Teacher Autonomy for Professional Development: A Longitudinal Case Study of Novice EFL Teachers

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Abstract

Despite many studies on teacher autonomy (TA) and its connection with learner autonomy (LA), scant attention has been devoted to TA on its own and how it might contribute to teachers themselves. Against this backdrop, the current study set out to investigate novice English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' autonomy development in terms of their self-directed professional development (PD) and capacity for their self-directed PD, the two subcomponents of the multidimensional framework of TA. To this end, two novice EFL teachers' audio diaries on the aforementioned subcomponents were collected for 10 months. Moreover, to complement the probable gaps in the diary phase, the teachers were interviewed in five terms. The thematic analysis of the collected diaries and diary-based semi-structured interviews revealed that novice EFL teachers' main activities for self-directed PD embraced peer observation, peer coaching, reading books, making use of technology, reflection, action research, and attending workshops. Additionally, the findings indicated that novice EFL teachers were equipped with both capacity and willingness to self-direct their PD. The constructive factors enabling them to develop such capacity included experience, reading books, and external support. The findings bear implications for teacher educators to underline the value of PD strategies for teachers. Teachers should also be aware of the PD strategies they could employ for their self-direction. The findings suggest some implication for institute managers too.

Keywords: teacher autonomy, professional development, self-directed professional development, diary

1. Introduction

The history of teacher autonomy (TA) commenced with Little's (1995) argumentation that learning strategies and learner training do not suffice to foster learner autonomy (LA) and that the teachers' role is of greater value in the development of LA. Following this commentary, many turned into TA to scrutinize how it promotes LA (e.g., Basri, 2020; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2017; Phan & Hamid, 2016). The field experienced a broader view of TA when McGrath (2000) put forward a different definition of the construct, independent of LA, embracing "teacher autonomy as self-directed professional action" (p. 109) or "development" (p. 100), and "teacher autonomy as freedom from control by others" (p. 101). Smith (2003) went further and expanded McGrath's illustration to bring forward a six-component framework of TA encompassing "self-directed professional action" and "self-directed professional development" (p. 4), each embracing three subcomponents. In this conceptualization, he not only referred to TA on its own without establishing any link with LA, but also took into account all its three dimensions, i.e., psychological, technical, and political. Additionally, he incorporated the term teacher-learner autonomy in his new framework in order to highlight teachers' self-direction in their teacher learning (TL). Smith and Erdoğan (2008) argued that teacher-learner autonomy should be incorporated into teacher education programs so as to promote TA and self-directed PD among teachers. Xu (2015) shared the same idea with them and proclaimed that TA is related to teacher PD. Teng (2020) also spotlighted the non-questionable importance of self-directed PD for teachers themselves. Likewise, Smith (2017) posited that when a teacher's capacity to experience TL is taken into account, the teacher may take responsibility for his own learning and consequently develop professionally.

Many investigators have recently been turned to TA (e.g., Han, 2020; Kaplan, 2017). Most of these studies, though, have addressed the relationship between TA and LA to explore how the former can be beneficial in the development of the latter (Rashidi & Mohammadineku, 2015; Wang & Ryan, 2020). Furthermore, many of the arguments on TA dealt with the political dimension of the concept (Benson, 2010; Erss, 2018), ignoring its psychological and technical aspects. Moreover, studies concentrating on how TA can contribute to teachers themselves are rather scarce. Therefore, a study on TA itself while taking into account its disregarded dimensions is necessitated. To bridge this gap, this study set out to explore novice EFL teachers' autonomy development longitudinally in terms of their self-directed PD and capacity for self-directed PD.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Professional Development

The vital role of teacher PD in the language teaching profession is confirmed by a quick look at the rich literature on the concept (e.g., Borg, 2018; Haapaniemi et al. 2021). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) propounded that constructive PD is necessitated to help teachers not only learn but also refine

knowledge. Referring to PD as TL, they unraveled incorporating external support, collaboration, active learning, and reflection as the prominent elements of an effectual PD. Borg (2018), similarly, highlighted the prominent role of PD for teachers and the profound influence it exerts on their sense of satisfaction, knowledge, beliefs, and teaching practice. Kyndt et al. (2016), likewise, uncovered several sources of PD, embracing experiential learning, collaborative learning, peer observation, reading books, reflection, and technology use.

A line of research has been conducted to discover teachers' PD strategies. Mahmoudi and Özkan (2015) ran a study to determine the strategies novice and experienced teachers employ for their PD. To do so, they administered a questionnaire among 60 teachers and then interviewed 12 of them. Data analysis revealed that whereas experienced teachers employed peer observation, peer coaching, reading articles, attending conferences, and observational visits to other schools, novices tended to attend workshops, read articles, and do peer coaching. Badri et al. (2016) investigated teachers' most favored PD activities. To this end, they used a questionnaire followed by focus group interviews. The results indicated that teachers' PD strategies included attending workshops, observational visits to other institutes, training courses, continuing education, action research, and peer coaching. Soodmand Afshar and Ghasemi (2018) utilized their own validated questionnaire and an interview to examine teachers' PD strategies. The findings related to the questionnaire indicated that the teachers were aware of the advantages of PD strategies and the interview yielded that they favored collaborative PD activities.

