



Presenting a Profile of Teacher Agency among Iranian EFL University Instructors

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Received: 2023/08/08

Accepted: 2023/10/21

Abstract: Agency is a significant element in both teacher education and school improvement because it informs how teachers make sound professional decisions. As such, the present study attempted to explore (a) Iranian university instructors' conception of teacher agency; (b) components of teacher agency; and (c) the role of initial motives on the instructors' professional agency. To address these issues, benefiting from purposive sampling, five participants were interviewed using the semi-structured interview as the main instrument. The findings indicated that Iranian university instructors believe that teacher agency is an important element in both language teaching and real-life contexts. As for the second concern of the study, the results revealed that personal, professional, and critical components are important. Regarding the third one, initial motives influence instructors' professional agency. It seems the overall profile of teacher agency in the Iranian context consists of the following key components extracted from the interviews, namely, decision-making, professional development, purposeful acting, making changes, self-reactiveness, intentionality, and forethought. Based on the major findings of the study, concluding remarks are discussed and some tips for further research are presented.

Keywords: Agency, Iranian Instructors, Professional Agency, Teacher Agency.

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Introduction

Agency has become a hot topic for research in the field of education since the emergence of such a concept (e.g., Liu, Wang, & Zhao, 2020; Sari, 2021; Tao & Gao, 2021; Wu, 2022). Further, educators at all levels have the intention to empower not only themselves but also their students. According to Priestley, Biesta, Philippou, and Robinson (2015), providing longer-term support for teacher agency at individual, cultural, and institutional levels is the most principal task to perform in order to achieve educational preservation and improvement. Various researchers have qualitatively investigated teacher agency in differing socio-cultural contexts with the aim of providing a detailed account of the nature of teacher agency in different contexts.

According to Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, and Paloniemi (2013), across the world, the literature appears to call for teachers to promote strict accountability for educational reform and school development as a strategic response to the political agenda. Researchers have studied the agency of experienced teachers, novice teachers, and even student teachers to examine how agency affects the teaching-learning process and improves behaviors. In educational contexts, the personal and/or collective agency of teachers plays a major role in introducing policy and innovative reform.

Settersten and Gannon (2005) stated that agency is also an important factor in teacher education and school improvement as it informs how teachers make sound professional decisions. They also believed that social structure should be considered in teacher agency research. Sociologists argue that human agency and social structure are among the main components of social events. Schwarz and de Groot (2011) asserted that such research also identifies the unique challenges of the education system. Therefore, teacher behavior is purposefully dynamic but can be institutionally constrained.

According to Barker (2005), agency is the dynamic ability of individuals to act autonomously and make their own activities and decisions. Through the lens of traditional philosophy, he also believed that (human) agency is deeply rooted in cooperative and active relationships rather than individual behaviors due to cultural and structural aspects. From an ecological viewpoint, agency places individuals within uncertain sociocultural circumstances where they act according to their attitudes, values, and features that they activate in connection with the particularity of the situation. From this perspective, agency is realized through the active involvement of individuals in the social context (rather than being owned by them). Such an ecological view toward agency also involves interactions in the time dimension, that is, information about the past time (previous experiences, e.g., routines adopted), future time

(e.g., motivations, desires, fears), and present time like decisions about the limitations and possibilities imposed by context.

On the same line, Eteläpelto et al. (2013), described teacher agency as teachers' ability of decisive acting to guide professional development and improve educational quality. Agency is practiced when individuals make decisions and take positions, which influence their professional status. As agentic professionals, teachers should be considered as integrated wholes that hold concerns about emotions, life experiences, obligations, and well-being in addition to their commitments to their responsibilities, identities, and positions in educational contexts. Moreover, teacher agencies are created by mutual cooperation between teachers and the sociocultural variables that limit or allow teachers to act such as the physical limitations, materialistic objects, power dynamics, and school culture.

According to Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson (2015), teacher agency, as a social not personal concept, is developed through teachers' engagements with their environments. It is the consequence of the interactions between agents' capacities (individual elements, such as commitments, values, roles, beliefs, and powers) and agents' space (contextual elements, such as social change, role expectations, and social networks). Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, and Miller (2012) also believed that the development of curricula (e.g., utilizing a variety of resources), classroom instruction and learning (e.g., generating group discussions to engage students), educating parents and communities, and participation in research to address exclusion and educational disadvantages are all encouraged by teachers as ways to improve schools. Teacher agency depends on social structures such as specific environmental conditions, opportunities and limitations, attitudes, values, and teachers' contextual adaptability.

