 1:

Situations are impressive as they are parts of our life, they are more palpable, practical, and tangible than the textbook, and they create learning more easily as mentality evolves around them conveniently. I present new content on the basis of the structure of the book and students' needs. Teaching the standard textbook is easy but of no use. Accuracy, fluency, and normal speech are the goals. All the students should be involved. (Ahmad)

Ahmad's awareness of focusing on colloquial expressions intercommunicated in class, students' real-life topics, and impromptu class occurrences, such as sneezing or perspiring and rehearsing them, was indicative of his improvisation ability as SDPA capacity (excerpt 2).

Excerpt 2:

I tried to propose any attractive topic to avoid prosaic classes. (Ali)

In comparison with Ahmad, it rarely occurred to Ali to convert situations to educational topics.

Extension. Providing extension and supplementary explanations formed the extension code. Ahmad extended the sentences, asked the students to iterate them with substitute words, and provided explanations that were not the focus of their textbook (excerpt 3).

Excerpt 3:

It is for a better comprehension of the content and their fluency. Extra forms lead to ambiguity avoidance. (Ahmad)

Ahmad was aware of the purpose of extending the content, but that activity was not seen in Ali's classes.

Creation. Creating spaces for learners to ask questions not related to the lesson was categorized as creation (excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4:

I should eliminate their problems and provide them with information as a real source. In this way, they feel tranquil that they have someone who can guide them in a confident way. (Ahmad)

Ahmad's students frequently asked about the meaning of words and expressions not directly related to their class, and Ahmad made them crystal clear. Ahmad's sense of responsibility implied his SDPA capacity for creation.

Augmentation. Augmenting the content was the next category observed in Ahmad's classes. Confronting the word "best" in a conversation, he explained the comparative and superlative adjectives. To show the importance of pronunciation, he differentiated "sinking" from "thinking" as

determining one's life. Furthermore, he played songs from famous groups, such as Modern Talking, as additional content.

Cultural discussion. Some cultural topics not mentioned in the textbook were discussed by Ahmad (excerpt 5).

Excerpt 5:

I like them to learn the real language used by the Native Americans. Culture is intermingled with language. (Ahmad)

Ahmad expressed his interest in teaching cultures. Following casual class conversations, he discussed many Anglophone cultural notes, such as different ways of expressing congratulations.

Textbook adhesiveness. It means following the textbook instructions and content, as done by Ali (excerpt 6).

Excerpt 6:

This textbook is so well organized that it can be relied upon even if one doesn't know a particular method. (Ali)

Ali taught the textbook line by line, pursuing teacher guide instructions precisely. He never expanded the content and did not go beyond the textbook.

Skipping the content. It refers to skipping some parts of the content without paying heed to the details (excerpt 7).

Excerpt 7:

I generally teach words in sentences as they are accessible and easy. (Ali)

Ali not only refrained from expanding terms but also ignored some new vocabulary and did not clarify the meanings in some parts. The meanings of

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many words were skipped and not clarified by him. He did not offer synonyms.

Taciturnity. It refers to providing no adequate explanations for students as a negative self-directed action (excerpt 8).

Excerpt 8:

When they don't ask questions, the teacher teaches up to the optimal level, and if they don't raise questions, I skip. In Teacher Training classes, I learned the teaching stages of engagement, study, and activation. (Ali)

Students were thought to have difficulty understanding the meaning of words because the teacher barely explained them. In many sessions after teaching the lessons, Ali left the class, telling them to do the exercises while the students were still perplexed.

4.2 Affective TA

Table 4 presents codes for the participants' affective autonomy from humoring to indifference:

Table 4
Codes for Affective TA

Category	Participants	Codes
Affective TA	Both	1. Humoring
	Ahmad	2. Motivating
		3. Counseling
		4. Attention to Individuality and collectivity
		5. Insufficient student motivation
	Ali	6. Indifference

Humoring. Ahmad used humor, banter, and fun in teaching. The continual smiles on students' faces denoted that they were contented, satisfied, and attentive. He sometimes changed his accent or played the role of popular actors or characters. Excerpt 9 is revealing.

Excerpt 9:

Teasing helps them learn better. A qualified teacher should have a witty spirit and simultaneously be serious. (Ahmad)

By contrast, Ali rarely attempted to use fun in teaching. His remarks showed he was aware of the banter's role, but he hardly ever used that technique. This is informative of Ali's lack of humoring self-direction, while he had the capacity for it.

