

Probing Language Teacher Accountability in Utilizing Self-developed Language Teaching Resources

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Abstract

This study was aimed at recognizing constraints on the way of some Iranian language teachers' utilization of self-developed, localized, English language teaching resources. To this aim, three sets of teacher variables on pedagogical and personal accounts were examined including Language teachers' experience (novice/experienced), their educational level (BA/MA/PhD) and their gender. Data were collected in two phases. In the first phase, through stratified sampling, some eighty-three volunteering, English language teachers (Male and Female), who were indulged in the Iranian Ministry of Education (MoE), university settings (public and private) and language institutes were randomly selected. Teachers' responses to a validated researcher-made questionnaire on language teacher curriculum autonomy revealed an overall significant Multiple R with $F(3, 80) = .88, (0.04)$ but each individual above-cited predictors could not significantly predict teacher curriculum autonomy score. In the second phase for triangulation aims, three above-cited teacher variables were mapped over the insights gained through written interview sessions with some fourteen English language teachers. Language teachers' self-reported 'challenges' and 'opportunities' for using self-developed language teaching resources for class use were content analyzed. It became evident that teaching experience was mystified in some respects in terms of its influence over interviewed teachers since diverse intentions on the part of the language teachers in this research might have deterred them not to use their full potential over using their own materials in class. Possible reasons for this situation have been fully discussed in the end.

Keywords: Accountability; Self-developed resources; Teacher agency; Teacher autonomy.

1. Introduction

In recent times, teacher autonomy (TA) as a key construct for a language teacher has received much attention in ELT domains in various circles and talks. Primarily, the concept of autonomy has long been mostly utilized and reported for language learners' success/failure since its introduction into ELT educational contexts (Balcikanli, 2008; Benson, 2006; Fei, 2002; Gremmo and Riley 1995; Najeeb, 2013; Tilfarlioglu & Ciftci, 2011 etc).

In materials development arenas, the concept of teacher autonomy is only a recent innovation and has been discussed to a less extent within syllabus designing fields (Tomlinson, 2012). In fact, very few researchers have studied the agency of language teachers in opting for proper language teaching resources for classroom contexts that could tap teachers' interests, local concerns, personal experiences, regional literature, and students' expelled concerns among other things. Only recently, some scholars in the field have turned their attention towards how the agency of a language teacher over the materials given out in language classrooms could lead to fruitful results (Grossman and Thompson, 2008; Hoppers, 1998; Kirkgoz, 2007; Parsaiyan, Ghahremani Ghajar, Salahimoghaddam & Janahmadi, 2014, etc.).

Sense of accountability and/or agency over choosing or developing apt material to replace common best sellers in the market has in the last decades been marked by language scholars as one of the critical concerns. Some similar terms have been explored such as 'teacher agency' and 'teacher autonomy'. This research is an attempt to explore this issue through mapping some anticipated constraints/opportunities within Iranian English language teachers on pedagogical and personal accounts, which were assumed to influence them over using self-developed teaching materials from natural routes. As in Sheldon's words (1988), textbooks represent the 'visible heart of any ELT program'. If teachers' perspectives are not taken into close account, and if they are not given choice, the mere presence of teachers as theory actualizers being issued by others can show only a dark picture of those who are involved in the issues related to using self-developed resources. The reason for this mystified picture is that since textbooks direct a language teacher to consider how concepts are to be taught, this will surely depict a confounded picture of who they are and how they are affected by the textbooks since the books might play a leading role in class not the teachers' agency.

Before going to the core of the study, it is worth knowing how the two concepts of teacher agency and teacher autonomy have been defined within syllabus designing fields for ELT domains.

Ryan and Deci (2002) defined autonomy as being the perceived source, or origin, of one's own actions. TA is not confined to the planning and implementing of the teaching activities only. It covers equally the improvement of the teachers' role and power in decision-making practices regarding the regulation of working conditions, school environment, and management of the human, financial, and material sources (Friedman, 1999).

In a recent study, Frostenson (2015) classified different dimensions of autonomy in a swedish context into three categories including (1) "professional dimension" referring to what teachers need to have as a member of a professional group, (2) "faculty or staff dimension" embodying the organization of teachers' schools, which might include the principal and the whole teaching staff including teachers' colleagues within the same school, and (3) autonomy within an individual teacher. Some scholars believed that any autonomous behavior on the part of a teacher, because it aligned with one's interests and integrated values, might emanate from the self and is endorsed by the self (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

Some other scholars thought that autonomy in a teacher can also be thought of as regulation by the self (Reeve, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2006). In such a situation, students are also more likely to develop autonomous self-regulation and intrinsic motivation in autonomy-supportive environments. In educational settings, autonomy support involves a teacher taking students' perspective; acknowledging their feelings and perceptions; providing students with information and opportunities for choice; minimizing the use of control, criticism, demands, and pressure; and praising mastery (Assor, Kaplan, Kanat-Maymon & Roth, 2005; Black & Deci, 2000; Reeve, Jang, Hardre, & Omura, 2002; Reeve, 2009).