Simpson et al. (2018) described teacher agency as the degree of control attained by a collection of teachers, balancing their personal and collective life experiences with external restrictions and the political and economic context. Education reform requires change, but it will always be implemented by professional institutions and educators since it is based on their interaction. Teachers apply agency to promote identity-representing changes that are inevitably influenced by a number of personal and environmental elements in a particular situation. It has also been said that teachers who are grounded in their professional vision and identity and who actively fight against restrictive rules and other hurdles to enhancing educational standards are exercising teacher agency.

Significance of the Study

Regarding the significance of the study, teachers are at the center of language teaching and policy research and play a key role in implementing policy initiatives and curriculum reforms (Guo, Tao, & Gao, 2019). Some scholars such as Sannino (2010) and Wernicke (2018) stated that teacher agency, i.e., teacher initiative or autonomy, has been the focus of a large portion of recent research on language teacher education (Ashton, 2022; Bao, Ren, & Wang, 2020; Huang & Yip, 2021). When a particular language teaching strategy is introduced, language teachers are key agents, actively or passively involved in the micro-level implementation of such strategy in the classroom (Chaaban et al., 2021). The instructors' ongoing efforts to keep up with the latest pedagogy and content knowledge demonstrate their agency. Teachers' agency ensures that curriculum reforms make sense and improve student learning effectively (Jenkins, 2020; Ruan, Zheng, & Toom, 2020). Therefore, teacher agency proves useful in supporting the selection and implementation of effective teachers' practices, as mentioned by Molla and Nolan (2020). Hence, due to the urgent importance of such a topic, a profile of teacher agency and its components among Iranian university instructors was presented according to the instructors' viewpoints.

Objectives of the Study and Research Questions

The current study aimed to discover components of teacher agency in Iranian EFL classes as well as to examine the conception of teacher agency among university instructors. In addition, by interviewing the instructors, the researchers intended to see whether or not their original perception of teacher agency affects their performance in classes. Additionally, the possible roles of initial motives of instructors' professional agency were examined throughout this study. To gain an insight into teacher agency and its contributory factors in teachers' engagement, the following three research questions were studied:

- 1- What is the university instructors' perception of teacher agency in Iranian EFL classes?
- 2- What are the components of teacher agency based on Iranian EFL university instructors' viewpoints?
- 3- What role(s) do initial motives play in the instructors' professional agency?

Literature Review

A substantial amount of previous literature has been focused on agency and its definition. Research on agency has attracted scholars' attention since the mid-1990s (e.g., Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Goodson, 2003; Jiang, Li, & Wang, 2022; Parker, 2016; Priestley et al., 2015).

Hence, it emerges from the interplay of individual factors like attitude, power, identity, and commitment and external factors like social network, contextual and structural aspects, and teacher support. In the same vein, Biesta and Tedder (2007) maintain that environmental factors play a major role in shaping teacher agency. Moreover, they stated that teacher agency is the result of the interactive relationship of teachers' efforts, accessible resources, contextual components, and societal changes. Likewise, Miller et al. (2020) state that there is a clear relationship between teachers' engagement and their agency; hence, it is not a fixed internal conception possessed by teachers.

Molla and Nolan (2020) also assert that teacher agency appears to be positively related to self- and collective efficiency in the work environment. In other words, high levels of pedagogical confidence and self-efficiency of teachers can contribute to higher educational quality. Teachers encompassing such features are able to take efficient actions leading to practical instructional practices in teaching and learning contexts based on learners' academic needs (Ali & Hamid, 2018; Charteris & Smardon, 2015; Giddens, 1984; Jenkin, 2020). Moreover, Lestari, Yusra, Arifuddin, and Susanti (2021) point out that the generalizability of much of the conducted research on teacher agency is controversial since this concept is influenced by both personal and contextual factors. Therefore, even within the same institution, each teacher with specific constraints might go through a uniquely different process of agency.