Motivating. It refers to the teachers' consideration of students' enthusiasm, incentive, and interest (excerpt 10).

Excerpt 10:

Teenagers keep updated about their common expressions. I indicate my respect for their ideology. (Ahmad)

Ahmad used culturally common teenage expressions with lament rhythm (e.g., "Don't toss us") or talked about their favorite topics (e.g., soccer teams). He took a film on his cellphone where the students repeated part of the lesson using appropriate rhythmic body movements. In some cases, he imitated the students' sluggish manner to help them be more alert (excerpt 11).

Excerpt 11:

I post it on my Instagram both to encourage them and to indicate their high quality. (Ahmad)

Counseling. It refers to the teacher's mental feedback, psychological counseling, soothing stress, and creating tranquility for students (excerpt 12).

Excerpt 12:

When the teacher becomes the counselor, the effectiveness of his speech is more persuasive than others. (Ahmad)

The teacher discussed competition in Iranian culture and compared individualistic and collectivist cultures. He talked about not engrossing themselves in unimportant affairs and about politeness and robustness.

Attention to individuality and collectivity. Ahmad paid attention to the feelings and behavior of individuals and the whole class. The teacher overheard a student who wanted to ask his friend about the time and announced the time loudly. He made emotional sentences (excerpt 13).

Excerpt 13:

If you missed me at home, just put your hands on your heart. (Ahmad)

Insufficient student motivation. Ali's motivating expressions were confined to topics about taking responsibility and how to sit in class; however, he thought there should be motivating and humanistic discussions in class (excerpt 14).

Excerpt 14:

I try to show them they are wrong. (Ali)

He mostly expected students to talk only about the speaking topics. He was asked: "Didn't you feel that here you were better to provide some examples?", and he said (see excerpt 15):

Excerpt 15:

I expected them to motivate me with their sentences. (Ali)

Indifference. It refers to expressing indifference about students' improvement, quarreling, and disputing. This is reflected in excerpt 16.

Excerpt 16:

Previously, I used to dispute and send them out of the class. Later, it brought difficulties for me on the side of the institute. Now I don't care whether they study or not. I leave them alone. (Ali)

Ali's tool for heightening the students' eagerness to learn was just getting good marks. His anger in class indicated his lack of affective control.

4.3 Evaluative TA

Table 5 displays the teachers' evaluative TA, including codes from test difficulty to every session quizzes.

Table 5
Codes for Evaluative TA

Category	Participants	Codes
Evaluative TA	Both	1. Test difficulty
		2. Indeterminate exam dates
	Ahmad	3. Test criteria
		4. Peer assessment
		5. Optional tasks
	Ali	6. Ready-made tests
		7. Every session quizzes

Test difficulty. It refers to composing difficult tests (excerpt 17). Both teachers' tests were so arduous that the students complained by saying "I know nothing, not easy, so hard." Students' interaction after a test demonstrated the ambiguity of the test directions, and the students lacked the nerve to ask about it.

Excerpt 17:

This has been a common problem all the time. You should translate and clarify questions for them because prior teachers have done so. (Ali)

Indeterminate exam dates. After saying that the class would have a midterm in the next session, Ahmad suspended that session without the test at the request of the students (excerpt 18). In other cases, he changed the sequence of the class activities following students' requests. Similarly, Ali frequently postponed examinations to the subsequent sessions.

Excerpt 18:

I sometimes change the exam times to help them study. (Ahmad)

Test criteria. It means determined but flexible assessment criteria. In response to a student who asked about the grades for the conversation part, Ahmad mentioned fluency, accuracy, performance, and mastery in all components and skills as the main criteria. However, his test questions for different terms varied, and sometimes there were no writing or reading sections in the tests.

Peer assessment. Ahmad inquired about the students' impressions of the quality of a student's performance (excerpt 19).

Excerpt 19:

The class is an entire whole, not just an exclusive teacher, I consider students' ideas in our work. (Ahmad)

Optional tasks. It means appointing optional tasks as part of the final assessment (excerpt 20).

Excerpt 20:

I convince them that class activities are the tests, and I remember their readiness. Every session is a test. (Ahmad)

Over the research period, Ahmad had various forms of assessment. In the first term, he just gave an oral exam. The following term, the assessment was conducted on the basis of role plays or representing lectures as part of the students' final exam.

