


English Teachers' Professional Autonomy: An Inductive/Deductive Hybrid Thematic Analysis Approach

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Keywords

Professional autonomy
In-service teachers
EFL context
Hybrid thematic analysis

Article Info:

Received : 12-11-2025
Accepted : 15-12-2025
Published : 24-12-2025

Abstract

This study investigates the professional autonomy of in-service English language teachers in Türkiye through an inductive–deductive hybrid thematic analysis approach. The research aims to identify the motivational, structural, and contextual factors that shape teachers' perceptions of autonomy and their engagement in professional development. Data were collected from 117 in-service teachers via the Teachers' Professional Autonomy Questionnaire (Okay & Balçıklı, 2021) and follow-up qualitative interviews with seven volunteers. Quantitative findings revealed moderately high levels of professional autonomy, with the highest scores in capability and internal motivation and the lowest in time management and external motivation. A curvilinear pattern emerged across experience levels: mid-career teachers demonstrated stronger motivation and self-efficacy, while novice and veteran teachers reported lower perceived autonomy. Qualitative findings highlighted that autonomy was fostered by intrinsic motivation, collegial collaboration, and supportive leadership, but constrained by workload, centralized curricula, and limited institutional resources. The integrated results conceptualize teachers' autonomy as conditional professional autonomy, a dynamic balance between self-determination and systemic constraint. The study offers theoretical and practical insights for fostering teacher agency through context-sensitive professional development and participatory school leadership.

DOI: 10.52963/PERR_Biruni_V14.N3.01

To cite this article: Gülbak, G. M., & Kırmızı, Ö. (2025). English teachers' professional autonomy: An inductive/deductive hybrid thematic analysis approach. *Psycho-Educational Research Reviews*, 14(3), 89-108. doi: 10.52963/PERR_Biruni_V14.N3.01

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, shifts in educational theory and practice have underscored the centrality of teachers not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as active agents shaping learning (Biesta, 2013; Priestley, et al., 2015). While the concept of teacher autonomy has long been discussed in relation to classroom control, decision-making, and curriculum implementation (Breen & Mann, 1997), an emerging perspective highlights professional autonomy as a distinct dimension. Professional autonomy extends beyond technical control over tasks to encompass teachers' capacity and responsibility to grow as reflective practitioners within collaborative professional communities (Okay & Balçıkanlı, 2021).

Professional autonomy requires more than freedom from external constraint; it entails motivation, capacity, and collegial collaboration, as well as the time and resources necessary for ongoing professional development. When these conditions are absent, teachers' agency is constrained, and their potential to innovate and sustain effective practice diminishes (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2010). Conversely, when teachers are supported as autonomous professionals, they assume ownership of their work and contribute actively to educational quality and democratic practice (Hughes & Lewis, 2020).

Research suggests that professional autonomy is crucial not only for teacher well-being and retention but also for developing the pedagogical adaptability required by contemporary reforms and diverse student needs (e.g. Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Chaban & Du, 2017). In contexts such as Türkiye, where centralized systems and heavy workloads often limit autonomy, examining how teachers perceive and exercise their professional autonomy offers valuable insights for policy and practice. Considering that an in-depth examination of the multi-layered structure of teachers' professional autonomy can provide valuable insights for both theory and practice, this study examines professional autonomy through an inductive–deductive thematic analysis and aims to contribute to educational policies and professional development programs by offering solutions to enhance teachers' professional autonomy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher professional autonomy (TPA) has long been a central topic in discussions of educational quality and teacher development. In the field of language education, autonomy has been approached both from the perspectives of learner autonomy and teacher autonomy in general sense (La Ganza, 2004; Benson, 2011). In-service teachers, who operate within institutional systems and established professional norms, often navigate tensions between these two forms of autonomy. For teachers, autonomy is not merely about instructional freedom but also about sustained professional growth, reflective practice, and participation in collaborative decision-making structures that support ongoing learning (Okay & Balçıkanlı, 2021; Pineda & Frodden, 2008). On the other hand, professional autonomy is a narrower term that focuses more on professional actions that are self-guided (McGrath, 2000).

English language teachers face unique challenges in maintaining autonomy due to curricular standardization, heavy workloads, and limited institutional support (Dilekçi, 2022; Yıldırım, 2017). Despite these constraints, studies consistently highlight that autonomy serves as a key motivational and protective factor for teachers' well-being, job satisfaction, and professional identity (Chaaban & Du, 2017; Derakhshan et al., 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Mansfield et al. (2016) found that higher autonomy correlates with greater job satisfaction and resilience, enabling teachers to sustain engagement despite systemic pressures. In the Turkish EFL context, autonomy has been shown to enhance teachers' sense of efficacy and reflective practice (Okay, 2018; Yükselir & Özer, 2022), suggesting that the ability to make professional decisions and self-direct development is crucial for effective and sustained teaching practice.

From a professional learning perspective, autonomy among in-service teachers is closely linked to intrinsic motivation and self-regulated professional development. Teachers who perceive themselves as autonomous are more likely to engage voluntarily in professional learning activities, explore new pedagogical methods, and integrate technology in innovative ways (Benson, 2011; Okay, 2018). However, this form of professional autonomy depends heavily on contextual factors such as institutional culture, administrative leadership, and access to resources. Research across various contexts has shown that supportive leadership and collegial collaboration enhance teachers' perceived autonomy and professional confidence (Hughes & Lewis, 2020; Pineda & Frodden, 2008), while rigid management structures tend to suppress initiative and innovation (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2010).

In Türkiye, where the education system remains largely centralized, in-service teachers often experience autonomy in a restricted or conditional form. Yıldırım (2017) found that English instructors valued autonomy but perceived limited space for independent decision-making. Similarly, Dinçer (2019) reported that although teachers desired greater professional freedom, structural and bureaucratic barriers limited their agency. More recent studies underline that autonomy among Turkish EFL teachers is not solely a matter of instructional control but rather a multidimensional construct encompassing capacity, motivation, collaboration, and time management, the dimensions that directly influence teachers' participation in meaningful professional development (e.g. Ertürk, 2023; Okay & Balçıklı, 2021).

In summary, the literature discusses teacher autonomy more in general sense rather than specifically professional autonomy and underscores that in-service English teachers' professional autonomy is both an individual and systemic phenomenon. It is strengthened by reflective practice, collaboration, and supportive leadership but weakened by centralized control, time pressure, and limited resources. Understanding how in-service teachers perceive and exercise autonomy in their professional development is therefore essential for designing context-sensitive policies and support systems that foster sustainable teacher growth and, consequently, higher educational quality.