As TA is an integral part of teacher decision-making and as teachers working together effects school reform, positive changes can be made for students through TA (LaCoe, 2008; Peralta Castro, 2016; Smylie, Lazarus & Brownlee- Conyers, 1996; Short & Greer, 1993).

In the reviewed literature, a closely related term to TA was agency. Gao (2010) defined agency as '*an individual's will and capacity to act*'. Giving the due agency to teachers had been discussed in the existing literature as a positive element in educational development but in case of language education, very few studies could be found in which authority of language teachers had been mapped over materials designing arenas. Grossman and Thompson (2008) explained how teachers were mainly influenced by their gathered materials and how they had tried to stick to their sources and from them they gained ideas on implementing them in their teaching. In a sense, it has been claimed that needs are usually defined according to a priori

syllabi in the published materials not constructed in a constant flux of changing situations by language instructors. In other words, teachers were thought as followers of others' ideas rather than being creators of meaning and linguistic information on their own.

Bandura (2000) identified three forms of agency in general: 1) personal, 2) proxy, and 3) collective, which could be associated with syllabus designing aims of the present study. Personal agency involved the self-regulation of motivation in relation to goal challenges and outcome expectations. He then theorized that an individual with a strong sense of agency would continue to expand his or her cognitive competence and knowledge and would react more quickly to adaptations in the environment, while someone with a weaker sense of this construct would be slower to adapt to changes and to continue to increase cognitive competence and knowledge. Because personal agency requires that the individual is rigorous in pursuing goals, and because individuals do not function alone, Bandura further theorized that in situations where the individual has only indirect control over the conditions and practices that affect daily life, those individuals also exercise what he termed as "proxy agency". Proxy agency can also happen when individuals do not have the skills and knowledge necessary to have direct control over their situation, or do not want to put in the effort to gain such skills and knowledge so they try to influence others to act on their behalf.

The third type of agency discussed by Bandura (2000) was "collective agency". Collective agency to his views could occur when people shared a belief that their collective power would result in a desired outcome. He then contended that a strong sense of agency could be enhanced or impeded in a group by the group members' behaviors and attitudes individually and collectively. Citing studies in the areas of education and business, Bandura theorized that the higher the perceived efficacy of the group, the greater the sense of purpose, persistence, and resilience of the group. While Bandura believed that socio-structural factors function interdependently with internal personal factors in mediating a sense of agency, he argued that rapid societal changes might occur for a teacher because of the widening gap between individual actions and foreseeable results.

With the growing complexity of various organizations and technologies, individual influence can become limited then (Bandura, 2001). This, in turn, can effectively diminish collective agency in the sense that when individual efficacy is lessened, the group's overall sense of efficacy is also affected.

In some cases, control over materials used by teachers has been promoted without restraining language teachers' agency. In a comprehensive study by Hoppers (1998), teachers were believed to take initiative if they could be given the due credence over controlling some Teachers' Resource Centers (TRC). In this study, towards facilitating teachers and school development, TRCs had been specified for some language teachers to promote pedagogical changes in an African scholastic context. In fact, TRCs had acted as supports for teachers' agency. Meanwhile teachers' assets like self-empowerment had also been focused upon as a critical issue, which could influence teachers' sense of autonomy in decision-making processes:

These would need to assume a critical role as 'change agents', since they are the mediators between society's experience and the learners, and between schools and community. They would be required to be directly involved in decision-making for the school as a whole, in interpreting education and development at local level, and in translating these concerns into curricular goals and learning practices. Teachers, therefore, need to be self-empowered. (p. 244)

This self-empowerment range among teachers in general and language teachers in particular should really be an issue here but to the extent that social educational organizations value a teacher as a critical decision maker.

In the present research, the researchers wanted to clarify what factors might enhance/restrain language teacher autonomy among diverse Iranian English language teachers with different teaching experiences (novice vs. experienced) within (male and female) teachers and having diverse educational levels (BA/MA/PhD). Subsequently, the following two research questions were proposed:

1. To what extent could collective influences by language teachers' personal (gender) and pedagogical (teaching experience and educational level) variables predict a higher autonomy score for materials development aims?
2. What inhibiting/facilitating factors might dis/encourage language teachers to make benefit of their own self-developed language teaching resources?

3. Methodology

Data collection in this study took place in two subsequent phases. In the first phase regarding the proposed research questions as to three teacher variables/facets including

'teaching experience', 'educational level' and 'gender' as independent variables over English language teachers' autonomy score in using self-developed re/sources, an attempt was made to examine targeted language teachers' personal and pedagogical variables as predictors over their autonomy scores.

