# Facilitating Professional Growth and Autonomy Development of In-Service English Teachers through a Blog: A Case Study in Iran

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# ABSTRACT

In order to help teachers maintain their professionalism and empower them to keep up with the indispensable changes inherent to their career, it is crucial to facilitate teachers' professional development. Professional development initiatives are believed to be more efficient if they are specifically designed and implemented to accommodate needs, lacks, and challenges of the teachers in a certain context. Established on these considerations and through incorporating the theoretical bases of constructivism and cognitive apprenticeship, this research aims to investigate the perceptions of the participating teachers about a professional development initiative which was mediated through a blog addressing the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness and further explore the participating teachers' perceptions towards their professional growth and autonomy. To this end, data was collected through three questionnaires, two interviews, and blog entries from four Iranian teachers of English, who were interested in developing their knowledge and practice of teaching along with the principles of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness. The design of the study was qualitative-dominant and based on the principles of multiple-case studies. Following the principles of deductive thematic analysis, this research adopted Evan's (2014) professional development model which identifies eleven dimensions of change categorized under three primary developmental components as behavioral, attitudinal, and intellectual. The model suggests that change often occurs across more than one component. However, for professional development to occur, it does not require change to take place in every single dimension. According to Evans (2014), professional development is multi-dimensional which comes about through a chain of reactions at micro-level; that is,

one change would lead to another, which subsequently makes a cycle of chain-reaction episodes. Analysis of the data revealed that the offered professional development initiative worked efficiently to foster professional growth of the participating teachers with regard to the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness. Moreover, the participating teachers believed that their perceived professional growth positively contributed to their autonomy development.

# ÖZ

Öğretmenlerin mesleklerini sürdürmelerine yardımcı olmak ve kariyerlerinin doğasında bulunan değişikliklere ayak uydurmalarında onları güçlendirmek için, öğretmenlerin mesleki gelişimine destek sağlamak çok önemlidir. Mesleki gelişimi amaçlayan girişimler, belirli bir bağlamda öğretmenlerin mesleki ihtiyaçlarını, eksikliklerini ve zorluklarını karşılamak için özel olarak tasarlanır ve uygulanırsa daha verimli olacaktır. Bu düşünceleri temel alan ve yapılandırmacılık ve bilişsel çıraklık teorilerinin prensipleri üzerine kurgulanan bu araştırma, katılımcı öğretmenlerin, öğrenen özerkliği ve öğrenci merkezli dil öğretimi kavramlarını ele alan ve bir blog üzerinden yürütülen bir mesleki gelişim girişimi hakkındaki algılarını araştırmayı ve buna ek olarak, katılımcı öğretmenlerin mesleki gelişimlerine ve özerkliklerine yönelik algılarını keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla, 'öğrenen özerkliği' ve 'öğrenci merkezlilik' ilkeleri konusunda öğretim bilgilerini ve uygulamalarını geliştirmek isteyen dört İranlı İngilizce öğretmeninden üç anket, iki mülakat ve blog ortamında paylaştıkları yazışmalardan oluşan veri toplandı. Çalışma ağırlıklı olarak nitel araştırma özelliği taşımasının yanı sıra çoklu durum çalışma ilkelerine dayanmaktadır. Tümdengelimli tematik analiz ilkelerini izleyen bu araştırmada, Evans'ın (2014) davranışsal, tutumsal ve zihinsel olmak üzere üç temel gelişim bileşeni altında kategorize edilen on bir değişim boyutunu tanımlayan mesleki gelişim modeli kullanılmıştır. Model, değişimin genellikle birden fazla bileşende gerçekleştiğini, ama mesleki gelişimin oluşması için her boyutta değişiklik olmasının gerekmediğini öngörmektedir. Evans'a (2014) göre mesleki gelişim, mikro düzeyde reaksiyonlar zinciri yoluyla ortaya çıkan çok boyutlu bir olgudur; yani, bir değişiklik diğerine yol açar ve bu da daha sonra bir zincirleme

reaksiyon dönemi döngüsü oluşturur. Verilerin analizi, sunulan mesleki gelişim girişiminin, katılımcı öğretmenlerin 'öğrenen özerkliği' ve 'öğrenci merkezli' öğretim kavramlarına ilişkin mesleki gelişimlerine katkı koyduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, katılımcı öğretmenler algıladıkları mesleki gelişimlerinin özerklik gelişimlerine olumlu katkıda bulunduğunu ifade etmişlerdir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** çevrimiçi mesleki gelişim, blog, İngilizce öğretmenleri, öğretmen özerkliği, öğrenen özerkliği

