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Development and Validation of a Teacher Autonomy Scale for Iranian EFL Teachers' Capacity for Self-directed Professional Action

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Abstract

Teacher autonomy (TA), including its conceptualization and multidimensionality, has received increasing attention in the past two decades. Notwithstanding many attempts to measure TA, teachers' capacity for self-directed professional action (CSDPA) has remained under-researched. To address this gap, this article delved into the status of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' CSDPA by developing and validating a questionnaire based on TA literature and semi-structured interviews with teachers. Employing exploratory factor analysis (EFA), the factor structures of 300 Iranian EFL teachers' responses were examined in terms of their CSDPA. The analysis results yielded five factors regarding teachers' CSDPA, including their capacities for self-directed instructional and curricular activities, self-directed institutional actions, self-directed teacher learning activities, self-directed assessment and collegial negotiation activities, and self-directed relational and ethical actions. The research outcomes suggest implications for language teachers, institute principals, and teacher educators to attend to teachers' autonomy as a key feature of their professional action.

Keywords: teacher autonomy, autonomy scale, capacity for self-directed professional action (CSDPA), EFL teachers

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1. Introduction

The topic of teacher autonomy (TA) deserves more investigation as a central theme in the domain of teacher education (Teng, 2018) due to its influence on numerous aspects of teaching (Wermke et al., 2018). So far, various definitions have been presented for TA. According to Little (1995), autonomous teachers possess a strong sense of personal responsibility in teaching, exercised by continuous analysis and reflection, along with cognitive and affective control. Tort-Moloney (1997) referred to TA as the self-conscious realization of when, why, how, and where didactic skills can be achieved in the teaching process while having interdependence and dialectical dependence on variables such as classroom discourse, curriculum, and research. Özdemir et al. (2023) defined TA as the extent of the teachers' professional control over teaching methods, evaluations, and the curriculum. Moreover, Teng (2018) held that autonomous teachers have a multidimensional capacity to make independent decisions according to student's interests and needs and exercise freedom and regulation from externally enforced agendas.

A large body of research has scrutinized the role of TA in different domains of the teaching career such as teachers' stress, motivation, job satisfaction, professionalism, and empowerment (e.g., Edinger & Edinger, 2018; Pearson & Moomaw, 2006; Worth & Van den Brande, 2020), teacher efficacy improvement, professional engagement, and job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

Also, a number of studies have been conducted on teachers' autonomy in using course books (Rathert & Cabaroğlu, 2021), distributed leadership and TA (Clutter-Shields, 2011; Gkorezis, 2016; Harris, 2005; Liu et al., 2021; Mifsud, 2017), teacher agency and autonomy constructs in language teacher identity (Nazari et al., 2023), teachers' sense of responsibility as a capacity dimension of TA for professional action (Barahona & Darwin, 2023), TA in relation to the components of emotional labor (Özdemir et al., 2023), and TA associated with learner autonomy (Wang & Ryan, 2023). Nevertheless, almost no research has been conducted on teachers' status of autonomy in terms of capacity for self-directed professional action (CSDPA). To this end, the present study aimed to fill this lacuna by focusing on Smith's (2003) model of TA to develop a questionnaire to measure teachers' status of autonomy in terms of CSDPA.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Autonomy

The concept of TA has received noticeable attention due to its central role and criticality for teachers in their profession and the quality of education (Ingersoll, 2007; Narayanan et al., 2024). It has been discussed that human beings have autonomy when they are born (Lee, 1998). Little (1991) considered withdrawal capacity, critical thinking, autonomous actions, and decision-making as elements of autonomy. Buyruk and Akbaş (2021) considered autonomy as an element that helps distinguish professionals from unprofessional individuals. Gan and Cheng (2021) believed that

autonomy contributes to employees' abilities to regulate their work, task competencies, and work attachment while improving their social and psychological encounters and well-being.

TA is also viewed as an indispensable component in the teaching profession while autonomous teachers seek novel teaching methods to develop up-to-date materials and improve their professional skills and knowledge (Freidman, 1999; Kong, 2020). TA is reported to be associated with several other teacher characteristics such as their rights to choose their teaching goals, methods, strategies (Deci & Ryan, 2000), freedom, capacity, or/and responsibility in making choices (Aoki, 2002). Smith (2003) divided TA into two major categories, namely TA for professional action (teaching) and TA for professional development (teacher learning). Each of them includes three subcategories, including self-direction, capacity for self-direction (TA I), and freedom from control (TA II). Through professional TA, teachers adapt quickly to changing situations to meet their needs. TA also helps teachers acquire the required professional skills and knowledge to be autonomous, interested, and willing to determine the teaching content and use different techniques and methods (Bustingorry, 2008; Raya & Vázquez, 2022; Villavicencio et al., 2024). Case Pedagogy in Initial Teacher Education: An Analysis of its Contribution to the Development of Professional Competences for Autonomy. *Sisal Journal*, *13*(2), 262–285. https://doi.org/10.37237/130206). In general, TA leads to higher teaching quality and, consequently, qualified pedagogical activities for students (Ertürk, 2020).