Meta-analyses and systematic reviews in this regard have also revealed that in many cases two main personal factors, teachers' pedagogical knowledge and teacher experience, in addition to contextual factors like teachers' and learners' inter-collaborations and school management lead to teacher agency development (Lestari, 2020). However, as Lestari (2020) argues, teacher agency is currently at its early research stage and much research in this area is required to reveal underlying factors affecting this abstract construct. Resulted from the several published studies on teacher agency, each from a different perspective, some of the most commonly accepted factors contributing to teacher agency achievement are presented as follows:

- personal factors including pedagogic competence, self-esteem, motivation, and behavior in addition to contextual factors such as school environment (Bandura, 1997),

- subjective factors including personal values, teaching experience, and professional qualification in addition to objective factors such as policy expectations, institutional rules, and norms (Molla & Nolan, 2020),

- teacher rapport with other educational stakeholders in their educational settings, school regulations, instructional practices, and culture (Jenkin, 2020),

- teachers' instructional strategies based on learners' needs, collaboration with school leaders, colleagues, and family-school community (Miller et al., 2020), and

- international, practical-evaluative, and projective aspects (Priestley et al., 2015).

Priestley et al. (2015) developed a framework (Figure 1) to demonstrate how teacher agency can be obtained through including three dimensions using an ecological approach. To this date, it has been empirically established through a variety of studies that this framework can be deemed as one of the most accepted frameworks for teacher agency (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Vähäsantanen, 2015). In this framework, teacher agency starts from previous teaching experiences, trained professional development courses and professional disposition, and past beliefs and actions. The next dimension, practical-evaluative, highlights the role of cultural, structural, and material factors. Finally, the projective dimension includes short-term and long-term actions with the aim of bringing changes in the future.

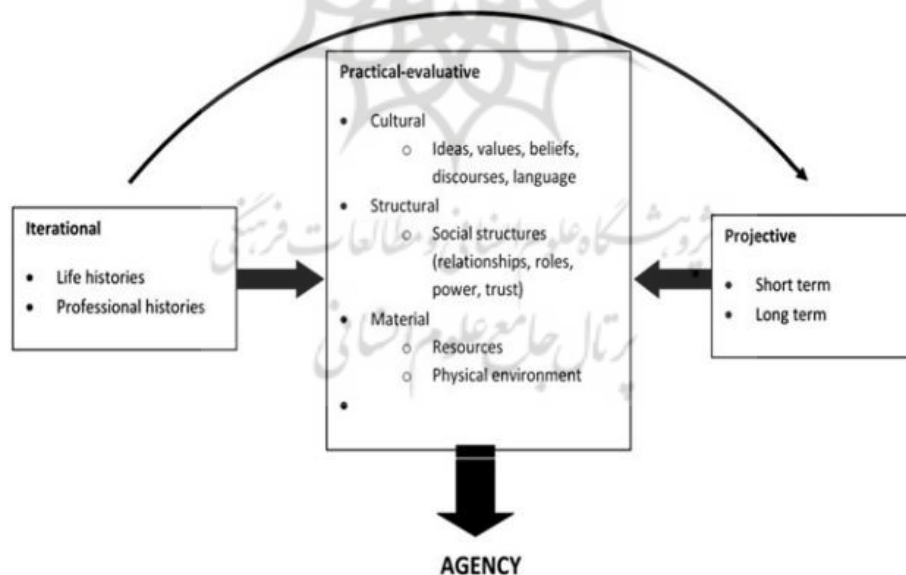


Figure 1. The framework of agency development (taken from Priestley et al., 2015, p.30)

Recent literature shows that interest has grown around the importance of teacher agency in curriculum development due to its vital role in shaping teachers' work, bringing meaningful

education, and increasing positive learning outcomes (e.g. Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2017; Charteris & Smardon, 2015; Damşa, Langford, Uehara, & Scherer, 2021; Gu, Liang, & Wang, 2022; Priestly et al., 2013); However, researchers have not examined teacher agency in detail, and further research is needed to bridge the gap between teacher agency and professional progress during educational reforms (Wallen & Tormey, 2019). Moreover, up to the present time, only few studies have investigated the language teachers' perception and use of agency. More specifically, very little is currently known about Iranian EFL teachers and the ways through which they express or develop their agentic capability in the face of national societal issues or local organizational demands (Ali & Hamid, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation was based on the one used by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The three processes in their system are open coding (extracting categories from the data), axial coding (finding links between categories), and selective coding (identifying and characterizing the core category), according to Kasurinen (2012). This approach was used in order to extract topics, combine topics converging around a common subject, continuously assess the themes, and choose headings and subheadings. The already present themes and the discovered ones should be continuously contrasted, claim Lincoln and Guba (1985), in order to determine the ultimate major topic. Therefore, each interview was reviewed in the current research in order to identify its topics and create a rough categorization. The next one was then to read to determine its subject and to contrast it with the preceding ones. The category will remain the same if the topics are similar, and a new category will be established if they vary. A new theme may sometimes be created by combining two or more existing, related themes.