Some have investigated how different PD programs would affect teachers. Santos and Miguel (2016) scrutinized the effects of peer observation on teachers' PD. To this end, they interviewed six teachers and found out that despite their appreciation of peer observation, they tended to implement this PD strategy when they were pressurized to do it by the school authority. Bell and Mladenovic (2015), similarly, ran a longitudinal study to uncover how teachers took advantage of peer observation. To collect data, they utilized peer observation, self-monitoring, questionnaire, and interviews. The findings indicated that peer observation not only resulted in teacher PD, but also led to reflection. Concerning reflection itself, Moslehi and Salehi (2021) scrutinized the connection between reflection and TA. Data analysis of their questionnaire revealed a positive relationship between teachers' reflection and their autonomy. In another study, Carpenter (2015) examined the effects of technology use on 20 teachers and found out although the majority of teachers valued Twitter as a source for their TL, they stopped pursuing it due to their lack of time. Similarly, Davis (2015) conducted a study to determine the effects of technology, particularly Twitter, on teachers' PD. To this end, 19 school teachers who were exposed to Tweet data for three months were interviewed. Thematic analysis revealed that using Twitter can be placed among PD strategies as it brought about meaningful TL. Moreover, Twitter provided the teachers with the option of self-selecting the domains in which they tended to do TL. Finally, Rosell-Aguilar (2018) scrutinized how teachers evaluated using technology as their PD strategy. Data analysis of the questionnaire and interview data revealed that the teachers benefited from this PD practice and tended to implement it for their PD.

A few researchers have studied the factors enabling teachers to do TL. Shabani (2016) found that TL happens in collaboration where teachers can be provided with other-regulation. Salehizadeh et al. (2020) also mentioned autonomy as a key component of TL among Iranian in EFL teachers. Kyndt et al. (2016) viewed teachers' willingness as the core factor enabling teachers to do TL. Likewise, Van den Bergh et al. (2015) study with two novice teachers to uncover the characteristics of teachers' PD indicated that both teachers had willingness to regulate their learning. However, they differed in terms of the external support they needed to afford them the capability to self-direct their PD. Haapaniemi et al.'s (2021) case study with five teachers from three schools uncovered colleagues' support as a factor helping teachers to pursue their PD.

2.2. Teacher Autonomy

Being the first to illustrate TA, Little (1995) defined it in terms of the role it plays in LA growth. McGrath (2000) referred to TA as comprising "self-directed professional action" (p. 109) or "development" (p. 100), and "freedom from control by others" (p. 101). Considering all the three dimensions of TA and differentiating between action and development, Smith (2003) unpacked McGrath's classification and proposed a multidimensional view of the attribute encompassing "professional action" and "professional development" (p. 4). Professional action includes self-directed professional action, capacity for professional action, and freedom for professional action whereas PD deals with self-directed PD, capacity for self-directed PD, and freedom for self-directed PD. Smith and Erdoğan (2008, pp. 84-85) elaborated that professional activity is related to teaching itself while PD is relevant to TL, a teacher's attempt to self-direct her learning. Consequently, they defined self-directed professional action as "self-directed teaching" and self-directed PD as "self-directed teacher learning". Moreover, they discussed that capacity for self-directed professional action equates "teacher autonomy (capacity to self-direct one's teaching)" while capacity for self-directed PD equals "teacher-learner autonomy (capacity to self-direct one's learning as a teacher)". Freedom from control over professional action and development are identical to "teacher autonomy (freedom to self-direct one's teaching)" and "teacher-learner autonomy (freedom to self-direct one's learning as a teacher)", respectively. Dikilitaş and Mumford (2019), however, argued that autonomy is multi- layered, comprising of motivation, agency, and identity.

A line of research has been carried out to investigate the relationship between TA and PD activities. Banegas et al. (2013) conducted a study to find out the effects of action research on TA. To this end, they collected data through recorded meetings, interviews, classroom observations, and field notes. Content analysis revealed that action research enhanced TA and therefore led to PD. Wang and Zhang (2014) studied the ways teachers develop autonomy in a teachers-as-researchers project. The collaboration between university teachers and English language teachers commenced with some workshops followed by some discussion sessions on the emerging issues. The results indicated the impact of action research on the participants' both PD and autonomy. Dikilitaş and Mumford (2019) investigated the effect of reading

on TA. To this end, they used a think-aloud protocol and focus group discussions to collect data from 11 teachers. Data analysis indicated that reading resulted in both TA development and motivation enhancement.

A body of research has scrutinized teachers' perceptions of their autonomy. Erss (2018) interviewed German, Finnish, and Estonian teachers to uncover their beliefs regarding their TA. After data analysis, he concluded that the education system of the countries constrained teachers' autonomy. Likewise, Salokangas, et al. (2020) scrutinized how teachers' perceptions about their autonomy differed in Ireland and Finland.