TA has also been underscored due to teachers' roles in some educational facets including their freedom to choose teaching strategies and methods, enacting school-wide and classroom decisions, and influencing the condition of their work (e.g., Pan et al., 2023; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Moreover, it has been regarded as the teachers' perception of their control over classroom management and their pedagogical activities as a phenomenon associated with teachers' instructional decisions on educational activities depending on the learning environment (Pan et al., 2023; Pearson & Hall, 1993; Wermke et al., 2018). In a similar vein, Benson (as cited in Smith, 2003) defined TA as "the right to freedom from control" (p. 1). He believed the elusive concept of autonomy connotes a prominent measure of independence from external control while individuals' mutual dependence balances it. Therefore, it indicates social interdependence.

Some conceptions have foregrounded TA as the teachers' authority in controlling themselves and their working environment (Erss, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2021; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). The teachers' teaching time regulation and their freedom level over their professional development were also associated with TA by LaCoe (2008). Hargreaves et al. (2012) referred to TA as the teacher's capacity, the practice of that capacity, or the affordability of institutional, discursive, and systemic structure where the instructor is located. Similarly, according to Vangrieken et al. (2017), TA is related to the teachers' being free, equipped, and willing to control their educational and instructional processes and practices. Moreover, in addition to teachers' control, Özdemir et al. (2023) referred to teachers' surface acting when they are inclined to regulate emotions as a response to the norms of the organization, without genuinely expressing their feelings.

In terms of teachers' decision-making, teachers' behavior to organize work and decide to accomplish it freely (Smylie, 1990), teachers' capability to control their daily timetable, choose their teaching way, have curricular ideas, and make teaching decisions freely (Husband & Short, 1994), and teachers' decision making based on their interests, values, and needs (Koestner et al., 1996) have been examples of TA definitions. Moreover, teachers' participation in the decision-making processes of the organization (Friedman, 1999) and making choices on when and what to teach (Aoki, 2002) indicate teachers' autonomy. Along with other decision-based definitions, some researchers approached the concept as the teachers' ability in decision-making on developing the level of students and their failure or success, including the techniques and methods of teaching, the curriculum of teachers, the measuring processes, and classroom management (Crawford, 2001; Wermke et al., 2018). In contrast, teachers' feeling of being limited in making decisions for their responsibilities would be a source of frustration for their autonomy (Tran & Moskovsky, 2022).

Similarly, for Çolak and Altınkurt (2017), the concept refers to the teacher's decision-making power, independence, and competency concerning educational activities, students, and educational institutes. Teachers might adhere to one centralized teaching structure and set invariable activities without taking into account students' skills, talents, and interests. Such an approach would lead to failed students and prevent their emerging talents; however, making individual decisions and applying exclusive approaches, as ascribed to TA, can be highly beneficial in these circumstances (Ertürk, 2020). Therefore, the complex multidimensional notion of TA has multiple levels and arises from teachers' attitudes, behaviors, and abilities and contributes to their responsibilities in curriculum construction and development, teaching, assessment, administration, student disciplining, and professional development (Guo & Wang, 2021; Hammersley-Fletcher et al., 2020). Teachers' ability to select their teaching methods and materials is a foundational indicator of TA (Nguyen et al., 2021). In general, teachers' decisions, showing their professionalism, their awareness of their roles and authority, and their professional skills and capacity, are related to TA (Kara & Bozkurt, 2022).

A line of research has focused on the social process the teachers are involved in their definitions of TA. In this regard, Smith (2003) accentuated the prominence of collaboration in teachers' practice, such as discussing problems or sharing ideas with their peers. Rubdy (2007) also argued that 'social autonomy' signifies that teachers are aware and critical of social consequences and the implications of their actions. Likewise, Iida (2009) emphasized the role of social autonomy development in Japan (as a collectivist society where "group" has a specific place), and highlighted that teachers' isolation would jeopardize their occupational future if they just pursued their ideal risks. He further advised teachers to balance social and individual autonomy (Iida, 2009). However, Zhu and Li (2023) particularly referred to the importance of contextual features in shaping teachers' collective resilience.

2.2. Research on Teacher Autonomy

Along with the theoretical developments and conceptualizations of TA, several researchers have investigated the possible relationship between TA and other variables. For example, some researchers have reported associations between TA and teachers' stress (e.g., Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Reitbauer et al., 2022), teachers' inclination to remain in the job (e.g., Dilekçi, 2022; Olsen & Mason, 2023; Worth & Van den Brande, 2020), teachers' morale (Yıldız et al., 2021), and teachers' efficiency, motivation, and organizational engaging (Akçay & Sevinç, 2021; Okada, 2023).

Several studies have substantiated the relationship between TA and teacher professional development. In the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) model, Hargreaves et al. (2012) referred to autonomy as teachers' capacity to perform independently of other authorities in their CPD, having the right to explore and express their specific views, and being free from other peoples' inhibiting assessments. Similarly, Parker (2015) claimed that teachers' professional development is critically associated with autonomy in their profession, and current school problems are expected to be resolved by ensuring TA as a starting point. Subsequently, Dhiorbhain (2019) referred to the emergence of TA, firstly, as a response to learner autonomy and, second, as the aim of teacher education where "learning to learn" is pivotal to the autonomous class. More recently, Tunçeli et al. (2022) explored the association between teachers' learning autonomy, critical reflection, and self-regulation and showcased a positive association between these three factors. It was also detected that self-regulation has a mediating effect in anticipating the teacher candidates' learning autonomy for critical thinking. The researchers suggested considering the three components in educational programs to enrich the learning process and increase education quality.