THE STUDY

This study aims to contribute to the existing literature by examining EFL teachers' perceptions of professional autonomy, offering a comprehensive perspective on the concept of professional autonomy. It holds significance for both educational research and practice as it provides an in-depth examination of in-service English teachers' professional autonomy within the Turkish EFL context, a dimension of teacher professionalism that remains underexplored in centralized education systems. By employing a hybrid inductive–deductive mixed-method approach, the study not only captures teachers' perceptions quantitatively but also explores the contextual and experiential factors that shape their sense of autonomy. The findings have the potential to inform teacher education programs, institutional policies, and professional development frameworks by identifying the key enablers and barriers that influence teachers' self-directed growth, motivation, and capacity for reflective practice. Moreover, understanding how autonomy varies across career stages can contribute to the design of differentiated support mechanisms that address the evolving professional needs of novice, mid-career, and veteran teachers. Ultimately, this study aims to strengthen the discourse on professional empowerment, emphasizing that enhancing in-service teachers' professional autonomy is essential not only for their well-being and professional satisfaction but also for improving instructional quality and student learning outcomes.

The research questions are formulated as follows:

- 1) What are the perceptions of professional autonomy of English teachers working at different levels and institutions (e.g., primary, secondary; state or private) in Türkiye?
- 2) What are the perceptions of professional autonomy of English teachers with different years of experience in Türkiye?

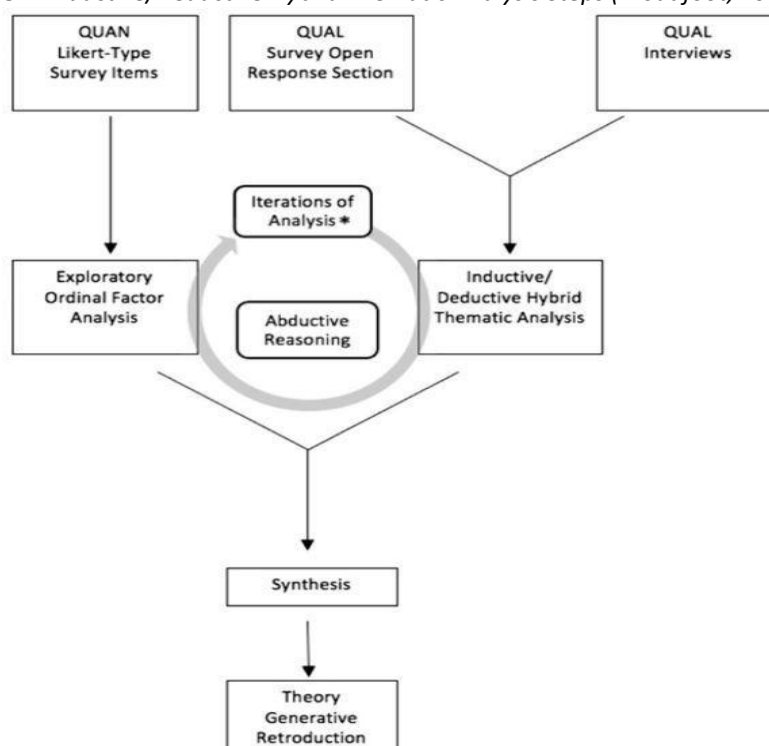
- 3) What are the factors (e.g. motivational, structural, contextual) affecting the professional autonomy of English teachers working at different levels and institutions (e.g., primary, secondary; state or private) in Türkiye?

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study has a mixed-method design which combines two different methodologies to examine the same phenomenon (Denzin, 1978), and to triangulate data in order to increase the validity and reliability (Mackey & Gass, 2005). In combining two different methodologies, Proudfoot's (2022) inductive/deductive hybrid thematic analysis was followed (Figure 1). Inductive and deductive hybrid thematic analysis requires the collection of quantitative and qualitative data and foresees that the inferences to be obtained within the scope of the study were drawn from both the data and the existing literature. The steps followed in the study within this framework are presented in Figure 1 below and explained in detail in the subsequent sections.

Figure 1. Inductive/Deductive Hybrid Thematic Analysis Steps (Proudfoot, 2022, s.5)



PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

Participants were 117 in-service state school English teachers working in different regions and educational levels (primary, secondary and high school) across Türkiye. A snowball sampling method was used, and the questionnaire was distributed online. At the end of the survey, participants were asked if they would volunteer for interviews; seven teachers agreed and participated in the qualitative phase.

Demographic information revealed that participants' teaching experience was evenly distributed: 1–5 years (17.9%), 6–10 years (21.4%), 11–15 years (17.9%), 16–20 years (20.5%), and over 20 years (22.2%). Most participants held undergraduate degrees (85.5%) (i.e. English Language and Literature, English Language Teaching), while a smaller portion had master's (13.7%) or doctoral (0.8%) qualifications.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researchers addressed the ethical concerns before conducting the research to protect the rights and interests of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Dörnyei, 2007). For the insurance of the ethical integrity, ethical approval was received from the university Ethics Committee (09/08/2023-2023/83-17) and informed consent was obtained from the participants after they were explained the research aims and procedures. The participants' right to anonymity was highly respected. Numbers were used to identify each instead of real names (e.g. P1, P2...). All data gathered and analyzed for the purposes of this study were kept confidential.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The instruments in the study are categorized under two main headings: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative data of the study were collected through the Teacher Professional Autonomy Questionnaire developed by Okay and Balçıklanlı (2021). TEPAQ, as shown in Figure 1 (QUAN Likert type survey items), were used to determine the level of professional autonomy of the participants. With 23 items, TEPAQ is suggested as an appropriate tool for understanding teachers' professional learning and raising their awareness of the importance of development in their profession. It was chosen because it was specifically designed and validated for Turkish EFL teachers.

The questionnaire was shared with the participants online via GoogleForms, with a consent form and questions on demographic information (age, position, years of experience, education, etc.). Quantitative data were analyzed using Jamovi 2.6.26 software. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were computed. Exploratory factor analysis was not conducted due to the low number of participants for the analysis. Reliability analysis yielded the following Cronbach's alpha values for subscales: internal motivation (0.85), collaboration (0.82), capability (0.82), time management (0.77), and external motivation (0.67), with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.78, indicating high internal consistency.

Following the same model, three open-ended questions in line with the relevant literature and study purpose (QUAL Survey Open Response Section) were added at the end of the questionnaire (1- Would you describe yourself as autonomous as a teacher? Why?, 2- What motivates you to engage in professional development/learning activities? Why? 3- What are the things that hinder/obstruct your participation in professional development/learning activities? Why?). 51 of 117 teachers responded to the qualitative part of the questionnaire.

Another qualitative phase was individual interviews with teachers, as suggested in the model (QUAL interviews). Since participation in the interviews was voluntary, the statement "I agree to participate in the interview about the study" was added at the end of the questionnaire and the interviews were conducted with seven voluntary teachers via the online platform (Gmeet). The interview participants represented diverse professional backgrounds and institutional contexts: three teachers from state high schools, two from primary schools, and two from secondary schools. Their teaching experience ranged from four to twenty-two years, offering perspectives from novice, mid-career, and veteran teachers. In the interviews, in addition to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, open-ended questions for the identification of factors related to the sub-headings of autonomy (motivation, capacity, collaboration and time management) were asked. (e.g. Do you find enough time for professional development activities? How? How often do you participate?) Interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed.