Data analysis of the interviews revealed that Finnish teachers had high levels of autonomy in educational, social, and development decisions while Irish teachers had autonomy in educational and social decisions. Eventually, they highlighted the role of the education context as a factor inhibiting TA. Cirocki and Anam (2021) ran a mixed-methods study on Indonesian teachers' beliefs about their autonomy. Data analysis indicated that while the teachers had high autonomy at classroom level, they had scarce autonomy at the school level. Moreover, the teachers were found to need more support with respect to their PD.

Despite many studies on TA, those concentrating on TA itself in terms of teachers' PD are rather scarce. Moreover, technical and psychological dimensions of TA have been somehow unexplored as many have dealt with its political dimension merely. Additionally, few studies have investigated novice EFL teachers' autonomy development longitudinally. Against this backdrop, Smith (2003) conceptualization of TA was adopted as it deals with all dimensions of TA. Nevertheless, to have an in-depth view of the concept, two subcomponents from the second component of his framework, i.e., self-direction and capacity for PD were studied. Consequently, the following research questions were raised:

(1) How do novice EFL teachers develop their autonomy in terms of their self-directed professional development longitudinally?

(2) How do novice EFL teachers develop their autonomy in terms of their capacity for self- directed professional development?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

To select the participants, convenience and purposive samplings (Riazi, 2016) were applied. In terms of convenience sampling, the participants were chosen based on their availability and on a voluntary basis. Regarding purposive sampling, to be relevant to the research questions, the participants were novice EFL teachers with less than two years of teaching experience (Gatbonton, 2008). The first author texted eight novice EFL teachers and invited them to join the study. The two novice EFL teachers who accepted the invitation were invited to the first author's office individually. There, they were not only briefed on self-direction and capacity for PD but also asked to reflect on the aforementioned components and send their audio diaries once a week through WhatsApp. For the interview phase, both teachers were interviewed during five terms to complement the probable gaps in the journal phase.

The teachers under the pseudonyms of Mobina and Azam were females. Mobina, was an eighteen-year-old B.A. student of English Translation in Islamic Azad University. Before being accepted in university, she had passed an IELTS exam with the band score of 7. Additionally, at the time of the study, she had a six-month teaching experience in language institutes. Azam was 41 who had a B.S. in Physics from Islamic Azad University. Eleven years after receiving her B.S., she changed her major and studied TEFL in State University as she was very keen on English. She had been teaching English in language institutes for 5 months.

3.2. Instrumentation

The instruments used in the current study were diaries and interviews. The interviews were conducted to complement the probable gaps in the journals.

3.2.1. Audio Diary

Diaries, also referred to as diaries, are case studies in which teachers keep diaries over a period of time (Mckay, 2009). Conducting more diary studies has been recommended by Mckay (2009) as she believed they might unravel factors which have not been recognized by the researchers themselves before. In the current study, audio diaries were utilized to scrutinize how novice EFL teachers develop autonomy for their PD. To this end, two novice EFL teachers were asked to reflect on their autonomy in terms of two subcomponents of R. C. Smith's (2003) framework of TA, i.e., self-directed PD and capacity for self-directed PD, once a week. Each teacher had provided us with 40 oral diaries collected during five terms, each lasting two months. Overall, it took 10 months (40 weeks), to collect the diaries. Moreover, the diaries were in teachers' native language, Persian, and each diary lasted 20 to 35 minutes.

3.2.2. Diary-based Semi-structured Interview

Semi-structured one was used as it draws to some extent on both structured and open interviews (Richards, 2009). In the current study, diary-based semi-structured interviews were conducted at the end of every term, five times for each participant to complement the probable gaps in the diary phase. Therefore, two interview guides (Richards, 2009), each based on each novice EFL teacher's diaries collected during an eight-week term, were prepared. The three authors met numerous sessions to decide on the type and content of the key questions to be embedded in these interviews. Two experts in the field were also asked to check the final questions to ensure the validity of the questions. Being conducted in Persian, each interview with each teacher lasted nearly one hour.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

To collect data, eight novice EFL teachers were invited to participate. To address the ethical issues (Riazi, 2016), they were provided with the full information about the purpose, duration, and the

procedures of the study. Moreover, they were briefed that their privacy would be kept secret and the data would be used for research purposes only. After obtaining the two novice EFL teachers' informed and voluntary consents to participate in the study, they were invited to the first author's office individually.

There, they were fully briefed on the two aforementioned subcomponents from Smith's (2003) framework, on which they had to reflect. Furthermore, they were told to send their audio diaries through WhatsApp every week. The collected diaries were transcribed for further reflection and analysis as soon as they were received. In the interview phase, each of the novice EFL teachers was interviewed during five terms. Therefore, two different interview guides based on the collected diaries of each individual novice EFL teacher were prepared every term in order to be used in the interviews. Eventually, all the recorded interviews were transcribed for further analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis

To answer both research questions, the transcriptions of all the collected audio diaries and the diary-based semi-structured interviews related to each research question went through the six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). In the first step, the first author read and reread the data in order to be familiarized with every single word exchanged between her and the participants.