Previous research has also indicated a positive relationship between autonomy, organizational factors, and distributed leadership (e.g., Cirocki & Anam, 2024; Hoy & Tarter, 1997; Narayanan et al., 2024). The traditional solo leadership approach relies on a single agency (Mifsud, 2017), while distributed leadership promotes the relationships between colleagues, cooperation, group working, and identification of organizational knowledge and expertise (Crawford, 2012; Harris, 2005; Keddie et al., 2023). Likewise, Clutter-Shields (2011) reported a positive association between distributed leadership and TA, specifically in the teachers' choices of course content, pedagogy, teaching materials, and student learning. Shah (2014) delved into the relationship between autonomy and organizational citizenship using semi-structured interviews. The findings suggested that distributed leadership can cause sensitivity of ownership, responsibility, fulfillment, and colleagueship among teachers by forming collaborations with other teachers, supervisors, and stakeholders and participating in decision-making processes. More recently, Özdemir et al. (2023) explored how distributed leadership and emotional labor (at three levels of deep acting, surface acting, and genuine emotions) were related, directly and indirectly through the latent variable of TA as a mediator. The researchers found TA as a prominent mediator. They concluded that

distributed leadership increased TA perception which helped teachers accomplish their duties with more genuine and natural emotions (Özdemir et al., 2023).

A line of research has focused on TA and teachers' job dedication and commitment (e.g., Brezicha et al., 2019; Diş & Ayık, 2016; Meihami & Malmir, 2024; Liu et al., 2021). Halbesleben (2010) asserted that autonomous teachers were more committed to their careers and revealed a higher degree of dedication to learners. Moreover, Ertürk (2023) focused on the effect of TA on teaching profession dedication based on teachers' perceptions using Teaching Profession and TA Scales. Their results indicated a great TA degree in the total scale, professional communication autonomy, and teaching process autonomy while proving a moderate TA degree in professional development autonomy and curriculum TA; thus, TA significantly predicted teaching profession commitment.

A large body of research explored curricular TA, concerned with teachers' approach to selecting educational materials (e.g., Aoki, 2002; Bakken & Lund, 2018; Cirocki & Anam, 2024; Dieudé & Prøitz, 2024; Stuvland, 2016; Urquhart & Weir, 2014). Benson (2000) asserted that restrictions such as strict curriculum, standardized evaluations and tests, and prescribed textbooks cause teachers to feel a challenging dilemma between their expectations and reflection. In Japan, Iida (2009) reported numerous constraints for TA, including the government educational policies, the national curriculum, entrance examinations, school curriculum and policies, students' goals and needs, parents' pressure, and power distance between novice and veteran teachers. Iida advised teachers to develop their TA according to their styles by studying professional journals or literature, keeping journal entries to reflect on both their language teaching and learning, self-observation, action research, taking notes in journals about class occurrences and how to cope with issues they encountered, and attending teacher development projects in conferences to create a social zone for cooperation with colleagues.

Öztürk's (2011) TA analysis revealed that countries with TA for student assessment and curriculum implementation exhibited more achievement than other countries. Likewise, Diyan and Adediwura (2016) developed a scale for measuring teachers' classroom TA. They explored some aspects of TA, including teaching content and materials selection, teaching styles, the processes of evaluating students, decision-making, student discipline, and independence. Wermke et al. (2018) interviewed Swedish and German teachers and found that they perceived themselves as very autonomous in the educational domain, in particular, concerning the choices of content and method. Similarly, Bakken (2019) found that English teachers in Norway enjoyed considerable freedom in selecting classroom texts following the aims of the national curriculum. The interview analyses suggested two reasoning positions on a continuum including freedom and text choice. While most teachers were in favor of selecting texts freely, few of them held that they exploited that freedom beyond selecting texts in textbooks.

Regarding teacher identity, previous studies have reported that TA is negatively associated with surface-acting (Stevens, 2020); that is, autonomous teachers do not engage in surface-acting

and fake behaviors and have more control over their job with their capabilities to align the profession with their personal beliefs and values, as they do not need to pretend emotions in reaction to the expectation of the organization (Özdemir et al., 2023). Moreover, Nazari et al. (2023) examined the role of teacher agency and autonomy constructs in language teacher identity from a post-structural perspective using semi-structured interviews and narratives. Their findings suggested that institutional power is a key factor in shaping teachers' agency, autonomy, and identity construction. Furthermore, institutional power shaped Iranian teachers' professional performance, and power was a normative drive weakening the link between agency and autonomy.