Ready-made tests. It refers to the teachers' use of tests made by other teachers as a self-directed action. This is exemplified in excerpt 21.

Excerpt 21:

I prefer the institute to prepare the tests. Making listening tests is challenging for me. (Ali)

Ali usually did not compose tests; instead, he used other teachers' tests or the institute's test bank. His preference, as stated above, implies his low capacity for that action due to his lack of willingness, sense of responsibility, or ability. Sometimes, his tests did not include a skill like writing, so he added these sections on the board, an intolerable clumsiness.

Every session quizzes. Ali asked the students to be ready for written or oral quizzes every session.

4.4 Instructional TA

Table 6 presents the instructional TA and the emergent codes, ranging from students' participation to wrong suppositions.

Table 6
Codes for Instructional TA

Category	Participants	Codes
	Both	1. Students' participation 2. Role play
Instructional TA	Ahmad	3. Variation

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	4. Rhyming
	5. Over-repetition
Ali	6. Dispersion
	7. Individual feedback
	8. Monotonousness
	9. Imitation
	10. Extreme expectations
	11. Strong reasoning but poor practice
	12. Changing the teaching process
	13. Frequent use of the first language
	14. Wrong suppositions

Students' participation. It denotes students' active participation. Routinely, for Ahmad, when a student came to the front of the class, other students asked clamorously: *What are you gonna do?* S: *I'm gonna perform conversation 46.* Other students: *What is it about?* Ss: *Going on a trip.* An example is given in excerpt 22.

Excerpt 22:

I expect them to have interactions. Students handle the class; I talk less, and they talk more. (Ahmad)

Ahmad believed in peer learning where students learn from each other. He advised the learners to interact with others and ask them questions. Although, in some cases, Ali used physical movements to convey the meaning (e.g., how to pick up a car) when the students appeared inactive with no interest or enthusiasm (excerpt 23).

Excerpt 23:

The reason might be due to sleepiness or fatigue. (Ali)

Role play. When a student came in front of the class, the student played all the roles, taking turns and repositioning the roles. Then, Ahmad played various roles (excerpt 24). Ali used suitable multi-task movements to clarify the meaning of words (excerpt 25).

Excerpt 24:

I want to aggrandize their power and help their illustrative ability. (Ahmad)

Excerpt 25:

I got an acting mode. By the use of fun, I tried to avoid a monotonous class. (Ali)

Both teachers were aware of some purposes of the activity while Ahmad indicated more capacity for it.

Variation. It means using various methods of teaching grammar and variation in activities or changing the sequence of activities. Grammar was taught within a conversational framework both deductively and inductively by Ahmad (excerpt 26).

Excerpt 26:

I choose how to teach grammar with regard to students' needs and the situation. (Ahmad)

Variety created happiness and pleasure in Ahmad's class. He videoed the students who, one by one, applied changes to sentences and announced them loudly. When the students watched their film, they laughed. He first taught grammar, the textbook's second activity after the vocabulary part. Moreover, He informed students of learning strategies (see excerpt 27).

Excerpt 27:

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I usually ask them not to look too much to the book and try to use their memory to remember the content and trust themselves. (Ahmad)

Moreover, Ahmad knew strategies. He talked about short-term and long-term memory as an infrequent topic in language classes.

Rhyming. The content was taught with active body movements, facial expressions, and rhythmic expressions by Ahmad (excerpt 28).

Excerpt 28:

Rhythm is a paramount part of teaching, helping them remember lessons with pleasure, creating variety, and appeasing their fatigue. (Ahmad)

The students sang sentences tapping on their desks rhythmically, including rock and roll, dance, hip hop, mourning, etc.

Over-repetition. Over-repetition was an axiomatic characteristic of Ahmad's teaching procedures. Ahmad excessively reiterated expressions and sentences, and students repeated after him. He believed it would reinforce their concentration (excerpt 29).

Excerpt 29:

I get them involved in sweat studying, not getting blasé. (Ahmad)

Dispersion. It implies simplification in teaching vocabulary (excerpt 30).

Excerpt 30:

I have not taught vocabulary in a comprehensive way because I didn't know. (Ali)

There was no classification or logic in his teaching vocabulary, which was taught accidentally and randomly. He rarely used the board. Not discussing a comprehensive set of synonyms or antonyms, in response to students' questions about the meaning of new words, he used oversimplified sentences or equivalents.