Moreover, she also took notes to develop potential codes. In the second step, she reduced meaningful segments of data into codes and assigned labels to them. For example, analyzing a diary related to the first research question led to the following codes: (a) deciding to solve a problem; (b) preparing a list of solutions; (c) applying the solutions; and (d) observing the results. In the next phase, she constantly compared and contrasted the codes to form potential themes. In the fourth step, she reviewed the initial themes against the coded data and the entire data set and, in turn, discarded, refined, or merged some themes. In the fifth level, she defined and named the final theme; for example, the aforementioned codes were named "action research". Before the sixth stage, member checking (Riazi, 2016) was employed. To do so, the data produced by each participant along with the researchers' interpretations of the data were sent to the participants to be checked by them too. All the participants confirmed there was no error in the data interpretation and no change was applied accordingly. Eventually, in the last stage of thematic analysis, the final report was written. It is worth noting that as the six stages were cyclical, the first author constantly moved back and forth through the stages to ensure about the consistency and dependability of the extracted themes.

4. Findings

4.1. Self-directed Professional Development

To answer the first research question regarding novice EFL teachers' autonomy development in terms of their self-directed PD, the related diaries and interviews went subjected to the procedure of

thematic analysis. This analysis revealed that Mobina implemented peer observation, did peer coaching, read books, made use of technology, and conducted reflection. In a similar vein, Azam employed peer coaching, read books, made use of technology, conducted reflection, did action research, and attended workshops. In what follows, the extracted themes, peer observation, peer coaching, reading books, making use of technology, reflection, action research, and attending workshops, are reported.

Peer Observation

Peer observation refers to a session during which the teacher observed her colleagues' classes in order to learn from them. As Mobina's favorite strategy to self-directed her PD, she commenced peer observation voluntarily from the outset of data collection. Although at that time she was teaching children, she observed both children and adult classes as she believed she "*would learn something from each of them*". In her second diary, she reported her experience of TL this way.

I observed a class, what really attracted my attention was error correction. The teacher didn't interrupt the learners in the speaking part of the class. Instead, she jotted down their mistakes and when their speaking was finished, she wrote them on the board and corrected them with the learners themselves. I like observation because I can see the exact procedure of a technique. This way I learn it by heart. [Mobina, Week 2]

As the above excerpt reveals, observing her colleague's class taught her new things about "*error correction*". Moreover, she appreciated the fact that peer observation would provide her with "*the exact procedure of a technique*", and therefore would result in TL "*by heart*". During the study, peer observations taught her many instructional lessons including the use of textbooks, class management, time management, pair work, and group work, to name a few. It should be noted that while Mobina relied on peer observation from the first weeks of the study, Azam couldn't implement this strategy as it was not allowed in the institutes where she worked.

Peer Coaching

Peer coaching embraces seeking the assistance of a peer in order to do TL. It was both teachers' most favorite PD strategy. In week 7, for example, peer coaching resulted in TL for Azam this way.

I have a private class with two teenagers whose speaking skills are not at an acceptable level. In the break, I spoke about it with my colleague. She proposed some good ideas regarding some interesting topics for teenagers. She also taught some techniques to improve learners' speaking. I liked that short discussion with her. I learned useful things. This makes me feel happy and somehow secure. [Azam, Week 7]

Here, Azam's peer coaching with her "*colleague*" resulted in TL. She learn not only about "*interesting topics for teenagers*", but also "*some techniques to improve learners' speaking*". Moreover, she argued that TL through "*short discussion*" made her feel "*happy*" and "*secure*".

Unlike Azam, who did peer coaching face to face only, Mobina employed this strategy online and on the phone too. Moreover, Mobina did not implement peer coaching with her supervisor as she was *"too busy" to* answer Mobina's *"questions"*. In week 34, for example, she called her ex-teacher and did TL.

I had a demo in an institute. I had it once before but I was not satisfied with that. So because I wanted to learn more about it, I called my ex-teacher. She is so helpful, I sometimes consult with her in WhatsApp too. You know, I prefer to speak with her because my own supervisor is too busy and has no time to answer my questions. Anyway, she thoroughly explained what would happen in a demo session. When she was explaining, it was like a review of the teaching techniques for me. Also I learned some techniques I did not know about before. [Mobina, Week 34]

Here, Mobina consulted her teacher on the phone to *"learn more about"* a *"demo session"*. To this end, she chose to call her teacher as they lived in different cities and she could not see her face to face. During the peer coaching session, while her teacher was elucidating a demo session, she found herself to be equipped with *"a review of the teaching techniques"*.
Furthermore, such clarifications taught her "*some techniques*" to which she had not been exposed before.