Several scholars have tried to measure TA by developing or using valid instruments. Ulas and Aksu (2015) developed a 5-point Likert scale of 18 items. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) indicated three factors for TA, including TA in instructional implementation and planning, TA in professional development, and TA in curriculum framework determination. Moreover, Sarkawi et al. (2019) employed TA questionnaires to investigate pre-service L2 teachers' journey to develop learner autonomy. The analysis of correlation tests and descriptive data revealed that teachers' autonomy degree in learning English was significantly high; however, there was a weak association between their autonomy degree and self-rating with learning English. The researchers recommended education policies need to give more consideration to developing learner autonomy for teachers. Similarly, in an explanatory study, Cirocki and Anam (2024) measured the Indonesian EFL teachers' sense of TA using questionnaires and focus group study. The findings suggested a high level of TA for instructional materials, educational methods, assessment, lesson planning, and pedagogical content among teachers. However, the teachers expressed low TA for their decision-making regarding the curriculum. More recently, in a correlational study, Ertem et al. (2021) explored the role of TA and school climate perceptions on teachers' goal orientations. The researchers employed multiple instruments, including goal orientation, school climate, and TA scales, to collect the data. Multiple hierarchical regression analysis indicated that TA, the principal's collegial and directive behavior, and curriculum autonomy predicted mastery, while directive principal behavior and communication autonomy predicted performance approach. In addition, work avoidance was predicted by teachers' intimate and disengaged behavior and the principal's directive behavior. They also found that TA, collegial and supportive principal behavior as well as communication autonomy are connected to teachers' relationships with students.

In summary, the aforementioned practical and theoretical considerations indicate the prominence of TA in relation to other factors including teachers' job satisfaction, dedication, commitment, efficiency, motivation, and organizational engagement. Thus, developing a valid scale to measure the context-based concept of TA seems crucial. However, to address the gap in the literature and due to the paucity of research on operationalizing teachers' autonomy in terms of their capacity for self-directed professional action, the current study sought to develop and validate an instrument. In this regard, the following research question was posited:

RQ. What is the status of Iranian EFL teachers' TA in terms of CSDPA?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Initially, 30 novice and experienced teachers (female=15, male=15) participated in semi-structured interviews in the first phase of data collection. Furthermore, an aggregate of 300 EFL teachers from different language institutes in Tehran Province were selected for the main phase of the study. All the teachers were native Persian speakers with ELT degrees, and their participation was voluntary. They included 140 males and 160 females, ranging from 20 to 56 years old, and held Diploma, BA, MA, or PhD degrees in the fields of English Translation, English Language Teaching, or English Literature. As for participants' teaching experiences and professional background, 151 of them were novice and 149 teachers were experienced. The teachers' experiences were identified based on Palmer et al.'s (2005) definition, considering teachers with more than five years of teaching experience, and novice teachers were classified according to Farrell's (2012) criterion for considering teachers with up to three years of teaching experience novice. They taught general English at different levels based on different ELT textbooks, such as *Family and Friends*, *American English File*, and *Summit* series. They were selected through convenience sampling for data collection in the main phase. Moreover, 7 experienced and 12 novice volunteer teachers who were similar to the target population were involved in item assessment procedures. The final piloting phase involved 40 EFL teachers who were involved in the test-retest reliability checking phase and were given the same questionnaire twice at a one-month interval. Table 1 outlines the demographic information of the participants in the first, piloting, and main phases.

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Participants in the First, Piloting, and Main Phases

	Gender		Age		Teaching experience		Educational level			
	Male	**Female**	**20-40**	**41-60**	**Novice**	**Experienced**	**Diploma**	**BA**	**MA**	**PhD**
Phase one										
No.	15	15	17	13	1	16	5	8	12	5
Total	30		30		30		30			
Piloting phase										
No.	20	20	22	18	2	20	5	15	15	5
Total	40		40		40		40			
Main phase										
No.	140	160	165	135	149	151	62	98	84	56
Total	300		300		300		300			

3.2. Instruments

The exploratory mixed method was used to collect data consisting of semi-structured interviews in the initial complementary phase and the questionnaire in the main phase.

3.2.1. Semi-structured Interviews

To gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' CSDPA and have a source of data to develop the questionnaire items, 30 EFL teachers were interviewed. An extensive literature review (e.g., Aoki, 2002; Bakken, 2019; Benson, 2011; Bustingorry, 2008; Derakhshan et al., 2020; Erss, 2018; Ertürk, 2023; Kara & Bozkurt, 2022; Keddie et al., 2023) and the use of Smith's (2003) model led to the formation of interview questions. Consequently, two experts in the field checked them to ensure their validity. The interviews were conducted in the teachers' native language, Persian, and each lasted for 15 to 30 minutes. The recorded interviews were transcribed and prepared for thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) coding approach. Finally, to ensure content validity, two experts in the field proofread the extracted themes, and some modifications were applied.