Given that this technique is subjective, it would seem essential to confirm the results. Analyst triangulation was used as a result. The fundamental principle of triangulation is that researchers should collect numerous sources of confirmation before drawing a conclusion (Willis, 2007). Triangulation is often employed as the qualitative counterpart of validity and reliability. Data triangulation (using multiple sources of data to study a phenomenon), methodological triangulation (using more than one type of method in the same study), theoretical triangulation (using various theories to explore the issue), and analyst triangulation (hiring more than one analyst in the same study), which is used in the current study, are just a few of the different types of triangulations that have been identified by prior research.

Method

Design

This study employed a qualitative research design. The researchers gathered qualitative data through semi-structured interviews to explore teachers' perceptions of teacher agency and the role of initial motives in shaping their agency.

Setting and Participants

This study was conducted on five Iranian university instructors including both males and females in the Iranian higher education context. Finding generalizable outcomes is less the focus of qualitative research than analyzing specific people (Webster & Mertova, 2007). In other words, obtaining a thorough grasp of (a small number of) people is more crucial for qualitative research than looking at a huge population. Therefore, for semi-structured interviews, for instance, five to twenty-five participants are required (Creswell, 2007). Participants had various educational and professional backgrounds, some of whom held Ph.D. degrees. It needs to be mentioned that the study did not focus on one single university as the literature review revealed that shared workplace might decrease the diversity of instructors' responses to the research questions (Priestley et al., 2012). As a result, by including participants from different universities, the research could take into account the diversity of instructors' views from various perspectives based on different structural dimensions such as colleagues' relationships, instructor-learner interactions, instructors' roles, and institutional support. Moreover, to ensure the homogeneity of the sample, participants were asked about their teaching experience.

Instruments

The data collection instruments in this study are presented as follows:

- Semi-structured interviews to determine instructors' opinions about the picture of teacher agency in Iranian higher education classes as well as the role of initial motives in shaping instructors' professional agency. Semi-structured interviews were designed in a way that lasted 30-40 minutes approximately. Some basic questions were designed and follow-up questions emerged from the participants' responses during the interview. An experienced researcher was asked to explore the questions developed by the researchers.

- Focus group interviews to explore how participants respond to their colleagues' views. Focus group interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour.

Data Collection Procedures

The researchers were data collectors and it should be noted here that one of the researchers played the role of a moderator, too. After providing the interviewees with information about the current research and its purposes, participants were ensured that the results would be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. Additionally, interviews were administrated face-to-face in the instructors' offices and audio-recorded for further analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

All semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Then, by reading and re-reading the transcriptions, the researchers aimed to develop a deep understanding of the data. Next, they attempted to find the most repeated ideas that were associated with the purposes of the current study. Analyst triangulation was used in order to make sure that the inherent subjectivity of qualitative research did not lead the researchers to conduct a biased analysis.

Results and Discussion

To address the research questions, five individuals participated in the semi-structured interviews. For the purpose of anonymity, the pseudonyms 'Hamideh', 'Soheil', 'Marjan', 'Ali', and 'Fereshteh' are used instead of their real names.

Regarding the first research question, the main points of their opinions regarding the interview questions are provided. Before presenting the participants' viewpoints, a picture of teacher agency is given by the researchers based on what the participants themselves claim:

Teacher agency is an important concept that is significant from both a professional practice and a lifestyle one. It is defined as the capacity of teachers to act purposefully to direct their professional growth and find solutions to the challenges they face. Teacher agency involves different components including personal, professional, critical, self-reactiveness, dynamic relationships, and purposeful acting, to name only a few. Teacher agency is influenced by initial motives such as willingness for improvement as well as desires and expectations. However, teachers should be careful as teacher agency can be a hurdle too as it may not be in congruity with students' individual differences in a specific class. Now that the picture of teacher agency is developed, their responses are presented in order to provide more detail about their viewpoints of teacher agency.

‘Hamideh’ stated that

As an instructor, I think teachers must always look for growth and development, whether for themselves or others. It is not summarized only in the concept of classrooms, I believe it helps you in your real life as well since it enables you to make decisions, respond to problematic situations, etc.