Individual feedback. It refers to the teacher's limited reaction. Ali replied to the students' questions individually, not addressing the whole class (excerpt 31).

Excerpt 31:

I just explain the important parts. (Ali)

Ali supported individual students. Following the textbook instructions, Ali helped every student to answer the questions. However, facilitating learning was not accompanied by motivating the students' interest, simplifying the task, helping them achieve goals, or reducing frustration. He just corrected grammatical and vocabulary errors.

Monotonousness. Ali used monotonous and unchangeable teaching methods. He started all sessions by playing the listening audio, just playing the tracks many times without pausing or analyzing the content. He always taught grammar deductively. Then he put all the explanations in Persian (excerpt 32).

Excerpt 32:

I am not experienced. The manager asked me to focus on listening, and I did so. I preferred to be told how to teach. I have decided to pass a TTC. I try to prepare their mind before the examples. (Ali)

He referred to the guidelines imposed by the institute, showing his awareness and willingness for SDPA capacity.

Imitation. It means imitating other teachers. Ali began to ask students to repeat words and expressions with various accents (see excerpt 33).

Excerpt 33:

As I saw my colleague, as a successful teacher, has done that, I followed him. (Ali)

Extreme expectation. Ali expected the students to prepare the lessons at home and memorize all the vocabulary components. In one session, he only commenced teaching in the last 15 minutes. In one case, he expected them to do the reading exercises without teaching the text. This shows that he did not have awareness of the pre-study concept (excerpt 34).

Excerpt 34:

They should have pre-study. (Ali)

Strong reasoning but poor practice. Ali taught line by line from the book and did not go beyond its instructions. However, theoretically, he justified his teaching well (excerpt 35).

Excerpt 35:

I teach according to E (Engagement), S (study: focus & practice), and A (activation). (Ali)

Changing the teaching practice. Over the course of time (from the middle of the study to the end), Ali's teaching process showed a progressive upward trend and moved away from obvious shortcomings (excerpt 36).

Excerpt 36:

Now I'm noticing my obvious mistakes. First, we have SP (study practice) and then SF (focus study). In TTC, I learned to lower TTT (teacher's talking time) and increase STT. Now I know the role of my movements. I studied the book "How to Teach English." Now I pause the listening tracks and ask them questions about the pictures. (Ali)

This might have been due to his teacher development plans, like participating in teacher training courses or observing other classes. Ali cared more about student participation, grouping, body movements, and role play. During the last few sessions, he summarized the lessons with perfect body movements. The last few sessions exhibited more active use of the whiteboard. Furthermore, he started relating the speaking topics to the students' real lives.

Using the first language. In response to his reason for frequently using Persian, Ali assumed (see excerpt 37):

Excerpt 37:

It occurs unconsciously. I make real gaffes, and I don't like it. (Ali)

This indicates his lack of cognitive control as he could not vary his behavior depending on the goals from moment to moment.

Wrong suppositions. While teaching the difference between the meaning of *observe*, *see*, *look*, and *watch*, he drew on wrong suppositions about these verbs. He transmitted these suppositions based on his own conjecture. This can be found in excerpt 38.

Excerpt 38:

Sometimes I am not sure whether to say something or not. I made a lot of slips.

The uncertainty in his decision making implies a lack of cognitive control in that action.

4.5 Disciplinary TA

Table 7 displays the disciplinary TA codes, ranging from teachers' unexpected behaviors to unpunctuality.

Table 7
Codes for Disciplinary TA

Category	Participants	Codes
	Both	1. Teacher's unexpected behaviors 2. Unfair bias

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Disciplinary TA	Ahmad	3. Lack of time management
	Ali	4. Unpreparedness
		5. Unpunctuality

Teacher's unexpected behavior. Teachers exhibited behaviors such as not being on time, leaving the class, and answering cellphones in class. Ahmad usually arrived late at the institute. He justified his lack of punctuality in this way (see excerpt 39):

Excerpt 39:

The quality is more important than the quantity. (Ahmad)

In many cases, he answered his cellphone calls, worked on his laptop, and made the final test during class time while leaving the students without classwork or activities; he explained (see excerpt 40):

Excerpt 40:

The reason was the fact that I was so busy and had no time to do that. (Ahmad)

Ali frequently asked students to do a task and left the classroom. At the beginning of the session, he was looking for his flash, studying his papers. During the semesters, there were times of silence without any activities. Break times and times to perform exercises were occasionally done without his presence. He was yawning many times, showing no stamina or energy. He asked students to do workbook exercises during the class time (excerpt 41).