3.2.2. CSDPA Questionnaire

The questionnaire developed in this study included two sections. The first section incorporated teachers' demographic data, including their age, gender, teaching experience, and educational degree. The second section included 30 items to explore teachers' CSDPA through a variety of items on a four-point Likert scale (1=not at all, 2=very little, 3=somewhat, 4=to a great extent), signifying the respondents' opinions regarding the items. The originally developed questionnaire was administered in different modes, including Word file, print layout, and Google Docs, to gather sufficient data on a large scale. The initial item pool was developed based on an extensive review of the TA literature (e.g., Guo & Wang, 2021; Hammersley-Fletcher et al., 2020; Kong, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2021; Okada, 2023; Olsen & Mason, 2023; Parker, 2015; Teng, 2018) and extracted themes from interviews. Next, two experts in the field of applied linguistics revised the items many times, and seven experienced and twelve novice teachers volunteered to read the items and commented on their structure, content, and clarity. In the final piloting phase, 40 EFL teachers, chosen through convenient sampling, answered the same questionnaire twice with an interval of one month to check its test-retest reliability.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

To develop the CSDPA questionnaire, an initial item pool based on the review of literature and semi-structured interviews was gathered. Subsequently, two experts in teacher education and research methodology reviewed all items. To ascertain the content validity of the items, the experts assessed and revised the items for their linguistic and content appropriateness. They agreed on the quality of 30 items targeting CSDPA. Next, at the pilot phase, a small sample of teachers completed the questionnaire to assess item formulation appropriacy in terms of comprehension and clarity.

Afterwards, during the piloting phase, 40 teachers answered the same questionnaire twice within a month, and test-retest reliability was calculated to be 0.90. Through the scale development/validation phases, EFA, with the principal axis factoring (PAF) method and promax as its rotation method, was employed. Before conducting EFA, skewness measures and kurtosis values of the items were observed to examine normality. Consequently, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure to evaluate the adequacy of sample size and Bartlett's Sphericity Test to examine the correlativity appropriacy between items of each questionnaire were calculated. Finally, to extract the factors of the questionnaire, EFA was run. Before filling out the questionnaires, the participants received information about CSDPA as a guide and rumination as an incentive. In addition, their anonymity was ensured as an ethical issue.

The questions for the interview phase were formed following consultation with domain experts during many meeting sessions. The recorded and transcribed data gathered from the semi-structured interviews went through thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) coding approach. Both top-down deductive and bottom-up inductive approaches were utilized as both Smith's (2003) theoretical framework and the data were used to develop the themes. Axial coding and the analysis of codes and categories led to five main themes including teachers' CSDPA in planning, teaching techniques, instruction, student/teacher relationship, and professional development.

Finally, the inter-coder reliability of .80 was manifested after a second coder recoded the data. A total of 45 items for the CSDPA questionnaire were developed at this phase.

4. Results

First, to extract the factorial structure of capacity for a CSDPA questionnaire, its 30 items, on a 4-point Likert scale, were submitted to EFA with the principal axis factoring (PAF) extraction method, and promax rotation technique. We chose PAF as it is a robust extraction method in EFA in that it extracts a factor structure wherein common variance is examined and error variance and unique variance are eliminated (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Its main purpose is to illustrate the maximum measure of extracted variance (i.e., repressing the maximum amount of variance). It should be noted that PAF as an extraction technique is also more powerful than other methods in different distributional conditions such as non-normality. Furthermore, promax, as an oblique rotation method was used in our analysis, as we detected a moderate amount of correlation among factors shown in the factor correlation matrix (see Appendix for the factor correlation matrix).

Data distribution features were inspected before factor analysis. First, normality was estimated based on the skewness measures and all of the skewness values of items were between -2 and +2 standard errors of their respective measures (see Table 2). Consequently, based on Tabachnick and Fidell's (2013) assumptions, the normality of the data was acceptable. Second, to examine sample adequacy for EFA (i.e., the sufficiency of the sample size), the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure was used. As Table 3 indicates, KMO was 0.90, far more than the prescribed amount of

0.60 (Field, 2013; Kaiser, 1970, 1974). Ultimately, Bartlett's sphericity test, as indicated in Table 3, was $X^2(435)=536.62$, $p=.00$, manifesting that correlation weights between items were appropriate for conducting EFA.

Table 2

Statistical Description of the CSDPA Questionnaire (N=300)

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
Item	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
1	1.00	4.00	2.92	1.06	-0.62	0.14
2	1.00	4.00	3.36	0.82	-1.13	0.14
3	1.00	4.00	2.94	0.94	-0.58	0.14
4	1.00	4.00	3.26	0.97	-1.02	0.14
5	1.00	4.00	3.15	0.97	-0.90	0.14
6	1.00	4.00	3.20	0.93	-0.94	0.14
7	1.00	4.00	2.78	1.11	-0.41	0.14
8	1.00	4.00	2.51	1.03	-0.08	0.14
9	1.00	4.00	3.01	0.97	-0.56	0.14
10	1.00	4.00	3.07	0.96	-0.74	0.14
11	1.00	4.00	3.11	0.92	-0.69	0.14
12	1.00	4.00	2.87	0.97	-0.47	0.14
13	1.00	4.00	2.87	0.92	-0.46	0.14
14	1.00	4.00	2.94	0.87	-0.61	0.14
15	1.00	4.00	3.14	0.90	-0.89	0.14
16	1.00	4.00	2.79	1.06	-0.34	0.14
17	1.00	4.00	3.10	0.86	-0.80	0.14
18	1.00	4.00	2.84	0.96	-0.39	0.14
19	1.00	4.00	3.18	0.84	-0.82	0.14
20	1.00	4.00	3.23	0.81	-0.82	0.14
21	1.00	4.00	3.25	0.94	-1.08	0.14
22	1.00	4.00	3.29	0.83	-0.91	0.14
23	1.00	4.00	3.21	0.96	-1.00	0.14
24	1.00	4.00	3.09	0.89	-0.72	0.14
25	1.00	4.00	3.22	0.83	-0.82	0.14
26	1.00	4.00	2.83	1.00	-0.43	0.14
27	1.00	4.00	3.07	0.84	-0.58	0.14
28	1.00	4.00	3.21	0.86	-0.93	0.14
29	1.00	4.00	3.18	0.95	-0.88	0.14
30	1.00	4.00	3.34	0.84	-1.15	0.14