# DEDICATION

*To the Fourth Decade of My Life*

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| | |
|---|---|
| CA | Curriculum Autonomy |
| CLT | Communicative Language Teaching |
| CoP | Community of Practice |
| CPD | Continuing Professional Development |
| EFL | English as a Foreign Language |
| ELT | English Language Teaching |
| GTA | General Teaching Autonomy |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| OPD | Online Professional Development |
| OTPD | Online Teacher Professional Development |
| PD | Professional Development |
| RQ | Research Question |
| TEFL | Teaching English as a Foreign Language |
| TTC | Teacher Training Course |

# Chapter 1

# INTRODUCTION

This chapter starts with the explanation of background of the study, which is followed by the statement of the problem. Then, the aim of the study and research questions are presented. Later, the significance of the study is explained and the key terms are defined.

## 1.1 Background of the Study

Dating back to 1980s and 1990s, professional development (PD) was perceived as a 'deficit-mastery model' which was proved to be a failure in terms of its efforts to provide 'one-shot' professional development. Considering teachers' learning as something done 'to' teachers, rather than 'by' teachers and 'for' teachers, this model was the target of many criticisms and consequently led to the reconceptualization of teachers' professional development. New trends in teachers' professional development perceive teacher learning as a constructive and active process which is dependent on social settings and circumstances, and is problem-oriented taking place throughout the life of each teacher (Guskey, 2002).

In line with this new understanding and as a critical component to the improvement of any educational institution, the notion of lifelong and continuous learning of teachers contributing to their professional development has been widely emphasized (e.g., Ehman, Bonk & Yamagata-Linch, 2005; Borko, 2004; Kane & Francis, 2013;

King, 2002; Pill, 2005; Utamii et al., 2019; Van As, 2018; Vrasidas & Zembylas, 2004; Widodo & Riandi, 2013).

Guskey (2002) defined the process of professional development as "systematic efforts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students" (p. 381). Guskey (2002) maintained that attitudes and beliefs of teachers alter only after they have sufficient evidence that proves their learners' improvements. Learners, in turn, improve as a result of changes in teachers' practices and instructional approaches in the classrooms and modifying teaching procedures. Therefore, there is a reciprocal relationship between change in the beliefs and attitudes of the teachers and learners' improvement.

Professional development is a dynamic concept. It is considered as a social construct which possesses a fluid nature and includes providing opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practices critically and adopt new knowledge, information, and beliefs about pedagogy and learners. Teacher development concentrates on broadening teachers' understanding of teaching and learning processes, and starts with pre-service education and continues through the career of teachers (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). This view to teachers' learning is supported by the theory of 'constructivism' which is the combination of cognition with other elements such as self-directed learning and motivation while emphasizing the social context of learning. Constructivism considers learning as a process of constructing knowledge, not knowledge absorption (Tam, 2000).

In the same line, Chen (2003) described constructivism as an outgrowth or consequence of cognitive science, and viewed learning as a process of constructing knowledge along with developing concepts and comprehending them as its final goals. Knowledge is constructed based on one's conceptions and perceptions of his/her world; hence, each individual is able to construct a different concept or meaning and learn by means of involvement in the reorganization and construction of concepts, reflection and absorption (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992; Schuman, 1987).

In order to learn constructively, Can (2009) offered a number of required conditions as: i) embedding the process of learning in the environments that are relevant, realistic, and complex; ii) integrating learning with social negotiation; iii) covering different perspectives and using a variety of representation modes; iv) fostering learning ownership; v) providing learners with enough time for investigation and engagement, and vi) developing self-awareness of the process of knowledge construction.

It would not be wrong to claim that these conditions, which are also valid for the learning of teachers, can be largely met by integrating technology into the educational contexts. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century which is the era of technology and digital life, teachers need to have easy access to information resources to update themselves especially in terms of the information which might not be available to them locally. Teachers should be able to empower themselves personally besides being able to share their knowledge and information with their fellows. They also need to be aware of their own potentials and do not consider themselves as passive professionals whose only resources of knowledge and information are the teacher

trainers, educators, and courses offered in a teacher education program (Lichtenstein, McLaughlin & Kundsen, 1991).

This view was further supported by Costa (2009) who believed that teacher professional development and acquiring new methods and techniques of teaching are not synonymous any longer. However, the new trend in professional development is to get involved with learning forms and approaches that are reflected in teaching practice. Availability of online tools paves the way for further professional development through providing learning opportunities both in networked and personalized ways. Costa (2009) emphasized that the learning environment created by web is substantially established upon the interrelationship among individuals. In the same vein, Reinders (2009) proposed that "teacher educators may look at the proliferation of so-called Web 2.0 applications, or 'social software', to try and tap their potential for communication, learner control, and to support constructivist classroom practice" (p. 231).