In analyzing the qualitative data, Miles et al.'s (2013) framework was applied systematically through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data reduction, both researchers independently conducted initial open coding of interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses, generating inductive codes while also applying deductive codes derived from the TEPAQ framework and the hybrid thematic model. In the data display stage, codes were

organized into matrices and thematic charts to compare patterns across participants and to examine how inductive and deductive categories intersected. Conclusion drawing involved iterative theme refinement, during which the researchers cross-checked interpretations, triangulated findings with quantitative results, and revisited the data to ensure analytic coherence. Two coders were involved throughout the process, and intercoder reliability was enhanced through regular comparison meetings; coding discrepancies were discussed until full consensus was reached, ensuring the rigor and transparency of the qualitative analysis.

FINDINGS

This section presents the results of the study derived from both quantitative and qualitative data sources in line with the mixed-method design described earlier. The findings are organized to reflect the inductive–deductive hybrid thematic analysis approach adopted in the research. First, the quantitative results are reported to illustrate participants’ overall perceptions of professional autonomy across the five subdimensions. This is followed by the qualitative findings gathered from open-ended survey responses and semi-structured interviews, which provide deeper insights into the factors shaping teachers’ professional autonomy. Finally, the synthesis of both datasets offers a comprehensive understanding of how motivational, institutional, and contextual dynamics interact to influence English teachers’ professional autonomy in the Turkish EFL context.

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Because the sample size of the present study ($N = 117$) did not meet the minimum requirements for conducting a new exploratory factor analysis, commonly recommended as at least 5–10 participants per item (Hair et al., 2019), the validated factor structure reported in Okay and Balçıkanlı (2021) was adopted. The five dimensions identified in the original study (Internal Motivation, Capabilities, Collaboration, Time Management, and External Motivation) were therefore used as the analytical framework for the current quantitative phase. This approach ensured conceptual comparability with the original instrument while allowing for a meaningful integration with the qualitative results presented later in the synthesis section.

The quantitative data revealed that the participants’ overall perceptions of professional autonomy were moderate to high. As shown in Table 1, the highest mean scores were obtained for capability ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.45$), followed by internal motivation ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.53$) and collaboration with colleagues ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.70$). The lowest mean scores were observed for time management ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.05$) and external motivation ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.01$). These results suggest that while teachers generally feel competent and intrinsically motivated to engage in professional development, they experience difficulties allocating sufficient time for it and are less driven by external incentives.

When examining the internal motivation subdimension (Table 1), it is observed that participants felt obliged to improve themselves professionally ($M = 4.14$), were willing to adopt new teaching methods ($M = 4.40$), and felt the need to progress professionally in order to meet students’ expectations ($M = 4.46$). In addition, participants stated that they enjoyed professional development ($M = 4.48$), that their engagement in professional learning was self-driven ($M = 4.14$), that they wished to advance professionally to address students’ needs ($M = 4.36$), and that they utilized all available opportunities for professional growth to perform their teaching duties in the best possible way ($M = 4.25$). The teachers who took part in the study also reported that they were able to access information related to professional development in teaching ($M = 4.38$), reach journals and books on the topic ($M = 4.18$), and improve their own teaching methods ($M = 4.43$). Similarly, they indicated that they could identify their own strengths and weaknesses ($M = 4.26$), use technology for professional development ($M = 4.39$), and keep up with the latest advancements in the field ($M = 4.21$). On the other hand, participants emphasized that professional development is not an obligation but rather an intrinsic desire ($M = 3.72$). In light of these findings on the internal motivation subdimension, it can be inferred

that the teachers participating in the study are highly willing to develop and enhance their professional autonomy.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for Internal Motivation*

| | <i>N</i> | <i>X</i> | <i>SS</i> | <i>Min</i> | <i>Max</i> |
|---|----------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| I want to develop myself professionally because I feel I have to. | 117 | 4.14 | 0.928 | 1 | 5 |
| It is my own wish to continue my professional development. | 117 | 4.14 | 0.928 | 1 | 5 |
| I am curious about new ways to develop my teaching. | 117 | 4.40 | 0.670 | 1 | 5 |
| I want to develop professionally because it is a necessity to meet the needs of students. | 117 | 4.46 | 0.714 | 1 | 5 |
| I enjoy developing myself professionally. | 117 | 4.48 | 0.638 | 1 | 5 |
| I feel obliged to continue my development as a teacher. | 117 | 3.72 | 1.144 | 1 | 5 |
| I constantly look for ways to develop my teaching. | 117 | 4.09 | 0.761 | 2 | 5 |
| I want to develop professionally to meet the needs of my students. | 117 | 4.36 | 0.663 | 1 | 5 |
| I want to develop myself professionally in order to push the limits of my abilities as a teacher. | 117 | 4.25 | 0.776 | 2 | 5 |

When examining the capabilities subdimension (Table 2), it appears that teachers also demonstrated a high level of self-confidence in this area ($M = 4.32$). Participants stated that they possessed the capacity to improve their own teaching methods ($M = 4.43$), had access to technology for professional development ($M = 4.39$), and were able to conduct research related to their professional growth ($M = 4.39$). They also reported being able to identify their strengths and weaknesses as teachers ($M = 4.26$), integrate the latest developments into their teaching practices ($M = 4.21$), and locate academic resources related to professional development ($M = 4.18$). These results suggest that participants display strong competencies within the framework of professional autonomy, indicating that they perceive themselves as capable and resourceful in managing their own professional learning.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics for Capability*

| | <i>N</i> | <i>X</i> | <i>SS</i> | <i>Min.</i> | <i>Max.</i> |
|--|----------|----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| I have the ability to develop my teaching. | 117 | 4.43 | 0.562 | 3 | 5 |
| I have access to technology to continue my development as a teacher. | 117 | 4.39 | 0.629 | 2 | 5 |
| I am able to search out information about teaching. | 117 | 4.39 | 0.539 | 2 | 5 |
| I am able to use technology to develop my teaching. | 117 | 4.39 | 0.601 | 2 | 5 |
| I am able to identify my weaknesses/strengths as a teacher. | 117 | 4.26 | 0.672 | 1 | 5 |
| I can adapt to recent developments in teaching. | 117 | 4.21 | 0.705 | 2 | 5 |
| I can find profession-related materials (i.e. books, journals, etc.) about teaching. | 117 | 4.18 | 0.816 | 1 | 5 |