Table 3

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.90
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3536.62
	df	435
	Sig.	.000

Having conducted EFA using PAF as its extraction technique, we came up with a five-factor solution which was achieved utilizing the Kaiser Criterion (see also Figure 1). This factor structure, which was cross-checked by parallel analysis results, accounted for a total of 44.59% of the common variance (see Table 4), with those four factors demonstrating 29.16%, 4.56%, 4.19%, 4.10%, and 2.58 % of that common variance, respectively.

Table 4

Total Variance Explained by the Five-Factor Solution

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
Factor	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	9.25	30.82	30.82	8.75	29.16	29.16	7.69
2	1.93	6.42	37.24	1.37	4.56	33.71	6.25
3	1.79	5.97	43.21	1.26	4.19	37.90	5.27
4	1.73	5.76	48.97	1.23	4.10	42.00	2.59
5	1.33	4.43	53.40	0.77	2.58	44.59	2.25

Figure 1

Scree Plot for EFA

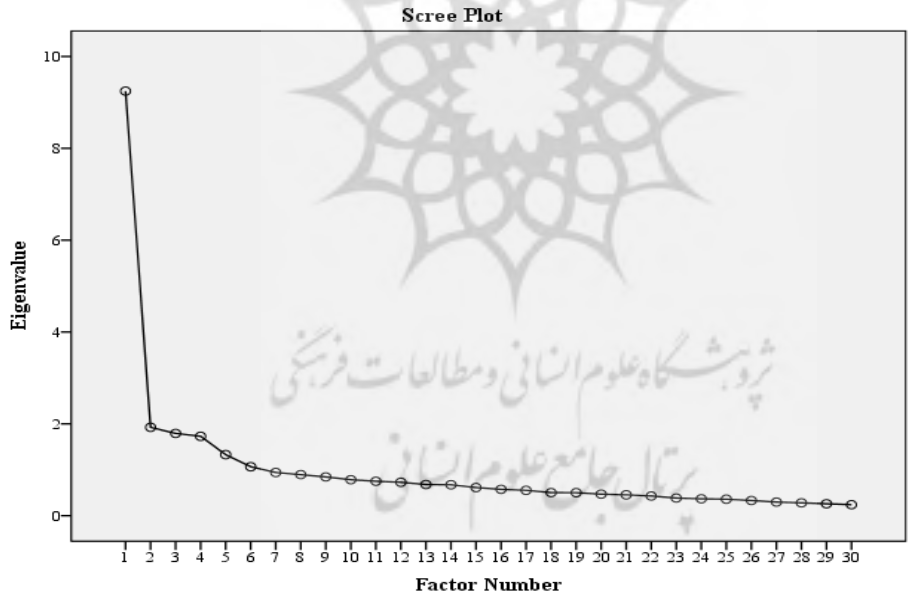

Table 5 recapitulates the information regarding the extracted five-factor structure, displaying the factors, their loading items, and reliability indices. As can be seen, all of Cronbach's alpha values were larger than the yardstick account of.70.

Table 5

EFA Summary

Construct	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 1	Item 5	0.784	
	Item 21	0.776	
	Item 29	0.753	
	Item 4	0.730	.90
	Item 23	0.716	
	Item 6	0.703	
	Item 1	0.663	
	Item 24	0.614	
	Item 7	0.562	
	Item 27	0.535	
Factor 2	Item 13	0.722	
	Item 12	0.700	.83
	Item 18	0.693	
	Item 26	0.646	
	Item 8	0.590	
	Item 16	0.552	
	Item 17	0.532	
Factor 3	Item 22	0.672	
	Item 20	0.638	
	Item 11	0.605	.79
	Item 25	0.595	
	Item 28	0.556	
	Item 30	0.548	
	Item 2	0.503	
Factor 4	Item 9	0.819	
	Item 10	0.594	.71
	Item 3	0.531	
Factor 5	Item 19	0.630	
	Item 14	0.607	.72
	Item 15	0.533	

Note: Factor 1=Capacity for self-directed instructional and curricular activities

Factor 2=Capacity for self-directed institutional actions

Factor 3=Capacity for self-directed teacher learning activities

Factor 4=Capacity for self-directed assessment and collegial negotiation activities

Factor 5=Capacity for self-directed relational and ethical actions

5. Discussion

To investigate EFL teachers' TA status regarding CSDPA, a 30-item questionnaire was developed and validated. As the results indicated, five factors emerged, including capacity for self-directed instructional and curricular activities (factor one), capacity for self-directed institutional actions (factor two), capacity for self-directed teacher learning activities (factor three), capacity for

self-directed assessment and collegial negotiation activities (factor four), and capacity for self-directed relational and ethical actions (factor five).