She further considered it as both a hurdle and a motivator:

Personally, I assume both, together are profitable for the process of language learning, since you need both motivations and hurdles to learn. I mean at least it takes a while for everybody to create or fix habits, so if you consider the experiences and the process, you may think that it is not worth it.

‘Soheil’ considered teacher agency an important element in professional development:

I reckon they are quite helpful since they lead to professional development which is the key point in the context of teaching today. Though it may be seen as a hurdle at the very outset, if you look at it deeply it would be considered as a motive in PD. Needless to say, the willingness and the environment of teachers are paramount to consider.

‘Marjan’ and ‘Ali’ held similar ideas:

It is the capacity of teachers to act purposefully to direct their professional growth, find solutions to challenges they face, and improve their practice. It is a motivator, as a teacher you may frequently strive to give agency to your students and it equally is important for you to have it too. Teachers should take ownership of the learning experience to direct their students effectively and they also grant agency to their students by giving them agency in how they learn. (‘Marjan’).

I think it is the capacity of teachers to act purposefully and direct their professional growth and also find solutions to challenges they face in the process of teaching.

It

is definitely a motivator as it gives the teachers the ability to make informed classroom and professional development decisions based on classroom needs. (‘Ali’).

The last participant (‘Fereshteh’) emphasized the role of teacher agency at both micro and macro levels:

In my opinion, teacher agency is shouldering responsibility on the part of a teacher voluntarily who cares for the local educational setting in order to improve the colleagues’ teaching practices so that they could optimally make use of the

teaching practices which have been employed by a teacher. I generally assume that it is beneficial for the educational system at the macro level if policymakers pass a law and provide the teachers with the liberty to do so because it will definitely guarantee the improvement of the educational system if they share their own ideas, which are realized in their classroom, with their colleagues.

Similar to the first respondent ('Hamideh'), 'Freshteh' considered it both a hurdle and a motivator:

I think it can be both an obstacle and an incentive. The reason why it is an impediment is that one sort of teaching practice may not serve the purpose of another class because that may not be in congruity with students' individual differences of the specific class or else it may act adversely. To put it differently, the teaching practice is context-based. Besides, other teachers may think they do not have the liberty to act in the classroom. The reason why it can be a motivator is that novice teachers may not have the creativity to realize differential teaching procedures in the classroom and as other colleagues advise them to recruit or operationalize specific teaching methods to optimize their teaching process.

Unlike the previous section, responses to the second research question tend to be more diverse. The main points proposed by each respondent are as follows:

Hamideh: *If I want to name three components, I would say, personal, professional and critical. And I do believe that all are important, but in different situations. I mean in a situation; one might be more crucial than the others. Or in a situation, two might be more important than one.*

Soheil: *Self-reactiveness, intentionality and forethought are some of the teacher agency components among which intentionality plays a key role to me.*

Marjan: *The model of teacher agency is built on five characteristics (1) presents the teacher as an actor, (2) depicts dynamic relationships (3) treats professional development and school reform as inherently contextualized including multiple levels (4) includes the professional development and school reform content as variable and (5) considers outcomes a part of a continuing cycle. Each one is equally important.*

Ali: *One of the components is the capacity to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of their colleagues.*

Fereshteh: *Being knowledgeable and autonomous, having a problem-solving attitude and ability, being welcome to listen to suggestions and complaints, being a decision maker, etc. are some components of teacher agency. The most important component is being knowledgeable and autonomous so based on the knowledge that the teacher has and his/her own independence, he/she can make necessary decisions.*

Regarding the third research question about initial motives, issues such as willingness to improve and progress, desires, and expectations were stressed by the participants. The first respondent ('Hamideh') argued that "the ability to reform, the spirit to grow, as well as the willingness for improvement and development" are important. The second respondent ('Soheil') stated that "they both play vital roles. They should accompany together to be productive. Neither personal motives nor instructors' professional agency alone can bring the ultimate result that teacher agency wishes to reach". Respondents 'Marjan' and 'Ali' believed that initial motives are important due to the important role of initial motivational tendencies: "Initial motives play an important role on instructors' agency in professional learning systems because impulses, desires, expectations, evaluation and other motivational tendencies are determining factors of the degree of commitment to action" (respondent 'Marjan'). "It's so important because the teachers feel empowered to take ownership of their learning experience both to their own professional development and educating students" (respondent 'Ali'). The last respondent thought that they are important because they empower teachers: "initial motives empower teachers to be able to purposefully direct their professional agency and integrate it in their classroom instruction" (respondent 'Fereshteh').