In the second phase and in line with including informants' views and triangulation of the data, the researchers utilized other survey-type data via written interview protocols. For this part of the research, an explicit attempt was made to carve the issue in more depth by trusting some volunteering language teachers from both formal and informal educational contexts, who kindly contributed of their time for this survey.

3.1. Participants

The sampled population in this research included 83 Iranian language teachers in both formal and informal ELT educational settings in two major states of Iran including Tehran and Khorasan Razavi. In the first phase of the study, from the total number of 150 language teachers (male and female) to whom inquiry was sent, a total number of 83 agreed to participate in this research. An attempt was made to select teachers with diverse characteristics to include our intended independent variables for this research. Table 1 displays participants' demographic information in the first phase of our data collection.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics as to Language Teachers' Demographic Information

Level of Education	Gender	Teaching experience		Major fields of study			
BA	21.7	Male	36.1	0-10	50.6	TEFL	86.7
MA	49.4	Female	63.9	11-20	39.8	Lin.	8.4
PhD	28.9			21-30	9.6	Lit.	10.8
						Trans.	3.6

Note: TEFL denotes Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Lin, Linguistics; Lit, literature, and Trans., Translation.

Still another group of respondents participated in this research in the next stages within interview sessions including three sets of teachers indulged in 1) private language institutes, 2) Iranian universities (both Public and Open) and 3) teachers in the Iranian MoE. whose information will be in order in the subsequent sections on data analyses.

3.2. Instruments

In order to invoke teachers' characteristics, the researchers initially made use of a researcher-developed questionnaire with thirty-eight Likert-type scale items for collecting the essential data and then refined and verified its items through the following steps:

Firstly, the items of the questionnaire were developed by making resource to a variety of research articles in the literature on language materials designing and educational resources on teacher autonomy scales to cater for the teachers' autonomy scores. Also, teacher-researchers of the present study had in their teaching profile a handful of teaching practice ranging between 10 to 15-year experience in teaching English in a variety of contexts both formal and informal settings, which could be relied upon as another dependable source for constructing the items for the questionnaire on teacher autonomy.

Secondly, content validity of the questionnaire was enforced by expert views. We got it crosschecked by two TEFL researchers having PhD degrees. For evaluating the agreement between and among above-cited recruited raters, Content Validity Ratio (CVR) by Lawshe (1975) was relied on as a quantitative index for assessing content validity. Quantifying the proposed items as essential, useful, or not necessary for our purpose gave us a good index with (CVR \geq 0.99) for the majority of items. The original questionnaire had thirty-eight items. Some six items were deleted since their CVR was lower than 0.99.

In a final attempt, on dependability/reliability grounds, during an initial pilot study among the target focus group, reliability of the due questionnaire was checked and rendered as satisfactory. After deleting four other items due to lower reliability index, the overall Cronbach Alpha indicated a good reliability index of (R=79.99) for the rest of twenty-eight items (Appendix A) among eighty-three respondents.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

Language teachers who kindly cooperated in the data collection stages could be contacted via both online and offline means. Through offline means, we could refer to various educational centers around the country in person. However, since this option could create many problems in terms of manageability of human re/sources due to the problems associated with time and place constraints, we also utilized online links to our target group a good deal more than offline means since online means (email groups and social networking) were more applicable and convenient on geographical accounts to obtain more diverse data and

information from the sampled teachers. This also ensured having access to more diverse groups within Iranian teachers as our focus groups.

In the second phase, some fourteen volunteering, language teachers from diverse settings participated in the written interview sessions. We made an attempt to sample diverse teachers from among both formal educational centers. The first group of interviewees were some university professors having varied ranks including assistant professors, lecturers and associate professors with a handful of useful experiences regarding agency in opting for teaching materials at tertiary levels. The second group consisted of some volunteering language instructors within Iranian language institutes for whom using extra materials in such educational centers was highly encouraged by supervisors and managers. In addition, a third group of language teachers in the Iranian Ministry of Education (MoE) as another focus group of informants which could provide some insights for the aims in this research project.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

In line with the research questions proposed for the first quantitative phase of the study, as to exploring the predictive power of the three independent variables including language teachers' educational level, teaching experience and their gender, regression designs with ANOVA output tables were used. In effect, for assessing the predictive combinatory values of the three variables above for predicting language teacher's autonomy scores, multiple regression analysis was used. We could also use single regression analyses for each individual variable in this study; however, because according to some statisticians, multivariate methods could honor a better picture of the reality (Thompson, 1991), we made multiple regression analyses for our purposes to paint a more complete picture. What might have been involved in language teachers' autonomy as a teacher construct ($Y_{\text{predicted}}$) could be more dynamically elucidated if we mapped it against a combination of variables ($X_{\text{predictors}}$). In this statistical method, we were concerned with a set of nominal (gender and educational level) and ordinal quantitative variables (teaching experience) as predictors and language teachers' autonomy scores as the continuous criterion variable, which could be run in multiple regression analyses (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2001).