The first factor incorporated 10 items regarding teachers' CSDPA in terms of curricular and instructional autonomy in developing or selecting lesson plans, textbooks, supplementary materials, instructional activities, and teaching methods. This domain of TA is supported by Pearson and Hall (1993), Freidman (1999), Deci and Ryan (2000), Vangrieken et al. (2017), and Özdemir (2023), who considered TA associated with pedagogical methods, activities, techniques, strategies, materials, daily timetable, or curricular ideas. This area is also in line with Hammersley-Fletcher et al.'s (2020) and Guo and Wang's (2021) claims regarding multifold levels of TA, including teachers' attitudes and abilities in curriculum construction. Furthermore, the results corroborate Bakken's (2019) findings implying teachers' preference for selecting texts as well as Nguyen et al.'s (2021) claim concerning teachers' ability in curricular selection as an influential TA indicator.

The second factor, capacity for self-directed institutional actions, included seven items regarding teachers' CSDPA about institutional autonomy which are related to the institute's programs, conventions, regulations, and facilities. These findings strengthen Hargreaves et al.'s (2012) claim about TA as the teachers' capacity in the institutional construction they are located in. Teachers challenging the institute conventions and being critical of the institute programs were previously discussed by Koestner et al. (1996), who highlighted the importance of TA in teachers' decision-making abilities based on their values and needs. Moreover, the results are in line with Çolak and Altınkurt's (2017) claim about the TA concept as teachers' decision-making power toward issues like educational institutes. In a similar vein, teachers' self-directed institutional actions substantiate Özdemir's (2023) findings that distributed leadership increases teachers' TA perception. Moreover, the results correspond to the studies that claimed a positive relationship between TA and organizational factors including distributed leadership (e.g., Crawford, 2012; Harris, 2005; Hoy & Tarter, 1997).

The third factor, capacity for self-directed teacher learning activities, consisted of seven items regarding teachers' CSDPA related to activities (such as reading books, doing research, reflecting, participating in discussions and seminars, recording events, consulting, and observing) they do to promote their professional development named teacher-learner autonomy as a sub-set of professional action (Smith, 2003). Similarly, Parker (2015) highlighted the relationship of TA with professional development. The findings are also substantiated by Ulas and Aksu's (2015) TA scale including professional development as TA. Furthermore, this was remarked by Tunçeli et al. (2022), who viewed teachers' self-regulation as a mediator in teachers' critical thinking on their learning autonomy. This is also supported by Halbesleben (2010), who found TA associated with professional development and effective job commitment. Moreover, the findings confirm Iida (2009), who discussed different constraints to TA and advised teachers to develop it according to their own style.

The fourth factor, capacity for self-directed assessment and collegial negotiation activities, incorporated three items on teachers' CSDPA in terms of their autonomy in assessments (class and final exams) and negotiating with colleagues. This partially aligns with Diyan and Adediwura's (2016) and Özdemir's (2023) findings which included teachers' control over assessment and evaluation processes among factors in their TA. Moreover, the fact that teachers' collegial negotiations strengthen teachers' social autonomy was previously propounded by Rubdy (2007). This is also noted by Iida (2009), who emphasized the role of teachers' social autonomy within a collectivist approach. In addition, the results can, to some extent, be supported by Halbesleben (2010) and Ertürk (2023), who found professional communication autonomy in relation to TA, and Shah (2014), who found colleagueship and collaboration with other teachers as effective elements in TA.

The fifth factor, capacity for self-directed relational and ethical actions, included three items regarding teachers' CSDPA delineating teachers' interpersonal relationships and ethical autonomy. This construct deals with teachers' interpersonal relations with students as well as their abilities to create opportunities for students' negotiation of ideas and to make decisions based on ethical principles. This capacity is partially consistent with Ertem et al.'s (2021) findings that revealed the association of TA, collegial, and communication autonomy with teachers' relationships with their students. Similar to factor four, this capacity highlights the significance of social autonomy in TA (Iida, 2009; Rubdy, 2007) in terms of teachers' awareness of the social consequences of their actions on their students' behavior.

Considering all the five factors, the developed and validated questionnaire is somewhat similar to Ulas and Aksu's (2015) scale, which consisted of three factors of TA, namely TA in instructional and planning, TA in professional development, and TA in curriculum framework determination. Furthermore, the current scale supports Cirocki and Anam's (2024) instrument incorporating TA for instructional methods, assessment, lesson planning, pedagogical content, and curriculum.

In summary, the five extracted factors provide us with a clear understanding of the constituents of teachers' CSDPA, which considered TA associated with professional action (teaching) in Smith's (2003) model. Accordingly, the questionnaire for teachers' CSDPA describes the characteristics of highly autonomous teachers, and the five factors present a clear picture of the domains to be considered for teachers' CSDPA. Finally, teacher learning as a loaded factor supports Smith's (2003) claim that professional development is a sub-set of professional action.