Discussion

The present study attempted to present a profile of teacher agency among Iranian university instructors. It further explored the components of teacher agency as well as the role of initial motives on instructors' professional agency. As for the first part, the emphasis was placed on issues such as teachers' own and others' development, the role of teacher agency in real life and professional progress, the teachers' potential to act purposefully, and their ability to govern their professional progress. Regarding the second question, it was revealed that teacher agency is composed of personal, professional, and critical components. Moreover, self-reactiveness, intentionality, and forethought were considered. Finally for the last question, the effect of initial motives on instructors' professional agency, the study stressed issues like willingness to

improve and develop, instructors' desires, expectations, and productivity, as well as their ability and tendency to reform and grow.

This study used Glaser and Strauss's (1967) analytic framework to provide the core categories of the interviews. Based on the interviewees' responses to the questions, their main ideas on the definition of teacher agency and its components were extracted. Moreover, their main standpoints on whether teacher agency is a motivator or a hurdle were extracted. They focused on the importance of teacher agency in various areas of our lives. Defined as teachers' capacity to act purposefully regarding both their growth and their challenges, teacher agency involves various components, including personal, professional, and critical ones. Respondents also argued that teacher agency can be both a hurdle and a motivator.

In this section, the compatibility or incompatibility between the findings of the present study and those of the previous ones is discussed. The first research question dealt with the perception of teacher agency among university instructors. Respondents in this study argued that teacher agency is important not only in language teaching classrooms but also in real life. To the knowledge of the researchers, previous studies have neglected the role of teacher agency in real life (Campbell, 2012). Another factor mentioned by the interviewees was that teacher agency can be both a hurdle and a motivator. This has been supported by some studies (Biesta et al., 2015; Calvert, 2016; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Priestley et al., 2015). Consistent with our findings, previous studies have shown that it can be a motivator due to the fact that it is a hurdle. In other words, hurdles are necessary for the process of language learning (Campbell, 2012; Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2013; Tao & Gao, 2017). However, some respondents in this study argued that it is merely a motivator. This argument has also been supported by other studies (Li & Ruppert, 2021; Pantić, 2015; Simpson et al., 2018). Hence, it seems that the literature has reported contrasting findings regarding this concern (Poulton, 2020). Another issue emphasized by the respondents was that teacher agency leads language teachers to act purposefully and as a result progress professionally. They considered this an important element in arriving at solutions to teaching challenges. This has been supported by previous studies as well (Imants & Van der Wal, 2020; Wallen & Tormey, 2019). As a byproduct of teacher agency, the purposeful act of teachers has been considered an essential element in making informed decisions based on learners' needs in classrooms. Along similar lines, previous studies have focused on the importance of decision-making in classrooms and the role of teachers in this process. Participants have also stressed the important role of teacher agency at both micro and macro levels. Previous research has mainly focused on the micro levels.

As Datnow (2012) argued, teacher agency is an important consideration for teachers to create a pleasant classroom atmosphere. The macro level, however, has not yet attracted the due attention of researchers.

Regarding the second research question, which explored the components of teacher agency, different components were mentioned by the participants. Some of the mentioned components were personal, professional, and critical. This is in line with some of the previous studies (Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019; Severance, Penuel, Sumner, & Leary, 2016). For instance, Pignatelli (1993) argued that the criticality component of teacher agency tends to be of crucial importance. Also, some of the participants focused on self-assertive factors such as self-reactiveness and intentionality. These two components have not been studied extensively in previous research. Another finding of the study was the importance of representing teachers as actors and focusing on professional development. These two elements have been considered important by previous studies (Feryok, 2012; Gudmundsdottir & Hathaway, 2020); however, some have treated them as trivial ones (Robinson, 2012; Schweisfurth, 2006). Another participant stressed the role of purposeful and constructive acts of teachers, which seems to be in line with the findings of previous studies in the sense that they have argued that teachers act purposefully in order to professionally develop (Priestley et al., 2015).

Regarding the third research question, which considered the role of initial motives on the instructors' professional agency, willingness to improve and progress were considered the most important triggers. According to previous studies (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Riveros et al., 2012), teachers' tendency to professionally improve and develop can be their initial motivator to continue the developmental process. The results of the study indicated that impulses, desires, expectations, and other motivational tendencies, which lead to an increase in the degree of commitment to action, play an important role in the effectiveness of initial motives on the instructors' agency. According to previous studies, fulfilling the above-mentioned tendencies through teacher agency can empower teachers (Bartell et al., 2019; Jenkins, 2020; Varpanen, Laherto, Hilppö, & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2022).