The criterion variable with teacher autonomy scores for materials development aims was quantitatively measured for each teacher ranging between 0 and 140 using the validated group administered language teacher autonomy for materials development purposes and the

data were analyzed using statistical SPSS software package ver. 21. For the second research question in this study, interview sessions were arranged with another group of English language teachers similarly having diverse teaching experiences, educational levels and were from among both gender and data were examined through content analysis of the recruited language teachers' insights.

4. Results

Table 2 demonstrates descriptive statistics for language teachers' autonomy scores counted against the three factors including language teachers' gender, educational level and teaching experience.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Language Teachers' Autonomy Scores

IVs	Gender		Educational level			Teaching experience		
	Male	Female	BA	MA	PhD	0-10	11-20	21-30
<i>M</i>	96.21	99.23	93.81	99.57	98.39	97.67	98.68	98.33
<i>SD</i>	15.04	12.06	14.86	13.21	12.34	12.72	14.32	14.05

As Table 2 demonstrates, an initial analysis revealed that the mean scores for language teachers' autonomy in promoting self-developed language teaching resources were varied against three variables under the study. Within gender, female groups ($\mu= 99.23$) had dominated male teachers as to achieving a higher score in using self-developed resources. Regarding educational level, MA students/holders were domineering with ($\mu= 99.57$) and in the third variable, teaching experience, those teachers who had had between 11-20 years occupied a better position over the other two groups, though with a little difference with the third group of teachers having 21-30.

4.1. Results of Phase One

Initially, some successive analyses were managed over checking multiple regression assumptions for the three independent variables, and the relationship between the variables was initially assessed. This ensured us in continuing with the intended statistical measures. Then using standard regression model, we ran multiple regression to test the collective predictive power of the three variables including teachers' gender, educational level and their

teaching experience. Table 3 displays the results of the coefficient from the standard regression model.

Table

CoC Coefficient Output for the Standard Regression Model

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	89.996	6.899		13.046	.000
	Gender	2.796	3.027	.103	.924	.358
	Degree	1.653	2.087	.089	.792	.431
	Teaching experience	.010	1.157	.001	.008	.993

a. Dependent Variable: autonomy

Evidently, from the outcome of Table 3, it was clear that with three sets of variables as independent and overall agency score as dependent variable, the result of regression was significant ($0.00 \leq 0.05$) but each individual, above-cited predictor could not have significantly predicted teacher curriculum autonomy score.

In order to analyze the success of the model in predicting the extent of teachers' autonomy in producing/using self-developed materials and language resources, we checked Model Summary Table 4 below.

Table 4

Model Summary Output for 'Teaching Experience', 'Gender' and 'Educational Level'

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.142 ^a	.020	-.017	13.38486

Note: a. Predictors: (Constant), teaching experience, gender, degree

Because the sample in this study was larger than 60, adjusted R square was not used to predict the power as such and R output was used instead. As table 4 displays, the value of R is .14, which showed that only 14% of autonomy score could be predicted by the combinatory influence of the three independents variables under the study, which was not high. Implications in this phase were then mapped over further data in the second phase.

4.2. Results of Phase Two on Interview Sessions

In the second phase of the study for assessing further insights regarding language teachers' views over the facilitating vs. inhibitory reasons for using/not using self-developed language teaching resources, content analyses for Focus Group designs were used. Some fourteen English language teachers cooperated with their insights over the following two questions:

1. To what challenges are you mostly exposed for adapting language teaching materials for class use?
2. What opportunities can a language teacher gain, if s/he adapts existing language teaching materials and adds self-developed materials as extra class activities?

Table 5 below summarizes the interviewed teachers' demographical information. On morality grounds, assigned numbers have been used to respect teachers' personal information.

Table 5

Language Teachers' Demographical Data During the Interview Sessions

No.	Gender	Educational contexts	Degree	Teaching experience
1	Female	University	PhD	17 years
2	Female	University	PhD	22 years
3	Male	University	PhD	15 years
4	Female	MoE	BA	27 years
5	Male	MoE	BA	26 years
6	Female	MoE	Associated degree	Retired
7	Male	MoE	MA	30 years
8	Female	Language institute	MA student	2 years
9	Female	Language institute	MA student	4 years
10	Male	Language institute	MA	18 years
11	Female	Language institute	MA	6 years
12	Male	Language institute	BA	4 years
13	Male	Language institute	MA	7 years
14	Male	Language institute	MA	5 years

Teachers were from three diverse settings including English language teacher from 1) language institutes, 2) MoE and 3) academic centers. Table 6 below displays participants' categorized responses to the two proposed questions above.