Reading Books

This theme refers to teachers' engagement in reading electronic or printed books. It was pursued by both teachers nearly every other week. Regarding this, Mobina stated:

I think teachers' book is one of the valuable books. Because it is to the point and it provides you with the exact knowledge you need. Reading this book taught me how to be a creative teacher. [Mobina, Week 28]

Here, Mobina clearly referred to books, particularly *"teachers' book"* as a *"valuable"* source which equipped her *"with the exact knowledge"* she needed. Furthermore, she maintained that she had experienced TL for being a *"creative teacher"* through the application of this strategy.
For Azam, reading a book made her report her TL this way:

I bought a book to improve my English. I think as a teacher I have to update my own knowledge too. I want to improve my knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. When I read books about General English, I feel more secure and motivated. [Azam, Week 21]

As the excerpt reveals, Azam decided to *"improve"* her "knowledge of *vocabulary and grammar*" through reading books. She argued that application of this strategy made her feel both *"more secure and motivated"* as she could *"update"* her knowledge.

Making Use of Technology

Technology use, which involved making use of Google and social media, was Mobina's first resort to self-direct her PD:

The first thing I do is searching the Net, by just a click you have access to anything you need. This week I searched how to teach children and I found some hints. I appreciate technology as it is available all

the time. And when I am searching the net, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media, I am exposed to many other things. I mean, I was searching about teaching grammar but I learned about many other things. Moreover, you can read the comments other teachers left under the posts too as some of them complement the posts and help you learn them better. Of course, this option is available in Instagram only. [Mobina, Week 1]

The *"first thing"* Mobina employed for her PD was technology use. She eagerly talked about the things she learned *"by just a click"*. She pointed to the availability of technology, which *"exposed"* her *"to many other things"* as its valuable features. Additionally, she argued that she would also do TL through reading *"the comments other teachers left under the posts"* and, in turn, *"learn"* better.

Azam, on the other hand, was not very keen on this strategy and employed it few times only. Moreover, her technology use was limited to Telegram channel whereas Mobina took advantage of You Tube, Instagram, Telegram, and WhatsApp too. For example, Azam joined a Telegram channel and commented:

There is a channel on Telegram which is for teachers only. I think it is a great idea because they've posted many instructional lessons about teaching. This channel was created a long time before. So I started from their first posts and took a look at them. I learned about the difference between task and exercise and comprehensible input. [Azam, Week 32]

Using technology as a self-directed PD activity seemed *"great"* to her. Consequently, as soon as she joined the Telegram channel, she started TL by reading the previous posts on *"teaching"*. As a result of such involvement with technology, she learned *"the difference between task and exercise and comprehensible input"*.

Reflection

Reflection, a process in which the teacher recalls and evaluates instructional events to give coherence to them, was specified by both teachers from the second week of data collection. Mobina's first report of reflection, though, happened after a peer observation session.

Since I finished class observation, I have been thinking about what happened there and what happens in my classes. I thought the whole way back home. I reviewed every episode and moment of my class and hers. The way she engaged her learners was really great. I evaluated the way I engage my learners. Moreover, her time management was perfect. I thought I have to learn new things and become better in this part. [Mobina, Week 2]

Here, Mobina's experience of peer observation made her reflect which, in turn, provided her with opportunity to *"evaluate"* her own teaching reflected in her statements as *"I reviewed every episode and moment of my class."* Moreover, this reflection made her realize that she had to *"learn"* more about *"time management"* so as to *"become better in this part."*

Other reports of reflections employed by both teachers had no reference to peer observation. Azam, for example, reported:

I had to teach a grammar tense on Wednesday and I didn't want to teach it the way I always do. So all the way back home I was thinking about it. I remembered how I teach other grammar structures and I evaluated them. Finally, I understood what to do. I decided to teach with pantomime. [Azam, Week 19]

Here, Azam attributed her TL, for teaching *"a grammar tense"*, to reflection taking place *"all the way back home"*. Recalling coupled with evaluating her experiences taught her how to teach *"with pantomime"*.

Action Research

While implementing action research, the teacher intervened into a procedure to bring about changes. Further, she observed the results of such intervention to make further improvement as required. Whereas Mobina did not referred to this strategy, Azam underlined it once and stated:

I have always had problem in managing my time. I decided to solve this problem forever. So I applied some of the solutions I knew. I wrote them for myself and started applying each of them in my classes. I wrote what I did and what happened as a result of that. Finally, I understood one part of the problem was related to the way I covered supplementary books. I feel self-confident now because I learned how to manage my time. [Azam, Week 18]

As the above excerpt reveals, Azam *"always had"* difficulty with time management. Eventually, she decided to *"solve this problem"* by doing action research. First, she *"wrote"* all the solutions she knew about this issue and then *"started applying each of them"* in her classes and observed the results. These careful movements between action and research had been beneficial for her as it resulted in TL, reflected in her statement, *"I learned how to manage my time."* Despite benefiting from this PD strategy, she referred to it only once more.