When examining the collaboration subdimension (Table 3), the overall mean score was found to be 4.15. Within this dimension, participants indicated that they were willing to seek ideas from colleagues to improve their teaching methods ($M = 4.23$), could work collaboratively with peers to enhance their instructional practices ($M = 4.17$), and had colleagues they could consult with regarding matters of professional development ($M = 4.04$). These findings suggest that teachers value collegial interaction and view professional collaboration as an important component of their professional autonomy.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Collaboration

| | <i>N</i> | <i>X</i> | <i>SS</i> | <i>Min.</i> | <i>Max.</i> |
|--|----------|----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| I can work with my colleagues to develop my teaching. | 117 | 4.17 | 0.813 | 1 | 5 |
| I like to learn from my colleagues to develop my teaching. | 117 | 4.23 | 0.736 | 2 | 5 |
| I have colleagues whom I can consult when I need help about my professional development. | 117 | 4.04 | 0.894 | 1 | 5 |

When it comes to the time management subdimension (Table 4), the overall mean score was found to be 3.44. This indicates that the English teachers who participated in the study were somewhat undecided about their ability to allocate sufficient time for professional development activities. Participants expressed that their heavy workload limited the time they could devote to such activities ($M = 3.37$) and that they had very little time for professional development outside of school hours ($M = 3.50$). These results suggest that time constraints constitute a significant challenge to teachers' professional growth and autonomy.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Time Management

| | <i>N</i> | <i>X</i> | <i>SS</i> | <i>Min.</i> | <i>Max.</i> |
|---|----------|----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| My workload is too heavy to engage in activities to develop myself as a teacher. | 117 | 3.37 | 1.21 | 1 | 5 |
| I find very little time outside the school for professional development activities. | 117 | 3.50 | 1.11 | 1 | 5 |

Finally, when examining the external motivation subdimension (Table 5), the overall mean score was found to be 3.10. Participants generally disagreed with the idea that professional development is pursued for financial benefit ($M = 3.23$) or undertaken primarily to obtain a better position or promotion ($M = 2.98$). These results indicate that teachers' engagement in professional development is not driven by extrinsic rewards, but rather by intrinsic and self-directed motivations, reinforcing the findings observed in the internal motivation subdimension.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for External Motivation

| | <i>N</i> | <i>Ort</i> | <i>SS</i> | <i>Min.</i> | <i>Max.</i> |
|--|----------|------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| I want to develop myself professionally to better my financial condition. | 116 | 3.23 | 1.12 | 1 | 5 |
| I want to develop myself professionally for a chance of getting promoted to a better position. | 117 | 2.98 | 1.20 | 1 | 5 |

An important component of this study was to examine whether English teachers' perceptions of professional autonomy varied according to their years of teaching experience. The results indicated that perceptions of autonomy indeed differed by experience level: teachers who had just begun their careers (0–5 years) and those with more than 20 years of experience demonstrated lower levels of self-confidence and perceived capability in this regard (Table 6).

Within the internal motivation subdimension, the item *"I want to improve myself because I find it necessary"* yielded the highest mean score among teachers with 6–10 years of experience, while the lowest means were observed among the 0–5 year and 20+ year groups. Similarly, for the item *"Professional progress is my own choice,"* teachers with 6–10 years of experience reported the highest levels of agreement, whereas novice teachers (0–5 years) and the most experienced group (20+ years) showed the lowest levels.

A statistically significant difference was also found for the item *"I am curious about new ways to improve my teaching"* ($F = 5.1269$, $p = .001$). Post hoc tests revealed that this difference stemmed from the gap between the 20+ years group and all other experience groups, with the 20+ years group showing the lowest mean ($M = 3.92$).

For the items *“I want to improve myself professionally because meeting students’ needs is a necessity”* and *“I enjoy professional development,”* all experience groups reported high mean scores, and no significant differences were observed. On the other hand, for the item *“As a teacher, I feel obliged to maintain my professional growth,”* only teachers with 11–15 years of experience had a notably high mean score ($M = 4.19$), while other groups reported lower values.

Another item where teaching experience appeared to play a key role was *“I constantly look for new ways to improve my teaching methods.”* Although teachers across nearly all experience groups scored high on this item, those in the 20+ years group showed a relatively lower mean ($M = 3.85$).

Similarly, for the item *“I need to improve myself professionally to meet students’ needs,”* a statistically significant difference was observed ($F = 3.9007$, $p = .007$). The 20+ years experience group again had a considerably lower mean ($M = 3.96$) compared to teachers in other groups. Finally, for the item *“As a teacher, I want to push the boundaries of my professional progress,”* the same pattern persisted — teachers with over 20 years of experience displayed lower mean scores ($M = 3.96$) than their less experienced colleagues.

Table 6. Internal Motivation Results Based On Teaching Experience (Years)

| | 0-5 | 6-10 | 11-15 | 16-20 | 20+ |
|---|------|------|-------|-------|------|
| I want to develop myself professionally because I feel I have to. | 3.76 | 4.36 | 4.19 | 4.38 | 3.96 |
| It is my own wish to continue my professional development. | 3.76 | 4.36 | 4.19 | 4.38 | 3.96 |
| I am curious about new ways to develop my teaching. | 4.67 | 4.60 | 4.48 | 4.42 | 3.92 |
| I want to develop professionally because it is a necessity to meet the needs of students. | 4.57 | 4.44 | 4.57 | 4.50 | 4.27 |
| I enjoy developing myself professionally. | 4.67 | 4.48 | 4.62 | 4.50 | 4.19 |
| I feel obliged to continue my development as a teacher. | 3.38 | 3.96 | 4.19 | 3.67 | 3.42 |
| I constantly look for ways to develop my teaching. | 4.14 | 4.16 | 4.24 | 4.08 | 3.85 |
| I want to develop professionally to meet the needs of my students. | 4.57 | 4.40 | 4.62 | 4.33 | 3.96 |
| I want to develop myself professionally in order to push the limits of my abilities as a teacher. | 4.43 | 4.32 | 4.38 | 4.21 | 3.96 |

In summary, these findings suggest a curvilinear relationship between teaching experience and perceived professional autonomy. TPA tends to rise during mid-career stages (approximately 6–15 years) but declines slightly among teachers with very long experience, possibly due to professional fatigue, systemic limitations, or a sense of career plateau.

Teaching experience also proved to be an important factor within the capabilities subdimension (Table 7). A statistically significant difference was found among experience groups for the first item in this category ($F = 2.9400$, $p = .028$). Specifically, teachers with more than 20 years of experience felt less competent in the item *“I have the capacity to improve my own teaching methods”* compared to teachers in other experience groups ($M = 4.08$).

Overall, across the capabilities dimension, teachers in all experience groups reported that they were able to use technology effectively, identify their own strengths and weaknesses, and locate academic resources related to professional development. However, differences emerged in certain specific items. For example, regarding the item *“I can conduct research related to professional development,”* teachers with over 20 years of experience reported lower levels of competence ($F = 4.088$, $p = .006$). Similarly, for the item *“I can use technology for my professional development,”* teachers with 0–5, 6–10, and 11–15 years of experience demonstrated higher levels of competence compared to other groups ($F = 2.6657$, $p = .042$).