Table 6

Frequency Counts and Percentage Rates of the Teachers' Views on Challenges Vs. Opportunities as to Using Self-Developed Materials

Challenges	Frequency Counts/Percentage Rates	Opportunities	Frequency Counts/Percentage Rates
1. Lack of theories in the present books	3 (25%)	1.Satisfying students' needs	6 (31.57%)
2. Books becoming old and obsolete over time	1 (8.33%)	2.Gaining occupational credits	2 (10.52%)
3. Including massive language knowledge	2 (16.6)	3. Proliferating learning	3 (15.78%)
4. Financial problems if multi-sources are used	1 (8.33%)	4. Increasing motivation and interest in the course	7 (36.74 %)
5. Bridging the gap between imposed books and proper tasks and exercises	1 (8.33%)	5.Developing more autonomous students and self-regulated teachers	1 (5.26%)
6.Time management	3 (25%)		
7. Losing track of examination objectives	1 (8.33%)		

As Table 6 shows, the frequency counts and percentage rates for 'challenges' vs. 'opportunities' have been arranged in two separate columns for a quick review.

In response to the first question, since it was also the immediate intention of the present researchers to check respondents' views with regard to their teaching experience, gender and their educational level, in the data analyses in this second phase, a conscious attempt was sporadically made to refer to their pedagogical and personal characteristics in each case.

The first interview question regarded the challenges that English language teachers were mostly exposed to adapting language teaching materials for class use. In fact, interviewed teachers were required to communicate what complications they had experienced in their educational settings that had deterred them to use their whole potentials for using teacher-developed language teaching resources. Responses to this first question were diverse among

three groups of the targeted teachers. In this study, the most rated strategy was used to take heed of the prominent challenges/problems. The first noted challenges were analyzed within How vs. What concerns as discussed in the next section.

The first prominent problem denoted two major trends including challenges that university language teachers had with 1) lack of background educational theories behind some available books (25%), and 2) the amount of language knowledge (content) to be included in ELT materials (16.6%), which were thought not to have had satisfied them. Actually, issues related to these two highly rated challenges could be summarized by how and what concerns respectively. Then, responses by the teachers from the other educational centers were checked and aligned within the two concerns above, which to the present researchers' views could differentiate teachers' responses by their "teaching experience" only. Evidently, more experienced teachers tended to use self-developed materials due to their discerned inefficiency in the teaching practicum and discerned lack of theories behind content/form presentation while less experienced ones focused on the second concern- the amount and extent of language knowledge to be included in ELT books. Some evidence is brought in the following section in this regard:

Participant 1 who had a handful of experience in teaching ESP and TEFL technical courses in Ghazvin international university as well as some universities in Tehran claimed that a major problem behind already published books for which she had preferred not to use in her classes was that *'they lacked a well-defined theory'*. She claimed that such course books were just embedded with knowledge-technical contents with a focus on language elements. An important challenge she had felt was thus to adapt the books she had chosen for class use based on what she had already found useful in her previous courses among similar students. This was also mentioned by another interviewed university teacher with 22 years' experience, who had taught conversation courses in a very large university setting in the west of Iran. As evidence, participant 2 had preferred to use her own books on conversational skills because to her they were all surrounded with what she felt her students needed in such courses including 1) input enhancement, and 2) awareness-raising activities, as she maintained. She emphasized that university students need to be accurate, fluent as well as complex in expressing their ideas, which are not included in one teaching source altogether. Hitherto, she had preferred to use her own book(s) since simultaneous focus on such skills altogether had been missing in the available books for such purposes. Conversely, participant 3 with 15 years' teaching

experience mentioned that some teaching materials at tertiary level generally need adaptation not because they are devoid of theories, but since they lack some other still necessary contents.

This was inspiring for us to see that the immediate focus of more experienced university professors was the teaching approaches behind presenting materials (the issue of how) while this was not the case with less experienced teachers in the same settings since they focused on the issues of what, so to speak. Actually, investigating this issue could not be directly related to the interviewed teachers' teaching experience, since sampled university teachers in this research were mostly privileged with PhD degrees, mapping the issue to their level of education was also probable, but it was not possible in this research to take full track of this aspect. For this reason, we checked if the same issue was at work in the language teachers in MoE and language institutes esp. those with lower educational levels. This was inspiring to know since among the interviewed teachers, we had a more diverse set of language teachers with different educational levels as well as diverse teaching experiences in the latter educational contexts that could let us reach a more compromised response in this regard. Initially, responses to this question among more experienced teachers in MoE were focused upon to examine how the focus on teaching practicum (how) or content (what) was similar or different among the language teachers with lower educational levels but nearly the same teaching experiences. Participant 4, a female teacher with 27 years' experience holding a BA degree in teaching English claimed that:

"I use different ways, and I know because of short time (90 min in a week) it's really hard. For example, in grade 7 and 8, which are based on many conversation and oral items, I try to do something based on reinforcement of written items such as different types of dictation: Running dictation, free dictation, time dictation, etc. I believe in paying attention to the difference between the contents of grades 7 and 8 and grade 9 which is very important, we should cover this gap."