Attending Workshops

Attending workshops, referring in this study to a one-shot session in which a group of teachers participate to learn about effective teaching from a more experienced teacher or their supervisor, was noted by Azam only. She started implementing this PD strategy from week 4 and continued it until the end of data collection. The workshops she attended were free meetings which were held by one of the institutes where she worked. Whenever she attended any workshop, she enthusiastically described what she learned.

This week the workshop was about teaching writing. Our supervisor taught us how to assess our learners' writings. He talked about the codes we can use. He told us about peer assessment and product and process writing. It was such a great workshop. I learned a lot. [Azam, Week 33]

In the workshop explained in this excerpt, Azam learned how to *"assess"* her *"learners' writings"*. Moreover, she *"learned"* about *"peer assessment and product and process writing"*. Two weeks later, she attended another workshop and stated:

This week I joined a workshop held in another city. Actually, it was held by another branch of the institute where I work. Anyway, I learned about communicative language teaching, time line, concept checking questions, and negative checking. It was a helpful workshop. I learned how to use more English and avoid Persian. [Azam, Week 35]

Azam's appreciation of the workshop is evident as she traveled from the city where she lived to another city to do TL. Application of this strategy taught her *"communicative language teaching, time line, concept checking questions, and negative checking".*

4.2. Capacity for Self-directed Professional Development

The second research question was aimed to explore novice EFL teachers' longitudinal autonomy development in terms of their capacity for PD. Both teachers claimed they had ability and willingness to develop such capability but the enabling factors they underlined differed slightly. Whereas Azam noted experience, reading books, and external support, Mobina underlined reading books and external support.

Experience

Experience in this study was grounded in a teacher's knowledge gained from her own act of teaching. In this regard, Azam repeatedly uttered that she needed more experience to be able to develop capacity for her PD from the first week of data collection. However, form week 14, she referred to her own accumulated experience as an advantageous factor affording her the ability to self-direct her PD.

I have to say that my own experience can afford me the ability to become a better teacher. I know I have to gain more experience but the experience I gained during this year is really helping me. When I know how to tackle a problem based on my own experience, I feel more empowered because I see the information I gained from my own experience is becoming a base for the upcoming information which helps me develop more ability to learn. [Azam, Week 14]

Here, Azam named her own *"experience"* as a beneficial factor which would bring about *"the ability to become a better teacher."* Although she believed that she had to *"gain more experience"*, she asserted that *"the experience"* she had gained during her teaching career was *"helping"* her to a great extent. Later she stated:

I am going to take some more classes because I want to gain more experience. In my idea, experience is the most principal factor in ability development. [Azam, Week 26]

Azam's appreciation of the role of experience in her capacity development is evident in the above excerpt when she referred to experience as a *"principal factor"* in developing such capability. Furthermore, her decision on taking *"more classes"* to *"gain more experience"* reveals how valuable experience was for her. Unlike Azam, Mobina did not alluded to her experience as a beneficial factor in her capacity development at all.

Reading Books

Reading books, referring to making meaning from electronic or printed books, was underlined by both teachers as a beneficial factor in their capacity development. For example, Mobina tended to rely on external support to develop the capacity to self-direct her PD during the first seven weeks of data collection. She emphasized reading books as a *"very useful"* factor in helping her develop such capacity from week 7. Then, she clearly stated:

I think books, particularly teachers' books, are helping me a lot. I read it two days ago and when I finished one part, I felt I have more courage to continue learning. I felt I was equipped with lots of new techniques which give me the energy and the ability to move forwards. [Mobina, Week 7]

Here, Mobina highlighted the valuable role of *"teachers' books"* in her ability development. She distinctly elucidated her feelings caused by reading the book. She clarified that reading the book made her feel not only more courageous to *"continue learning"* but also more equipped with *"new techniques"* which, in turn, empowered her to self-direct her PD. The way she viewed reading books as *"advantageous"* to help her develop capacity for her PD did not change till the last week of data collection.

Likewise, Azam repeatedly noted reading as an *"instrumental"* factor affording her ability for her self-direction:

Last night I read a book about the role of a teacher. I felt really good as I understood that I have the potentiality to improve. I did realize that if I want and I try, I will develop my abilities and therefore become better and better. I think books are helping me develop ability and be aware that I do have the capability to improve, I should just try for it. [Azam, Week 30]

Here, Azam discussed how reading a book about teacher role helped her *"be aware of"* her *"potentiality to improve"* and recognize that she did have the *"capability to improve"* but she just had to *"try for it."*

External Support

By this theme is meant the scaffolding the teachers received from her colleagues or supervisors. While Azam highlighted this factor once only, Mobina delineated how her colleagues' suggestions helped her develop capacity for her PD from the early weeks of data collection. She asserted:

I have the ability to learn new things, to help myself develop. But without help from the people around, it can be hard to develop. Their support is like pouring oil on troubled waters. If these kinds of support did not exist, it would take a really long time to develop ability. When I know, there is someone who can support me, I feel relieved and I become sure that I can develop ability by their support. [Mobina, Week 5]

Here, Mobina argued scaffolding from others acted like *"pouring oil on troubled waters"*. The reason why she appreciated such support lied in the fact that she believed without such *"support"*, developing ability would *"take a long time"*. Moreover, she clarified that having someone who provided her with

"*support*" would make her "*feel relieved*" as she became "*sure*" that she could "*develop ability by their support.*"

Azam also announced:

  I have the ability to help myself improve but I am sure I need help too. When I speak with my colleagues and they share their ideas with me, I feel very glad because what they are sharing is the result of years of experience which means a lot to me. I think without help from more knowledgeable colleagues around, I can hardly develop the ability to improve. You know, their suggestions complement my knowledge and give me the ability to continue and improve. [Azam, Week, 16]

  Here, although Azam believed she had "*the ability to help*" herself "*improve*", she viewed external support from her "*colleagues*" as a constructive factor which meant "*a lot to her*". She further argued that developing "*ability*" to self-direct her PD seemed impossible "*without help from more knowledgeable colleagues*". Besides, she asserted that external support did "*complement*" her "*knowledge*" and, in turn, provided her with "*the ability to continue and improve*".

5. Discussion

Many studies have shed light on TA; however, those which concentrated on TA itself while attending to psychological and technical dimensions are rather scarce. Furthermore, few studies have scrutinized novice teachers' autonomy development over time. The present study, therefore, aimed at investigating novice EFL teachers' autonomy development longitudinally in terms of their self-direction and capacity for PD, two subcomponents of Smith's (2003) framework of TA.

  The findings related to the first research question indicated that the two teachers implemented nearly the same PD strategies, except for peer observation, action research, and attending workshops. As to peer observation, despite bringing about not only in-depth learning but also reflection, the teachers were not permitted to implement it because of the rules of the institutes. Consequently, the educational context seems to limit teachers' choices of PD activities. Regarding action research, although it resulted in both self-confidence enhancement and TL, only one novice teacher implemented it. Therefore, it can be concluded that novice EFL teachers needed more instruction to be able to take advantage of this strategy. Moreover, the reason why attending workshops was not implemented by both teachers may be rooted in financial problems and the fact that not all institutes hold free workshops to help teachers in their journey of PD. These findings are partially consistent with Mahmoudi and Özkan's (2015) study, which showed that novice teachers did TL through attending workshops, reading articles, and coaching peers. Nevertheless, as the current study was longitudinal, it shed light on more PD strategies. Besides, our findings are supported by Kyndt et al. (2016), who pointed out peer observation, reading books, using technology, and reflection among the six PD strategies. Besides, our findings are partially in line with Badri et al. (2016) study as both studies underlined attending workshops, action research, and peer coaching. Our study, nevertheless, uncovered observing peers, reading books, making use of technology, and reflection as other

PD strategies which were not reported in their study. Regarding observation, while the teachers in our study employed peer observation only, their participating teachers implemented observational visits to other institutes. This shows that the educational context of a country has direct effects on the strategies its teachers employ to self-direct their PD. This is confirmed by Salokangas et al. (2020) and Erss (2018), who also foregrounded the education system of countries as an effective factor hindering TA. Moreover, the findings revealed that most of the TLs were targeted at classroom management, time management, and error correction, which is in agreement with Zein's (2016) findings unravelling that novice teachers required more knowledge in terms of time management, error correction, and lesson planning.

Implementing peer observation, which equipped the teachers of the present study to be exposed to the whole procedure of a technique, resulted in in-depth learning for them. Moreover, it was revealed that peer observation facilitated TL for time management, pair work and group work, and the use of textbooks, which are among the six favorite domains Richards and Farrell (2005) noted to be learned in peer observation sessions. Furthermore, peer observation created spaces for reflection, which resonates with. Richards' (1995) argument that peer observation exposes teachers to new teaching styles and, in turn, triggers reflection. However, our findings contradict Santos and Miguel's (2016) findings that the teachers employed peer observation not voluntarily but when they were pressurized by schools. In our study, though, peer observation was pursued completely voluntarily, but the reason why it was not undertaken by one of the teachers was due to the rules of the institutes which inhibited such a PD strategy.

Regarding peer coaching, our findings revealed that doing it provided the teachers with a sense of security and happiness as they could see how much they could learn in a very short time. Besides, our findings relevant to a teacher's unwillingness to do peer coaching with her supervisor is supported by Kesler's (2020) study, which unraveled that teachers tended not to do peer coaching with their supervisors as the supervisors were busy most of the time. Additionally, our findings about reading books accord with Dikilitaş and Mumford's (2019) findings that reading not only had positive effects on TA development but also helped the teachers to become more motivated. Likewise, Grosemans et al. (2015) placed reading books among the strategies teachers undertook to do TL without interaction with others. They added that reading books help teachers stay up-to-date, which is in line with our findings about teachers' claims about the role of reading books in helping them refresh their knowledge. As to technology, our findings are supported by Davis (2015), whose study uncovered that technology use resulted in TL in diverse domains and provided the teachers with choice of when and where to do TL. Our teachers, similarly, highlighted the availability of technology use and TL in various domains as valuable features of this PD strategy.