Excerpt 41:

I was getting prepared, and I accept that it was a little bit aberrant...I answered my cellphone as it was emergency. (Ali)

Unfair bias. It means a negative bias against a single student. It was frequently observed that Ahmad was inclined to discriminate against a student who was weak in English. On many other occasions, he showed his nervousness and aversion toward the weaker student (excerpt 42).

Excerpt 42:

Yeah... If I had said that to a wall, he would have learned it. He does not use his head. (Ahmad)

Ali expressed his lack of interest in a student many times (excerpt 43).

Excerpt 43:

Everyone who sits beside him would collapse. (Ali)

Lack of time management. The dull and slow teaching speed in reaching the identified goals determined by the syllabus was quite apparent in Ahmad's classes. Students and parents often complained to the manager about not finishing the textbook. This is evident from excerpt 44.

Excerpt 44:

Sometimes we should focus more on parts of a lesson. I work a little below the standards...The purpose is learning. (Ahmad)

Unpreparedness. Ali sometimes showed defective pedagogical performance.

Unpunctuality. Ali did not pay attention to students' punctuality. He was frequently indifferent to students' tardiness. Occasionally, he asked, "Why so late?" but generally, students took their seats without any reaction, and the class continued without any pause.

All in all, the codes extracted from the observations indicate the teachers' self-directed teaching. The excerpts from SRIs manifest their SDPA capacity. Indicators of SDPA capacity in teachers' speech were ability, awareness, sense of responsibility, affective and psychological control, interest, willingness, and knowledge about their self-directed teaching (SDPA).

5. Discussion

In this study, TA was investigated based on Smith's (2003) model with regard to teaching experience. Data from the audio-visual observations of classes accompanied by SRIs revealed that, in terms of freedom from control, the novice and experienced teachers showed divergence regarding their capacity and self-direction for professional action. Considering a curricular perspective, the experienced teacher showed the capacity for transformation, transposition, or re-contextualization by broadly converting the situations to benefit the instruction of topics, called content adjustment to a different context or practice by Christiansen et al. (2019). The novice teacher did not exhibit such actions or willingness to create spaces for curricular adaptations. Taking into account Levi's (2016) four curricular orientations of philosophical and epistemological paradigms, Ahmad provided extension and supplementary explanations, created spaces for learners to ask questions irrelevant to the lesson, and augmented the content. On the contrary, Ali's instruction included following the textbook instructions and content (textbook adhesiveness), skipping the content, and not providing adequate explanations. That would lead the two participants to be placed around the following spots on the curriculum spectrum (Figure 1):

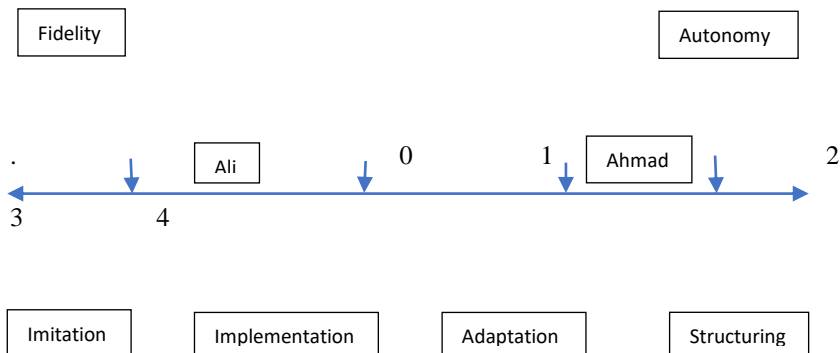


Figure 1 Teachers' status on Levi's spectrum of curricular orientations.