Finally, in the item *“I can keep up with the latest developments in terms of professional growth,”* teachers with 20 or more years of experience again exhibited lower levels of perceived competence ($M = 3.92$). Taken together, these results indicate that while most teachers feel capable

of managing their professional learning, veteran teachers tend to perceive themselves as less up-to-date and less active in adopting new practices compared to their younger or mid-career colleagues.

Table 7. Capabilities Results Based On Teaching Experience (Years)

| | 0-5 | 6-10 | 11-15 | 16-20 | 20+ |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|------|
| I have the ability to develop my teaching. | 4.48 | 4.48 | 4.57 | 4.38 | 4.08 |
| I have access to technology to continue my development as a teacher. | 4.14 | 4.04 | 4.48 | 4.29 | 4.00 |
| I am able to search out information about teaching. | 4.57 | 4.52 | 4.57 | 4.42 | 4.12 |
| I am able to use technology to develop my teaching. | 4.48 | 4.28 | 4.48 | 4.08 | 4.04 |
| I am able to identify my weaknesses/strengths as a teacher. | 4.57 | 4.48 | 4.52 | 4.21 | 4.23 |
| I can adapt to recent developments in teaching. | 4.43 | 4.12 | 4.52 | 4.17 | 3.92 |
| I can find profession-related materials (i.e. books, journals, etc.) about teaching. | 4.62 | 4.36 | 4.52 | 4.42 | 4.12 |

Within the collaboration subdimension (Table 8), no statistically significant differences were found among teachers from different experience groups. Overall, teachers appeared to be open to collaboration and capable of working effectively with their colleagues. However, in the final item of this subdimension, “*When I need professional support, I can find a colleague around me to consult with*”, participants in the 0–5 years, 6–10 years, and 20+ years experience groups reported lower mean scores. This finding suggests that while teachers generally value collegial cooperation, those who are either new to the profession or in its later stages may experience a sense of isolation or limited access to professional support networks within their institutions.

Table 8. Collaboration Results Based On Teaching Experience (Years)

| | 0-5 | 6-10 | 11-15 | 16-20 | 20+ |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|------|
| I can work with my colleagues to develop my teaching. | 4.19 | 4.20 | 4.19 | 4.21 | 4.08 |
| I like to learn from my colleagues to develop my teaching. | 4.29 | 4.16 | 4.52 | 4.21 | 4.04 |
| I have colleagues whom I can consult when I need help about my professional development. | 3.95 | 3.84 | 4.29 | 4.25 | 3.92 |

Similarly, within the time management subdimension (Table 9), no significant differences were found among teachers with different years of experience. However, it was observed that almost all experience groups reported low mean scores in this subdimension. This finding indicates that regardless of their level of professional experience, teachers face similar challenges in allocating sufficient time for professional development activities, largely due to heavy workloads and institutional demands.

Table 9. Time Management Results Based On Teaching Experience (Years)

| | 0-5 | 6-10 | 11-15 | 16-20 | 20 + |
|---|------|------|-------|-------|------|
| My workload is too heavy to engage in activities to develop myself as a teacher. | 3.38 | 3.28 | 3.43 | 3.42 | 3.35 |
| I find very little time outside the school for professional development activities. | 3.71 | 3.40 | 3.43 | 3.63 | 3.38 |

Lastly, within the external motivation subdimension (Table 10), no statistically significant differences were observed for the first item. In other words, teachers across all experience groups agreed that professional development is not pursued for economic gain. On the other hand, a statistically significant difference emerged for the item “*I want to improve myself professionally in order to be promoted to a better position*” ($F = 3.2587$, $p = 0.018$). According to this result, teachers with 11–15 years and 20 or more years of experience appeared less optimistic about advancing to higher professional positions. This suggests that as teachers gain more experience, their expectations

regarding promotion or career advancement tend to decline, possibly reflecting a sense of career stagnation or limited upward mobility within the educational system.

Table 10. *External Motivation Based On Teaching Experience (Years)*

| | 0-5 | 6-10 | 11-15 | 16-20 | 20 + |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|------|
| I want to develop myself professionally to better my financial condition. | 3.24 | 3.46 | 3.19 | 3.38 | 2.92 |
| I want to develop myself professionally for a chance of getting promoted to a better position. | 3.38 | 3.28 | 2.86 | 3.08 | 2.38 |

In summary, the findings indicate a curvilinear pattern in which autonomy and motivation were highest among mid-career teachers (6–15 years) but lower among novices (0–5 years) and veterans (20+ years). Mid-career teachers showed greater internal motivation, curiosity, and self-driven professional growth, while the most experienced teachers reported lower confidence, curiosity, and perceived capability, likely due to fatigue or a sense of plateau. Across capability measures, most teachers felt competent, yet those with over 20 years of experience were less confident in keeping up with new developments and using technology. Collaboration levels were generally high across groups, though newer and senior teachers felt less supported by peers. Time management was a consistent challenge for all groups, with heavy workloads limiting development opportunities. Lastly, external motivation (e.g., promotion or financial gain) declined with experience, suggesting that senior teachers felt fewer career advancement prospects.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The qualitative data of the study consisted of open-ended survey responses and individual interviews. The first open-ended survey question asked teachers how autonomous they felt in their profession. A summary of the participants' responses, along with illustrative quotations is given in Table 11.

Table 11. *Perceptions About TPA Themes*

| Theme | Sample quotations |
|--|--|
| Pedagogical freedom and creativity | "Yes, I feel autonomous because I have the flexibility to choose teaching methods and adapt materials according to my students' needs." (P4) |
| Partial/ context-dependent autonomy | "I can say I am autonomous to a certain extent. I am free to choose how to deliver lessons, but I usually have to follow the set curriculum." (P2) |
| Systematic constraints and curriculum pressure | "No, because I have to strictly follow the daily plan determined by the Ministry of Education and apply it within limited time without much room for flexibility." (P49) |
| Experience and self-directed development | "Yes. Especially after starting my master's degree and with my 16 years of experience, I feel autonomous as a teacher who wants to promote learner autonomy." (P7) |
| Institutional environment and administrative support | "Yes, I can make my own decisions, and my principal always supports me." (P33) |
| Intrinsic motivation and personality-based autonomy | "Yes, because I have the freedom to make the best decisions for my students." (P25) |

According to the analysis of responses, English teachers' perceptions of professional autonomy were clustered under six main themes. The most common theme was pedagogical freedom and creativity, where teachers reported feeling free in choosing teaching methods, adapting materials, and planning lessons. However, many also described their autonomy as partial, limited by the national curriculum, yearly plans, and administrative constraints. Curriculum rigidity, exam-oriented practices, and lack of time led some participants to state they did not feel autonomous at all.