In this assertion by participant 4, focus on how of teaching rather than only inclusion of necessary contents was noticeable. To contend, having found a gap between different courses for teaching oral skills, she had preferred to include extra practices to alleviate the corroborated problems in the books for the sake of facilitating learning. Another language teacher from the same context- participant no.5, with the same educational level but a higher teaching experience of 26 years- had initially the same view over lack of time to cover the

teaching materials but regarding the challenges he felt in MoE books, he had focused over five problems, which also showed his concern over *'teaching how'* rather than *'teaching what'*:

Participant 5:

The main problems with which most teachers in MoE are challenging are 1) There is no link between students' concerns and issues discussed in the books, 2) The entries brought in the books cannot satisfy students' interests, 3) There is lack of motivation raising materials for the students, 4) The content is meaningless for literacy instruction, and finally 5) Entries are not in accordance with the characteristics of different regions.

Seemingly, confirmed reasons by the latter interviewed teacher, as an experienced English teacher, signified his concern over how of presenting the materials rather the nature of content itself since he mostly focused on some variables in students themselves as essential facades that should have been considered by materials developers on top and linking lesson foci with students' characteristics, to mention a few. Participant no. 6- a retired English teacher in MoE- also declared similar concerns over the presently-taught books in the same setting. She also added the problem of inconsistency between teaching and testing approaches there, which was another clue that teachers with more experience, though with lower educational levels, had teaching and learning concerns more over inclusion of extra materials.

Regarding the difference in outlook between *'how'* and *'what'* as challenges, it was noted then that teaching experience and not educational level could differentiate language teachers in MoE from university settings. For sure, we could not get a true picture unless the other side of the coin- the issues regarding the opportunities that a language teacher might gain- were also considered. To this purpose, in order to scrutinize what vantage points were hidden in the material development practices in each three contexts, we asked a second question as to the opportunities that English language teachers could gain if they embarked on the tasks of promoting their own teaching materials.

To recap, the second interview question is reformulated here for a concise consideration:

2. What opportunities can a language teacher gain, if s/he adapts existing language teaching materials and adds self-developed materials as extra class activities?

Teachers' responses to this second question could depict their stance and indirectly could be regarded as signs to securitize their views as to what extent they were willing to be

involved in such issues as materials development in their educational contexts. Again, each respondent's response went under content analyses by dismantling their views and merging overlapping opinions to formulate common themes as in the previous question. As to teaching experience, and the educational context of the interviewed teachers, some inspiring views were gained that were thought-provoking as discussed in the next section.

Regardless of the three educational contexts explored in this research, in many cases, this time the influence by the teaching experience was conspicuous. More experienced teachers tended to focus on fulfilling 'students' needs' (31.57%) as a key opportunity that they had gained while less experienced ones had focused on satisfying students' motivation (36.74%), though there were sporadic cases where both foci had been noted by both more and less experienced teachers. Below, some evidences have been brought from diverse teachers in this regard. The assigned propositions denoting motivational/needs-oriented codes as referred to by the teachers have been underlined in each case:

Example cases from less vs. more experienced teachers:

Participant 3 (15 years)

"For the second question, since i have the experience of adding a theme-based & function-based material to my conversation classes beside the main course book, i should mention that students were really motivated, found vocabulary learning in conversation classes more practical, and believed that they felt improvement after a semester. What they didn't feel in their previous conversation courses."

Participant 11 (6 years)

"I also use some materials depending on my students' interest and my purpose in that session that enhance creativity among them."

Participant 10 (18 years)

"English language classrooms are diverse places not only in terms of where they are situated, but also in terms of the individual learners within each context. Imposed teaching materials cannot be responsive to the heterogeneity inherent in the classroom and do not encompass the learners' first languages and cultures, their learning needs and their experiences."

Participant 7 (30 years)

"The prospect books in high schools can't cover all aspects of new and recent methods especially CLT method. Also the books can't cover students' needs. "

Furthermore, teachers referred to some other opportunities, which they had gained after using their own teaching materials. Discerned opportunities, as cited by the interviewed

teachers, included 1) students being more autonomous, creative and responsive, 2) teachers can get more spontaneity over their job, experience a nice washback over how and extent of learning, and 3) courses could become more practical, tangible and local as verified by the due teachers.

The thing that was not yet clear for us was that diverse teachers in the three educational contexts while having varied teacher variables in terms of educational degree, experience and gender, for this second question, they mostly denoted similar standards in proper utilization of self-developed language teaching resources, which was not as diverse as in the challenges they had reported.