The extracted codes and categories show the experienced teacher to be more autonomous and the novice one to be less autonomous on the curricular continuum. Ahmad's higher SDPA capacity with respect to the curriculum, in

contrast with Ali's lower capacity, is in line with evidence proposed by Burkhauser and Lesaux (2015), implying that experienced teachers' greater capabilities in adapting materials to satisfy instructional targets yielded theory-based reforms. The experienced teacher's use of professional judgment in choosing the modes and means of teaching to satisfy students' needs corroborates current education theories, redefining and extending educators' space for applying self-direction (Bakken, 2019). His deviations from the textbook concur well with Bakken's discourse position promoting teachers' freedom of choice in choosing texts and TA. At the same time, Ali's discursive practices of limiting his SDPA are more similar to the position that views textbooks as an authoritative source. While Ahmad's self-direction to use driving forces (e.g., impromptu situations, his own and students' interests) is due to his self-direction capacity in curricular choices, it also substantiates Darragh and Boyd's (2018) findings on experienced teachers; however, Ali's fewer adaptations in text-selection contradicts their findings about novice teachers who desired more autonomy wishing to be afforded opportunities to change the set curriculum. The other code relevant to the educational content was teaching culture. Ladson-Billing's (as cited in Sisson et al., 2020) three criteria for culturally related teaching include the willingness to support and nurture cultural competence, the ability to improve learners academically, and the development of critical or socio-political consciousness. Unlike Ali, Ahmad incorporated teaching culture except for the third criterion, revealing that the experienced teacher was more autonomous.

With regard to the affective category related to emotional and mental conditions, Ahmad's SDPA and SDPA capacity were represented by using humor, banter, and fun in teaching, and personalization in activities, situations, and expressions. On the contrary, Ali's expressions indicated his awareness of the prominent role of humor in affecting diverse behaviors from the relationships that teachers set up with learners to the consideration of their personal characteristics (Aşılıoğlu, 2021); however, no humor style was observed in his classes. Therefore, although Ali did not show SDPA for humor, he indicated a capacity for it. Ahmad's SDPA implied his consideration of students' enthusiasm, incentive, and interest, and student encouragement, counseling, and attention to individuality and collectivity, which differed from Ali's cynical echo of criticizing insufficient student

motivation and expressing indifference about students' improvement, quarreling, and disputing. Ali even expected to receive motivation from the students. Ahmad's affective approach (his crucial caring and mental support for fostering students' motivation and engagement and expressing affection) parallels Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory (SDT) of an individual's three psychological and universal needs of autonomy (feeling self-endorsed and self-governed), competence (effective and competent), and relatedness (feeling loved, interacted, connected). This suggests that Ahmad tried to fulfill the students' psychological needs. On the contrary, Ali's distressing performance did not align with fulfilling the three key psychological needs, implying a lower SDPA and less SDPA capacity since he did not express any willingness to act in this manner.

Both the novice and experienced teachers' difficult tests and indeterminate exam tests generated an atmosphere of negotiations of injustice and distrust. While both teachers had freedom from control, they did not reveal a commitment to evaluative rules and criteria. According to Christiansen et al. (2019), the two descriptions of a desired teacher are the "technician," enacting the predefined measurements, and the "reflective practitioner," who is autonomous and engages in professional judgments on the bases of class dynamics; both teachers fall in between, requiring more supervision on assessment. As an experienced teacher, Ahmad revealed self-direction on determined but flexible assessment criteria, peer assessment, and assignment of optional tasks as part of the final assessment, whereas Ali's every session quizzes imply personal spaces to maneuver. Finally, Ali's use of tests made by other teachers and ready-made tests and his disinclination to prepare complete tests indicate his lower SDPA, which lends support to Sevimel-Sahin's (2020) findings that novice teachers had difficulties applying their tests due to teaching context or local needs.

In terms of the extracted instructional category and the related codes, both teachers used the role-play activity. However, Ahmad manifested more SDPA capacity for it. Ahmad's peer learning, using various methods of teaching grammar, variation in activities or changing the sequence of activities, informing students of learning strategies, rhyming the content with active body and facial movements, and over-repetitions were indicators of his

high capacity for self-direction toward professional action. On the other hand, Ali's inactive students' participation, dispersion, simplification in teaching vocabulary, and limited reaction to students' questions revealed weaknesses in his self-direction. These findings support Bier's (2016) report that experienced teachers are more methodologically attentive than novice teachers. The results are also consistent with Mukundan et al.'s (2020) research in which experienced teachers regarded the use of songs and rhymes to have a considerable effect on learning, highlighting Underhill's (as cited in Mukundan et al., 2020, p. 204) statement that he "cannot separate jazz improvisation from his development as a teacher."