Teachers with extensive experience, on the other hand, expressed that they sustained autonomy through self-directed professional development and individual learning efforts. Institutional support and administrative flexibility also appeared as key factors shaping perceptions of autonomy. Finally, some participants associated their autonomy primarily with personality traits and intrinsic motivation. Together, these themes demonstrate that teacher autonomy is influenced not only by individual capacity but also by structural and environmental conditions.

The second question aimed to explore participants' primary sources of motivation for engaging in professional development activities. A summary of their responses and representative quotes is provided in Table 12.

Table 12. *Sources For Motivation Themes*

| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Sample quotation</i> |
|---|---|
| Student-centred motivation | "My motivation comes from wanting to improve my teaching and better support my students' learning. Seeing my students participate and progress reminds me why I teach." (P1) |
| Keeping up with educational and technological innovations | "Staying current and growing in my field is my main motivation. In a world where education and technology constantly evolve, being up to date makes me more effective, confident, and inspired." (P2) |
| Lifelong learning and personal growth | "As teachers, we must keep up with new generations that change every year. Lifelong learning is personally important to me—it makes me feel more motivated to teach." (P4) |
| Passion for teaching and intrinsic joy | "Loving my job. My intrinsic motivation is this: the more I learn and the better I do my job, the more I can help others." (P26) |
| Changing student needs | "As technology develops, students' needs change, and every year a new generation comes. I need to meet their expectations." (P22) |
| Systematic or institutional pressure | "Honestly, as English teachers we're tired of traditional professional development—it's usually the same presenters, same topics, same advice." (P10) |
| Interest in digital tools | "Because I'm curious about these topics and good at digital tools. I enjoy teaching my students new things." (P35) |

Most participants shared student-centered motivation, expressing that their main reason for professional development was improving student success, addressing learners' needs, and enhancing classroom interaction. Following this, the need to keep up with educational and technological innovations emerged as another strong motivator. Teachers emphasized their desire to stay up to date with new teaching methods and tools.

Another salient theme was lifelong learning and personal growth. Participants viewed teaching as a profession that requires continual learning and saw professional growth as beneficial to both themselves and their students. Intrinsic motivation and passion for teaching were also highlighted by several teachers. Less common but noteworthy factors included changing student demographics, institutional pressures, and interest in technology. These diverse sources of motivation reveal that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors shape teachers' engagement in professional development.

The final survey question explored the barriers preventing participation in professional development. A summary of responses and illustrative quotes is presented in Table 13.

Table 13. Barriers for TPA

| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Sample quotation</i> |
|--|---|
| Time constraints | "The main barrier is lack of time. Lesson planning, grading, and sometimes private courses make it hard to find time for extra training." (P5) |
| Heavy workload | "My teaching schedule and the curriculum exhaust me mentally and physically. I can't even find quality time for myself." (P25) |
| Family responsibilities | "I struggle with time because I also have responsibilities as a mother and wife. These take time and energy, leaving little for professional activities." (P16) |
| Financial constraints | "Both time and money are factors. Even if we have free time, we don't want to spend it on work-related activities unless they're within working hours and compensated." (P12) |
| Irrelevance or ineffectiveness of activities | "Most professional development activities feel disconnected from real classroom realities, so I don't find them useful." (P7) |
| Low motivation | "Paperwork, teaching duties, and years of routine make me feel I'm already competent enough—so I don't feel motivated to attend." (P14) |
| Logistical problems | "I live far from central areas in Istanbul. I'd participate if these events were online." (P20) |

The most frequently cited barrier was lack of time. Teachers emphasized that their heavy teaching loads, administrative paperwork, and family responsibilities left little time for professional development. Workload and fatigue further limited their participation, as did financial challenges such as the cost of materials or transportation. Some participants criticized traditional training events as irrelevant or impractical, while others mentioned low motivation or burnout as barriers. Finally, logistical and geographic factors, particularly for those in rural or distant areas, were additional constraints.

The other qualitative data source was individual semi-structured interviews. These interviews explored the deductively defined subdimensions of professional autonomy. The summary of the participants' responses and example quotations is presented in Table 14.

Table 14. Subdimensional Themes

| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Sample quotation</i> |
|----------------------|--|
| Intrinsic motivation | "For me, professional autonomy means having the freedom to decide how to teach and what materials to use. It increases both my confidence and creativity." (P3) "When my students participate actively, I feel motivated. Their development pushes me to improve too." (P5) |
| Extrinsic motivation | "Even though the administration gives us freedom, ministry inspections and fixed plans still limit our decisions." (P7) "Certificates from in-service trainings are valued by administrators." (P2) |
| Time management | "I teach 30 hours a week. Finding time for extra activities is hard, especially with a small child." (P2) |
| Collaboration | "We share teaching ideas in a WhatsApp group. This synergy helps me try new methods I hadn't considered before." (P7) |
| Capacity | "In my rural school there's no computer or internet, but I bring my own laptop and use what I can." (P1) "I watch YouTube videos and follow podcasts to learn informally." (P7) |

The structured interviews supported five main deductive themes (i.e. intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, time management, collaboration, and capacity). Teachers' narratives provided a multifaceted picture of their professional autonomy and the factors shaping it. Participants reported that they felt most autonomous and motivated when they could make pedagogical decisions and contribute to student learning. However, administrative control and centralized curriculum requirements led many to feel constrained and externally regulated.

Time management challenges stemming from heavy workloads and personal responsibilities were recurrently mentioned as barriers to professional development. Collaboration emerged as a positive force as teachers highlighted that sharing experiences and producing materials collectively enhanced their learning. Under the capacity theme, participants drew attention to technological limitations and lack of access to resources, both of which restricted their ability to act autonomously.

As part of the hybrid thematic analysis, all qualitative data obtained were synthesized and presented in Table 15.

Table 15. *Hybrid Thematic Analysis*

| <i>Theme area</i> | <i>Deductive themes</i> | <i>Inductive themes</i> | <i>Hybrid analysis themes</i> |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Motivation | Intrinsic motivation Extrinsic motivation | Student-centered motivation Lifelong learning Intrinsic joy | Participants mostly based their motivation for professional development on internal sources, emphasizing student success and personal satisfaction. However, some also noted that external pressures (institutional expectations, inspectors, exam systems) influenced their motivation. |
| Time/ Workload | Time management | Lack of time Family responsibilities Fatigue | Time constraints emerged as the most prominent barrier in both open-ended responses and interviews. Ineffective time management directly affects both professional development and decision-making autonomy. |
| Collaboration | Collaboration | Willingness to collaborate with colleagues Shared learning opportunities | Teachers emphasized that collaboration with colleagues supports both their autonomy and professional growth, yet they complained that such collaboration is rarely encouraged at the institutional level. |
| Capacity/ Resources | Capacity (technology, materials, training opportunities) | Lack of technological infrastructure Limited access to teaching materials | Participants highlighted that they lack sufficient materials, technology, and training opportunities to make autonomous decisions. This lack of physical capacity is particularly significant for teachers working in rural areas. |
| Systemic/ Institutional Factors | External motivation (rules, expectations, supervision) | Curriculum pressure Centralization Administrative restrictions | Teachers' perceptions of autonomy are largely limited by the centralized education system and school management practices. As a result, some decisions are made out of obligation rather than professional choice. |

The hybrid thematic analysis used in this study enabled the interpretation of qualitative data through both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) approaches. Themes derived from open-ended survey questions reflected participants' authentic experiences, while data from interviews were analyzed according to predefined theoretical dimensions of professional autonomy.