5. Discussion

In this research, the present researcher made an attempt to explore the relationship between some English language teacher variables/facets over their autonomy scores through correlational designs to reach a compromise over how of employing self-developed language teaching materials for their class uses. Data were investigated through two research phases. In the first phase, three independent variables including language teachers' educational level, teaching experience and their gender were scrutinized via multiple regression techniques.

As the findings showed, collective sets of variables above could not predict a high autonomy score for materials development aims. This could in some respects show that presumably either each three variable alone should be considered individually or else collective influence by the three factors could not be influential in predicting a more autonomous teacher. The results in this research were not in line Khezerlou's (2014) research. As to curriculum development aims, Khezerlou had conducted a similar comparative study over EFL teachers' conceptualization of teacher autonomy regarding curriculum development practices of Iranian and Turkish English teachers and contended in the end that factors such as age, gender and academic level had significant effects over their perceptions of an autonomous language teacher.

In the second phase, teachers' views were inquired via interview profiles that depicted the nature of challenges and opportunities that recruited teachers from three different educational contexts in Iranian societies mostly experienced. This phase was aimed at arriving a deeper insight over the individual teacher variables under the study to inspect their effect over their autonomy/agency to turn into course developers. Two sets of challenges vs. opportunities were inquired from three groups of teachers who were indulgent in three

educational contexts in Iranian communities to take a broader view over the gained the findings. Regarding the most discerned challenges as "lack of theories" in the existing books in the market and in turn massive inclusion of language knowledge and within recognized opportunities, the probable influence by the teachers' experience was conspicuous which could differentiate language teachers to a higher extent compared with their educational level. Concerning the most rated opportunities- satisfying students' needs and enhancing the motivation level and students' interest- however teachers' views were not uniform.

Findings in the second phase could indicate that in the diverse educational contexts of the English teachers in this study, none of the three teacher variables could exclusively differentiate teachers' views as explained in the results section. In fact, similar opportunities had urged recruited teachers in this study to follow more autonomous routes in their occupational contexts, regardless of their individual characteristics.

The overall significant relationship among intended variables and overall autonomy score could imply that for some variables within teachers' personal accounts such as gender and other variables within pedagogical accounts such as teachers' experiences and their educational level, this agency in a teacher could not be said to be completely augmented by training techniques. On the other hand, this could designate that the picture is murky and no uniform deductions could be made for all teachers having similar teacher facets. This could indicate that many propositions are hidden that might deter/encourage language teachers to use their full potential over using their own materials in class. The authors in this research finally came to believe that the art and imagination of the teachers themselves esp. based on what their previous experiences might say to them seem to be better shortcuts towards exploring how they view their role as course developers as Parsayian et al (2014) had declared. This seemed true though one could not overlook still a myriad of other factors that influence teachers' authority in choosing what they think is fruitful for their aims including extra-curricular de/motives. As Ahearn (2001, P. 112, as cited in Lantolf & Poehner, 2008) confirmed, agency could be defined as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act". This could denote how interviewed teachers' lived experiences could have also urged them to make amendments to their outlook over the mass of materials to include in their syllabi.

Ahearn also cited Lantolf and Thorne's concerns (2006) in which they had claimed agency in EFL teachers could also be pertained with their diverse responses towards relevance and significance to different things and affairs which this may give a context-sensitive sense to their agency in choosing the essential materials to use in class contexts.

In recent years, other researchers have worked on some other aspects related to the agency of language teachers in opting for proper teaching materials such as reflective teaching (Noormohammadi, 2014), identity indices (Kayi-Aydar, 2015), syllabus designing (Akbarpour-Tehrani & Wan Mansor, 2012) among others. Noormohammadi verified that teacher autonomy could be trained through reflective practices and thus it is not a static attribute to be sought in a language teacher. Kayi-Aydar (2015), on the other hand, believed that ‘micro-politics’ of educational contexts in which a teacher works shapes language teachers’ sense of autonomy. Akbarpour-Tehrani and Wan Mansor (2012) claimed that not the context but ways through which knowledge is gained in second language classes have an influence over the autonomy that a language teacher experiences; therefore, more room was considered for pedagogical reasons as compared with personal variables in a teacher.

In this study, although diverse language teachers from three different educational centers were included, the long run influence of the professional context of the interviewed teachers might have been at work. To contend, within Iranian MoE, policy makers on top decide on the suitable course books for both public and private (non-profit) schools in line with goals favoring current mainstream teaching and learning trends in ELT. In academic settings as the other formal venue, language professors have nearly full control over the learning materials they choose. Within informal language learning settings, managers of private language institutes decide upon some proper bestseller textbooks, which have already been supplied with teaching materials including workbooks, audio-visual aids, teacher's books etc. In such contexts, due teachers have the least to the most authority and/or control over language teaching re/sources they use, which might have changed their views due to their educational contexts during a more or less long periods being occupied in the due educational centers. Issues such as teacher burn-out, self-efficacy and the like might have also been inflicted to the detriment of those who participated in this research, which might obscure the ingenuity of the results reported in this research.