His imitating other teachers indicated Ali had the capacity for self-direction, but his monotonous and unchangeable teaching method shows that his self-direction was not directing him toward professional action. Ali's self-study expectation, his frequent use of his first language, and his wrong suppositions were indicative of his low SDPA as his exclusive actions in the instructional domain show he needed teaching guidelines. His powerful theories but weak practice and changing teaching processes indicated he had the SDPA capacity to improve in putting theories into practice. Ali's reshaping of teaching experience after encountering variant contextual realities resonates with Huang et al.'s (2019) study, indicating the novice teacher's identity formation with changes in a positive direction. This also agrees with Daniels's (2017) finding that a sense of autonomy increases participating teachers' inclination to further improve their skills and develop their competence. Furthermore, the findings corroborate Erss's (2018) assertion within Wermke and Höstfält's (2013) perspective of service autonomy that experienced teachers' options and choices in classrooms can be trusted more than those of the novice teacher. Finally with respect to disciplinary TA, while both teachers had freedom, they revealed anomalous actions deviating from the norms. They exhibited unexpected behavior (wasting time, leaving the class, answering a cellphone in class, etc.) and negative bias toward a single student. In particular, Ahmad's lack of time management and Ali's wasting time and procrastinating, unpreparedness, and unpunctuality indicate a lower capacity for self-direction and the need for more control in terms of disciplinary actions.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this case study was to clarify differences in autonomy between two Iranian male teachers, one novice and one experienced, utilizing Smith's (2003) framework of TA. The framework consists of three concepts: SDPA, SDPA capacity, and freedom from control. Observations and SRIs analysis led to the extraction of categories and codes that evidenced discrepancies in their autonomy within five major categories: curricular, affective, evaluative, instructional, and disciplinary TA. As to freedom from control regarding context and regulation, both teachers indicated the need for supervision and guidelines in particular domains. The experienced teacher's high SDPA capacity in curricular, affective, and instructional TA can be seen in his ability to direct his self-direction toward professional action. However, his low SDPA and SDPA capacity (following his unwillingness) in some sub-components of evaluative TA (difficult tests) and disciplinary TA domains (unexpected behaviors, lack of time management, and unfair bias) illustrate the need for more supervision and control from supervisors or managers to attend to teacher education plans. On the other hand, although the novice teacher demonstrated SDPA capacity in limited domains, his low or limited SDPA and SDPA capacity in approximately all five TA domains indicate his need for more precise rules, guidelines, and instructions. It can be concluded that the experienced teacher's options and choices in the classroom can be trusted more than those of the novice teacher.

These findings have pedagogical implications for teacher autonomy. First, in teacher education programs, by discussing the major categories of TA conceptualization, teachers' self-directed teaching actions, and their SDPA capacity, educators could help teachers reflect on their actions and improve their teaching quality. Teacher educators can help teachers increase their TA capacity by developing skills and awareness and promoting willingness, interest, and a sense of responsibility for SDPA. In the Iranian context, where EFL institutes mainly follow decentralized educational systems, teachers need to receive theoretical and practical education to balance control and autonomy. Second, institute managers can define their desired standards and constraints through the study framework for experienced and novice teachers according to their performance. They may determine the degrees of teachers' TA to decide on required legitimization, regulations, prescriptions, and plans

to control additional authority, with a balanced amount of autonomy. Third, the institute supervisors may observe the classes in terms of TA using benchmarks, including the TA categories and codes in the study. Moreover, policy makers may consider instructions (e.g., in textbooks or tests) for every TA domain in view of their purposive aims and standardization for professional outcomes.

The study had some limitations. First, the findings were dependent upon the particular context of one language institute in a specific geographical setting. In future studies, the domain of context could be expanded by incorporating more institutes or other educational centers like schools. Next, there were just two participants in this longitudinal case study. An increase in the number of participants would help gather richer data. Moreover, our data collection procedure was limited to observation and SRIs. The data could be further triangulated by the use of other data collection methods such as teacher diaries. Finally, TA was studied as a separate construct. Considering its overlap with other variables, it could be analyzed in relation to teachers' agency, identity, motivation, and students' educational outcomes.

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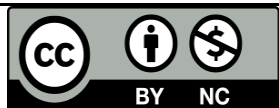
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