6. Conclusion and Implications

This empirical exploratory study delved into teachers' status of CSDPA, that is teacher autonomy I according to Smith's (2003) classification, by developing and validating a questionnaire. Since TA is a context-based notion and has been indicated to be associated with other concepts such

as teachers' stress, job satisfaction, teachers' morale, teachers' efficiency, motivation, and organizational engagement (Akçay & Sevinç, 2021; Worth & Van den Brande, 2020; Yıldız et al., 2021), the necessity of a tool to measure TA in every context seems crucial. Furthermore, the developed scale targeted all aspects of TA. The study of teachers' willingness and abilities in their decision-making and the initiatives they take in their classes through reflective and self-managing processes as psychological and technical interpretations of TA demonstrated five major domains and specific activities representing the CSDPA continuum of teacher autonomy.

The results of this research can be beneficial and informative for language teachers as TA significantly and positively predicts their success (Derakhshan et al., 2020), by strengthening the components of TA, teachers can promote the quality of their careers and lives. Furthermore, the questionnaire can serve as a self-reflection tool for teachers' self-assessment. It can also help teachers spot the constraints on their autonomy that would limit their freedom.

Moreover, the scale would be useful for language institute principals and supervisors by shedding light on the teachers' positions on the TA continuum from the low autonomous to the highest ones. Such information on TA can also benefit the principals in their micro and macro decision-making and policies and provide them with consultations, justifications, and effective suggestions or solutions regarding the areas where teachers have low autonomy. The principals can also provide spaces for teachers to be more autonomous based on their CSDPA. The other implication of the study is for teacher training courses to include the constituents of TA in their syllabus by highlighting some components with consideration of educational context.

Similar to all studies, the present research is subject to certain limitations. The first limitation refers to the small sample size; therefore, it is recommended that future studies replicate it with a greater number of participants. Secondly, the study is confined to the context of Iran, especially the language institutes in Tehran. Future researchers are suggested to expand the context by including more educational centers and more cities or countries to increase the generalizability of the outcomes. Finally, the study was limited to non-native EFL teachers while native and/or ESL teachers can be considered in future studies.

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Appendix

Table 6

EFA Summary and the Questionnaire Items

Construct	Questionnaire items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 1	5. I am able to develop or select my own supplementary materials for more effective teaching.	0.784	
	21. I have the ability to develop creative and innovative ways to make the teaching activity interesting and meaningful for my students.	0.776	
	29. I have the ability to change my teaching practice and not to stuck in the routines.	0.753	
	4. I have the ability to decide about my lesson plan myself.	0.730	0.90
	23. I have the ability to adapt my teaching activities based on my students' needs and interests.	0.716	
	6. I have the ability to select the methods and sequencing of teaching myself.	0.703	
	1. I have the ability to teach according to my own decisions rather than the demands of the textbook, syllabus, or institute authorities.	0.663	
	24. I have the ability to take risks in my decision-making and try out new things in my classes.	0.614	
	7. I have the ability to have a role in the selection of textbooks and activities in the institute.	0.562	
	27. I have the ability to build and implement my own theory of language teaching in my teaching practice.	0.535	
Factor 2	13. I have the ability to be critical of educational programs in my institute.	0.722	
	12. I have the ability to challenge those institute conventions and regulations that I do not favor.	0.700	0.83
	18. I have the ability to have a role in deciding on in-service teacher education programs in my institute.	0.693	
	26. I have the ability to rely on my own knowledge and experience when there is a contradiction between my teaching activities and the policies set by the institute.	0.646	
	8. I have the ability to make decisions about my salary and rights in the institute.	0.590	
	16. I have the ability to make decisions about my dress code and appearance in the institute.	0.552	
	17. I have the ability to have a role in deciding on the types of teaching facilities needed to be used in the physical environment of my classroom.	0.532	
Factor 3	22. I have the ability to read new books to enhance my teaching practice.	0.672	
	20. I have the ability to do research in collaborating with professional teachers to find alternative practices for classroom problems.	0.638	
	11. I have the ability to analyze and reflect on my teaching process.	0.605	0.79
	25. I have the ability to participate in professional debates among teachers about language teaching.	0.595	
	28. I have the ability to systematically record events, details and feelings about my teaching experience.	0.556	
	30. I have the ability to take part in seminars, workshops and lectures about language teaching.	0.548	
	2. I have the ability to consult other teachers and observe classes to enhance my own teaching.	0.503	

Factor 4	9. I have the ability to decide about final exams.	0.819	
	10. I have the ability to develop my own class exams.	0.594	0.71
	3. I have the ability to make instructional decisions based on what other teachers share with me about their practices.	0.531	
Factor 5	19. I have the ability to create opportunities for the learners to express their personal political, cultural, or religious beliefs.	0.630	
	14. I have the ability to decide about moral and ethical principles in the institute.	0.607	0.72
	15. I have the ability to make decisions about interpersonal relationships with my students in the classroom.	0.533	