6. Conclusion

Disregarding the constraints or praises of for a language teacher to be indulged in an ongoing process of materials development, ‘Teacher Intuition’ (TI) has recently been in vogue among researchers in Applied Linguistics domains (Johansson & Kroksmark, 2004; Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2014). This line of research considers teachers’ intuition as a

critical asset that may encourage or discourage them to bring changes to the course goals. In their article, Markauskaite and Goodyear defined TI in terms of "Intuitive Pedagogy" to 'describe those aspects of a teacher's working knowledge which are derived from direct personal interaction and experience, and which often take an implicit commonsense form, rather than being expressed in formal language or as articulated principles' (p.3).

Coining these new terms in general educational sciences might have a lot to do with materials development arenas as a major subdomain in language education arenas. We do believe that changes do not occur all at once. Confronted with shortcomings of teaching materials, a good number of teachers (language teachers, no exception) feel re/using of the same materials over and over again might contradict the ever changing needs of learners. This aspect of learning is so critical in bringing change for the better movements.

The influence that teaching experience might have in the processes of material designing and/or development might be grave in EFL contexts since teaching materials are the primary source of the input that language learners receive. Nevertheless, such aspects within teacher characteristics themselves have rarely been surveyed within EFL language educational contexts. In view of that, enriching language teaching contexts with divine sources that instantiate teachers' souls and passions for endorsing moments of learning can be a great opportunity that is manageable only by a teacher who delves into his/her learners' souls. This reviving of soul mates in language classrooms needs a teacher destined with a sense of support and accountability who experiences identity re/construction over time (Canagarajah, 2005). Future researchers then having similar concerns might consider this issue to contribute more to the core of the issues as referred to in this research.

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Appendix

English Language Teacher Autonomy Questionnaire for Materials Development aims

What follows is a questionnaire developed for a research project on assessing English language teachers' attitudes in using self-developed language teaching re/sources to use in their classroom settings. You are requested to kindly give your idea on each item ranging from **Quite true (5)**, **Fairly true (4)**, **Neutral (undecided) (3)**, **Fairly false (2)**, and **Quite false (1)** about you. We would really like to thank you for agreeing to contribute to this end. This contribution is quite confidential, anonymous, and totally voluntary.

Gender: Male Female

Educational level:

PhD MA BA

Years of teaching experience:

0-10 11-20 21-30

Please mark the items according to what you really do in your educational contexts NOT what you think you should do.

1. I consider my students' needs before I use any teaching material.					
2. I always do research on what my learners need to learn and then develop sources.					
3. I prefer to use the same teaching materials that my educational centers (schools/universities/institutes) might introduce.					
4. I use the latest researches in curriculum development areas to update the teaching resources I use.					
5. I enjoy adaptation of the existing teaching materials for special students' needs.					
6. One of my professional needs for development in my job should be developing language resources.					
7. I usually make my colleagues aware of the objectives of the course.					
8. I usually give suggestions to my colleagues to change and/or update their materials.					
9. If my colleagues do not consider my reminders, I justify objectives through more discussion.					

10. I prefer uniform standards seen in bestseller books to conduct my teachings effectively.					
11. I feel using up- to-date sources for language learners is a necessity.					
12. I think already written course books by higher organs are based on curriculum standards on scientific research and knowledge systems. So, I prefer them.					
13. I find it hard to develop language teaching materials because finding proper content is a burden for me.					
14. I prefer not to use my own selected teaching materials because already packed books have made managing teaching procedures easy for me.					
15. I enjoy career related courses in curriculum designing in general.					
16. I enjoy graphical designs of bestseller teaching series like interchange, Top notch, etc. so, I do not like to develop books of my own.					
17. Using different instructional materials may bring a chaos in my classes.					
18. I do not like to collaborate in promoting any kind of teaching materials.					
19. If I make my own teaching materials, my time, budget and energy may be wasted. So why bother?					
20. Making the level of difficulty of language appropriate for the standards and benchmarks is difficult for me.					
21. I try to organize some refresher courses for in service training of teachers about new teaching materials.					
22. Accessing a curriculum development committee for updating the curriculum development processes is a difficult task for me.					
23. If possible, I would become a constant member of a curriculum development committee in my town.					
24. I like to have the right to trim down some parts of the books and use my own resources.					
25. I like to devote validating learning activities to those curriculum development committees before launching them in my field.					
26. I like to base the curriculum on mastery of predictable linguistic knowledge rather than unpredictable knowledge for language learning purposes.					
27. I like making room for flexibility and choices in the curriculum.					
28. Reflecting teaching materials from easy to difficult is not an issue and I like to include limitless information in the curriculum.					