When combined, these two approaches provided a multidimensional understanding of teachers' perceptions of professional autonomy and the factors shaping them. For example, the motivation theme was analyzed inductively in relation to intrinsic satisfaction gained from student achievement, and deductively in relation to external factors such as institutional performance expectations and administrative pressures. Similarly, the time management and capacity themes were evaluated both in terms of individual limitations and their broader implications for TPA.

SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

Following Proudfoot’s (2022) hybrid inductive–deductive framework, this section integrates the quantitative and qualitative results to move beyond simple corroboration toward theory-generative retroduction, an interpretive process that seeks to uncover the underlying mechanisms shaping teachers’ professional autonomy. The combination of numeric trends and lived experiences allows for the emergence of deeper conceptual patterns explaining *why* and *how* in-service English teachers in Türkiye perceive autonomy as they do. To this end, a joint display (Table 16) was developed to illustrate the points of convergence, complementarity, and divergence between the EFA-based factors and the emergent qualitative themes.

Table 16. *Joint Display*

| <i>EFA Factor (Quantitative Dimension)</i> | <i>Quantitative Findings (Summary)</i> | <i>Qualitative Insights</i> | <i>Integrated Interpretation</i> |
|--|---|--|---|
| Internal motivation | Mid-career teachers (6–15 yrs) reported highest intrinsic motivation; lowest among novice and veteran teachers. | Teachers linked motivation to self-driven growth and student success, not external rewards. | Both strands show motivation as internally sustained and highest when autonomy and self-efficacy align. |
| Capabilities | Veteran teachers (20+ yrs) perceived lower competence in adapting to new methods and technologies. | Qualitative data showed senior teachers felt “outdated” due to systemic rigidity and lack of institutional support. | Experience moderates capability; institutional culture amplifies or reduces confidence. |
| Collaboration | No significant quantitative difference; moderate-high means overall. | TPA depended on school culture—supportive leadership encouraged peer learning, while rigid environments reduced collaboration. | Quantitative stability masks qualitative variability due to contextual leadership factors. |
| Time management | Low means across all groups; no significant differences. | Teachers cited heavy workload and administrative duties as barriers to autonomy and professional development. | Both strands identify time and workload as universal constraints. |
| External motivation | Decline in promotion-related motivation with more experience. | Teachers perceived limited career mobility and systemic stagnation. | Reduced extrinsic incentives may reinforce intrinsic but limit sustained engagement. |

The quantitative data indicated that teachers generally demonstrate strong internal motivation and professional capability, while reporting lower levels of external motivation and time management. These results suggest a teaching workforce that is intrinsically driven and self-reliant but hindered by systemic and temporal constraints. At the same time, the qualitative findings revealed that autonomy is understood by teachers not merely as individual independence but as a contextually negotiated and relational phenomenon, one shaped by institutional culture, workload, leadership practices, and access to professional resources.

Through retroductive reasoning, these strands converge around a central theoretical insight. Professional autonomy among in-service teachers is a dynamic equilibrium between personal agency and structural constraint. Teachers’ narratives illustrate that while they take personal responsibility for their development and exhibit strong intrinsic motivation, their autonomy is continuously

moderated by organizational and systemic factors such as rigid curricula, hierarchical leadership, and limited recognition of teacher expertise.

The integration of findings also points to an experience-based differentiation in the autonomy process. Mid-career teachers (6–15 years) emerge as the most autonomous and self-confident group, balancing institutional expectations with individual initiative. In contrast, novice teachers (0–5 years) and veteran teachers (20+ years) experience reduced autonomy for different reasons, the former due to dependency and lack of confidence, the latter due to fatigue, disillusionment, or structural stagnation. This pattern supports a developmental interpretation of professional autonomy, where teachers' agency evolves but remains contingent upon institutional affordances and professional recognition.

Furthermore, the synthesis underscores the multidimensional nature of TPA as conceptualized earlier. Quantitative correlations among these dimensions, reinforced by qualitative accounts, indicate that internal motivation and professional capability function as core enablers, while time constraints and lack of institutional support act as systemic inhibitors. This interplay suggests that TPA is not a static trait but an emergent property arising from the interaction between teacher self-determination and institutional ecology.

In retroductive terms, the underlying generative mechanism revealed by the integrated data can be articulated as “conditional professional autonomy”, a state in which teachers' intrinsic motivation sustains professional growth despite limited structural empowerment. This mechanism operates through teachers' adaptive strategies, such as self-initiated learning, peer collaboration, and informal resource-sharing, that compensate for institutional deficiencies. The persistence of these adaptive behaviors points to a resilient professional culture where teachers internalize responsibility for their own learning even in the absence of systemic facilitation.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore in-service English teachers' perceptions of professional autonomy and to examine how these perceptions vary across experience levels within the Turkish EFL context. Using Proudfoot's (2022) hybrid inductive–deductive approach, the study generated a retroductive explanation of how professional autonomy is both experienced and constrained within institutional systems. The integrated findings revealed that teachers' autonomy is characterized by strong internal motivation and professional capability, yet limited by systemic workload, time constraints, and hierarchical control. To strengthen the alignment with the study's aims, the following discussion explicitly addresses each research question in turn, linking interpretive claims directly to the corresponding quantitative and qualitative findings.

The findings confirm that teachers' professional autonomy is multifaceted, encompassing internal, interpersonal, and contextual dimensions (Okay & Balçıklı, 2021). The high scores for internal motivation and capability suggest that teachers perceive themselves as competent and self-directed professionals who take ownership of their learning. In relation to first research question, these results clearly demonstrate that teachers perceive themselves as highly capable and intrinsically motivated, a conclusion supported by the consistently high quantitative scores in internal motivation, capability, and collaboration (Tables 1–5). These results align with previous research emphasizing that autonomy is grounded in intrinsic motivation and reflective professional growth (Benson, 2011; Okay, 2018). Teachers' preference for self-initiated professional learning over externally imposed activities mirrors the concept of self-regulated autonomy, where professional learning is sustained by internalized values rather than administrative requirements (Derakhshan et al., 2020). This interpretation is grounded in both the statistical findings and the qualitative narratives, which repeatedly highlighted teachers' self-directed engagement and internal sources of professional drive. However, despite their intrinsic motivation, teachers reported limited time and institutional support

for professional development, resulting in lower mean scores in the time management subdimension. This finding corroborates earlier studies (Dilekçi, 2022; Yıldırım, 2017) showing that centralized educational structures and heavy teaching loads restrict teachers' capacity for continuous development. In this sense, teachers' autonomy is not diminished by a lack of will, but by the structural conditions that impede its full expression.