However, it should be noted that technology use the teachers in our study was individualized while Davis' study reported on collaborative learning. Similar to our findings, Visser et al. (2014) underlined the effectiveness of technology use on teachers' PD. Also, they also uncovered self-selecting the domains of TL and saving time as the main characteristics of technology use. Furthermore, the teachers of the present study experienced indirect TL by reading the comments related to their favorite posts in social media as well, which was not pointed out in any of the above studies.

As to reflection, Koh and Tan (2016) announced that reflection plays such an important role in teachers' PD and hence has to be instructed in teacher training courses. Saric and Steh (2017), similarly, underlined the role of reflection in teachers' self-regulated activities. Moslehi and Salehi's (2021) study to investigate the relationship between teachers' reflection and their autonomy also indicated that teacher reflection promoted TA. Along similar lines, Manzano Vázquez (2018) referred to reflection and inquiry as the chief elements of TA. Regarding action research, despite its undeniable value for teachers, only Azam underlined it which can be due to Mobina's lack of knowledge about this strategy. Such occurrence is confirmed by Missoum (2015), who found out that novice teachers refused doing action research as it required expertise. Additionally, Wang and Zhang (2014) found that action research resulted in teacher PD and, in turn, TA. However, they argued that teachers should be provided with the basic theories of action research in order to be able to take advantage of this PD strategy, which is in line with our findings.

It is worth noting that although action research was not our teachers' most favored PD strategy, it resulted in self-confidence enhancement. As to attending workshops, our findings are in contrast with Abu-Tineh and Sadiq's (2018) argumentation about the inefficiency of workshops in enabling teachers to experience PD as workshops do not result in reflection. Girvan et al. (2016), similarly, claimed that PD strategies that extend over time would better provide teachers with opportunities for TL, which contradicts our findings as our teacher experienced TL attending one-shot workshop.

As to the second objective of the study, the findings unraveled that the teachers had both capacity and willingness to self-direct their PD, which can be regarded as a modification of Smith's (2003) framework of TA. While he defined capacity for PD in terms of ability only, willingness can be added to the related subcomponent due to the non-questionable importance of one's willingness to start doing TL (Van den Bergh et al., 2015). Regarding experience, our findings indicated that teachers' experience empowered them to continue TL and use their experience as a base for the upcoming flow of information. This is supported by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) and Viera (2020), who highlighted the importance of teachers' experience in their TL. Reading books also turned to be an advantageous factor helping the teachers in our study develop their capacity to self-direct their PD as it enabled them to recognize their own potentiality.

Regarding external support, it was revealed that the teachers appreciated external support as it helped them shorten the time to develop the ability to self-direct PD. Furthermore, the findings related to external support indicated that TL is a social process where learning is facilitated in collaboration with others (Vygotsky, 1978). Shabani's (2016) finding that teacher PD can be best attained when teachers are engaged in social processes to develop potentiality through other-regulation. This confirms our findings about the heavy reliance of one of the teachers on external support. Moreover, Grant et al. (2020) proposed a new framework of TA which highlights the role of assistance as the principal factor helping teachers experience PD. They stated that the provision of guidance to teachers facilitates collaborative learning and, in turn, enables them to pursue continuous PD. Haapaniemi et al. (2021), likewise, uncovered external support from colleagues as the most important factor giving teachers the ability to self-direct their PD.

6. Conclusion

This study showed novice EFL teachers' autonomy development in terms of their self-direction and capacity for PD. The findings indicated that novice teachers were equipped with certain PD strategies. Peer coaching was their most favored PD practice while peer observation, action research, and attending workshops were found to be their least favorite ones. Besides, this study uncovered novice teachers' both capacity and willingness to self-direct their PD which can be regarded as a modification of Smith's (2003) framework, which did not take into account teachers' willingness in their capacity development.

The present study suggests some implications for teacher educators, teachers, and language institute managers. Teacher educators can make teachers aware of different strategies for their self-directed PD. Besides, teachers who strive for PD should know that there is no end to TL and therefore they can acquaint themselves with different PD activities. Additionally, language institute managers can ask supervisors to devote more time to help teachers who seek their assistance. They can also hold some free workshops for their teachers to facilitate their TL in their journey of self-directed PD.

The limitations of this study were related to the number and gender of the participants. Different results will be gained if more participants and male teachers are studied in future research. Furthermore, as the participants were institute teachers, further studies are required to be conducted on state school teachers. Besides, studies which take into account all dimensions of TA simultaneously could be conducted. Studies on teachers from different educational systems can be done as well. Comparative studies regarding novice vs. experienced are also recommended.

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