Conclusions and Implications

In sum, it seems that professional development is the closest factor to teacher agency. It is regarded as both a determining component of teacher agency and an important factor in shaping instructors' perceptions of teacher agency. Other factors, however, are also important such as the role of teacher agency in real life and teachers' inclination to grow. It is worth mentioning that the overall profile of teacher agency in the Iranian context consists of the following key

components which were extracted from the interviews: decision-making, professional development, purposeful acting, making changes, self-reactiveness, intentionality, and forethought (See Figure 2).

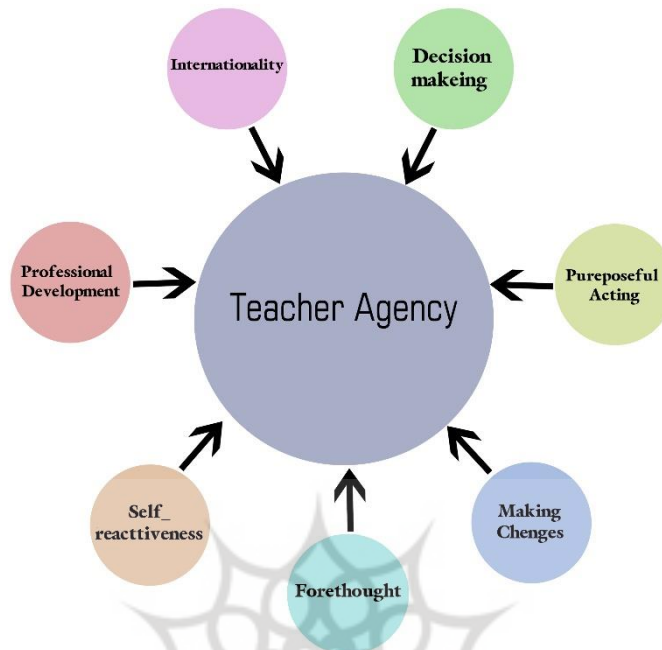


Figure 2. The Overall Profile of Teacher Agency

Regarding the implications of this study, the findings shed some light on the current view of teacher agency. The findings of this study can be used by authors and researchers, especially novice ones, in order to get familiar with the most important aspects of teacher agency so that they can direct their studies on those aspects. Accordingly, they can use these findings in order to select research topics that are more compatible with academic writing standards; thus, enhancing the chance of getting them published. Moreover, this study can be used in developing material texts and tasks for teacher training courses. Also, teachers themselves can use the findings of this study to fully comprehend important aspects of teacher agency. Another implication of this study is for teacher trainers. They should pay more attention to getting teachers more familiar with standard ways of practicing teacher agency. Moreover, educational administrators are advised to devise a professional culture in which teachers are inclined to be more active participants. On the same line, educational support is required for teachers and teacher communities.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The first limitation of the present study is the few number of participants. Although in qualitative studies, it is justified to select few participants, including a larger number of participants will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the matter. Hence, future studies need to explore teacher agency using a higher number of participants. Secondly, due to the fact that the only instrument in this study was the interview, providing a detailed developmental account of teachers' perceptions is uncertain. Therefore, future research, especially longitudinal ones, using other research instruments is required to investigate likely changes in teachers' perceptions throughout their teaching process. Moreover, this study only focused on non-native teachers. Therefore, further studies should be done on the contrasting viewpoints of native and non-native teachers. Also, researchers are suggested to draw a comparison between the viewpoints of teachers and other educational stakeholders such as policymakers or educational administrators. Finally, future studies can investigate the views of teachers from different cultural and teaching backgrounds to provide a more comprehensive account of teacher agency.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation to Mr. Ali Banisharif, a PhD student at Shiraz University, anonymous reviewers, the editorial board of the Applied Research in English Language journal, and the research participants for their contribution to the study.

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Appendix

Questions of Semi-structured Interviews

1. What do you think about teacher agency?
2. Is teacher agency a hurdle or a motivator, which helps the process of language learning?
3. Is teacher agency necessary for accelerating the process of learning?
4. What are the components of teacher agency? Which one(s) tend to be more important?
5. What is the role of initial motives on instructors' professional agency?
6. Do initial motives change instructors' professional agency?



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