A notable contribution of this study is the evidence that perceptions of TPA vary according to years of teaching experience, following a curvilinear trajectory. Addressing second research question, the analysis indicates that autonomy is strongest during mid-career stages (6–15 years) and declines for novice and veteran teachers, a pattern directly reflected in the quantitative results (Tables 6–10) and supported by qualitative accounts. This developmental pattern suggests that autonomy evolves through experience, but may also plateau or decline when professional recognition and growth opportunities are limited. The lower scores among early-career teachers reflect dependence on institutional norms and reduced confidence in pedagogical decision-making, a phenomenon widely reported in studies on teacher identity formation (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Chaaban & Du, 2017). Conversely, veteran teachers' reduced autonomy appears linked to institutional fatigue, where long-term exposure to rigid systems diminishes motivation for self-directed learning (Derakhshan et al., 2020; Warren, 2018). For veteran teachers, lower levels of perceived autonomy appeared might be tied to symptoms of professional fatigue within highly centralized and workload-intensive institutional structures. Their reduced motivation and capability may be shaped not only by intrinsic factors but also by external pressures including rigid curricula, limited career advancement opportunities, and insufficient systemic support. These combined influences suggest that burnout among experienced teachers is driven by an interaction of internal decline in professional stimulation. Overall, within Proudfoot's (2022) theory-generative lens, this pattern can be interpreted as evidence that autonomy is not a static competence but an emergent and contingent property influenced by the interplay between teachers' intrinsic motivation and the affordances of their professional environment.

The qualitative findings underscored the importance of institutional leadership and collegial culture as mediating conditions that either enable or inhibit teacher autonomy. Teachers working in supportive environments expressed higher professional confidence and satisfaction. This observation aligns with Hughes and Lewis (2020) and Pineda and Frodden (2008), who emphasized that participatory leadership fosters teacher agency and professional learning communities. Conversely, participants described that excessive administrative control and prescriptive curricular demands limited their decision-making power, creating an environment of compliance rather than empowerment. In addressing third research question, these qualitative insights illuminate the specific institutional, motivational, and contextual factors shaping teachers' autonomy and explain why structural conditions frequently override teachers' individual capacity and willingness to act autonomously. The accounts echo previous findings that external regulation undermines teacher motivation and narrows professional judgment (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2010; Dilekçi, 2022). In this study, autonomy is therefore shown to be relational: it thrives where institutional structures allow teachers to engage in shared leadership and declines where decision-making remains centralized.

Another key insight emerging from the integration of findings is the strong link between TPA, professional identity, and intrinsic motivation. Teachers frequently described autonomy as the freedom to make pedagogical choices and as a moral responsibility to improve learning outcomes. This aligns with the ecological perspective of teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015), which conceptualizes autonomy as the intersection of teachers' personal capacity, structural conditions, and social context. Teachers' emphasis on intrinsic satisfaction, such as the joy of student learning, resonates with Mansfield et al. (2016), who argue that autonomy contributes to teacher resilience and sustained engagement. In-service teachers in this study viewed professional learning not as an institutional obligation but as an extension of their identity as educators. Such self-determined motivation

represents the *inner logic of autonomy*, a mechanism through which teachers construct meaning and maintain agency even in constraining environments (Benson, 2011).

Through Proudfoot's (2022) retroductive process, the integrated data suggest that in-service English teachers' professional autonomy in Türkiye can best be described as conditional professional autonomy. It is possible to suggest that this form of professional autonomy is characterized by three interdependent mechanisms:

1. Intrinsic motivation as the primary driver of professional learning.
2. Institutional mediation, where leadership and collegial culture either amplify or suppress teachers' agency.
3. Structural constraint, wherein centralized policies and workload pressures delimit the practical exercise of autonomy.

Conditional professional autonomy thus represents a negotiated balance between teachers' self-determination and the institutional conditions under which they operate. This conceptualization extends previous models of teacher autonomy (Okay & Balçıklı, 2021; Yıldırım, 2017) by foregrounding the adaptive strategies teachers employ to reconcile professional ideals with systemic realities.

CONCLUSION

This study provides an empirically grounded and theoretically generative understanding of English teachers' professional autonomy within the Turkish EFL context. Using Proudfoot's (2022) hybrid inductive–deductive approach, the study identified conditional professional autonomy as the core mechanism explaining how teachers sustain agency despite institutional and systemic constraints. The findings suggest that autonomy among in-service teachers is a relational and adaptive construct, shaped by intrinsic motivation, professional capability, and the surrounding institutional ecology. Teachers demonstrate strong self-determination and commitment to professional learning, yet their ability to act autonomously is limited by workload pressures, centralized curricular mandates, and uneven leadership practices.

From a practical standpoint, the study underscores the importance of context-sensitive professional development that empowers teachers to make pedagogical and developmental decisions based on their expertise. School leaders and policymakers should support shared decision-making, collegial collaboration, and distributed professionalism to strengthen teachers' sense of agency. Creating institutional cultures that value teachers' voices and professional judgment will be crucial to translating individual motivation into sustainable educational improvement. The findings suggest that enhancing teacher autonomy in Türkiye requires systemic and institutional reforms that recognize teachers as knowledgeable professionals rather than passive implementers of policy. Providing context-sensitive professional development, reducing administrative burdens, and promoting collaborative school cultures could enable teachers to exercise greater agency over their learning and practice. Leadership training for school administrators should also emphasize shared decision-making and distributed professionalism.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how Proudfoot's (2022) hybrid method can yield generative explanations that connect micro-level teacher experiences with macro-level educational structures. By identifying *conditional professional autonomy* as the underlying mechanism, the study advances understanding of how autonomy is enacted, negotiated, and sustained across different stages of teachers' professional lives.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size, while adequate for mixed-method interpretation, was limited. As such, the results may not fully capture the diversity of experiences among teachers. Second, while the qualitative

interviews provided valuable contextual insights, their relatively small number limited the breadth of perspectives that could be explored. Future research should employ longitudinal or comparative designs to examine how teachers' professional autonomy evolves over time and across institutional settings. Including additional variables, such as school leadership style, policy changes, or institutional culture, would also enrich understanding of the systemic mechanisms influencing teacher agency. Expanding the scope beyond English teachers to other disciplines could help validate and extend the concept of conditional professional autonomy in broader educational contexts.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

First author have made substantial contributions to acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data, and drafting the manuscript.

Second author have made substantial contributions to conceptual design and revising the manuscript for important intellectual content.

FUNDING

The study was supported under the project number BIRUNI-BAP-12-2025-01-13.

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