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The emphasis of English language teacher education policies in countries like Iran is on 'training' teachers rather than 'developing' them. This system trains teachers who are relatively proficient in speaking English, are able to teach the language in terms of its mechanics, and at the end evaluate the achievement of their learners (Rahimi, 2011). Evaluations of some programs in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) in Iran revealed that they are not as effective as they should be and are in need of revision and reformation. Students in bachelor and master programs in TEFL/ELT (English Language Teaching) are required to pass mainly theoretical courses with the least focus on practicum.

Moiinvaziri and Razmjoo (2016) asserted that many of the TEFL/ELT master's graduates acknowledged their lack of skill and competence in teaching practice. In another study, Taheri and Abbasian (2016) inferred that the existing courses in M.A. programs hardly address the knowledge and information which prospective teachers need to deal with real challenges in their teaching practice. They further suggested that because the majority of M.A. graduates in TEFL/ELT gain employment in private English institutions, some courses such as teaching English to adults or teaching English to children need to be added to the curriculum. Moreover, according to Tajik, Mirhosseini and Ramezani (2019), the majority of teacher training courses in Iran share some general shortcomings such as "lack of opportunity for student teachers to have actual teaching experiences" (p. 1383), "failure to help teachers overcome teaching frustrations" (p. 1384), "failure to develop teacher reflection", and "ignoring educational technology tools" (p. 1387).

On the other hand, English teachers working in foreign language institutes in Iran are not necessarily graduates of English language teaching. People graduated in English translation, English literature, or any other fields- even though not related to English- are permitted to teach English provided that they meet the teaching criteria of a certain institute. Applicants of teaching English take a written proficiency exam, and if it is passed, they will be interviewed with the purpose of being assessed in terms of proficiency, pronunciation and other oral abilities. The interview might include questions exploring knowledge of teaching methodologies in some cases. Those who pass the oral part of the examination successfully are required to attend an intensive 'Teacher Training Course' (TTC) offered by the institute applied to.

The focus of the teacher training course is mainly on communicative teaching/learning approaches. At the end of the course which typically lasts within a range of one week to one month, each candidate as a trainee renders a demonstration; that is, putting what s/he has been taught into practice. The trainees are required to follow the trainer(s) in terms of methodologies and techniques of teaching communicatively and class management. Typically these demonstrations are conducted in an artificial setting in which other trainees or student-teachers play the role of imaginary students and try to challenge the candidate demonstrating. The satisfactory performance as evaluated by the trainer is certified and the candidate then gets the opportunity to be employed in that institute, or other franchised institutions, as a teacher.

After being employed, teachers are scarcely provided with opportunities to develop themselves professionally. Some institutes might hold workshops or one-day training courses, or encourage teachers to participate in workshops, seminars, etc., which are held outside their institutes. Institutional meetings are occasionally organized, where teachers can discuss their problems and experiences, but majority of the teachers usually do not take the event seriously. However, some institutions, occasionally, distribute questionnaires investigating attitudes and ideas of teachers, in case a certain program or policy has been implemented. In other words, teachers are occasionally asked about their needs and wants especially regarding the lacking facilities and equipment in the institute. Nevertheless, teachers' needs in terms of their professional development do not receive due attention.

In order to pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of teachers, their real performance is observed from time to time by the educational supervisor of the institution or by

other responsible authorities. Unfortunately, most teachers perceive these observations as threatening and, in cases, offensive. Based on the findings of the observations, the administrators or other people in charge take measures to alleviate or remove the drawbacks. If teachers wish to secure their job, they need to follow the 'best practice' as prescribed by the observer(s) which leads to the teachers' lack of autonomy to manage their PD (Gholaminejad, 2020).

Another issue which needs more consideration in the context of the current study, Iran, is learner autonomy. Although a number of studies addressed learner autonomy in Iran (e.g., Ajideh, 2009; Nazari, 2014; Nezakatgoo & Fathi, 2019; Shams, 2013), more solid measures need to be taken to promote practicing its principles in the real context of classrooms. The prevalent English teaching method in Iran is communicative language teaching (CLT) that is applied through using series of books such as New Interchange, Headway, American File, Top Notch, Four Corners, etc., the focus of which is principles of learner-centeredness. Yet, the traditional role of the teacher as the main authority of the class is still widely accepted. A recent study (Moradi & Alavinia, 2020) listed a number of barriers impeding learner autonomy and learner-centeredness in Iran. The contributing factors include lack of learner readiness and familiarity, learner passivity and lack of motivation, lack of teacher's professional knowledge, and lack of effective teacher (re) training initiatives as well as contextual deterrents such as role of the policy-makers, cultural impediments, uncooperative parents, and insufficient facilities.

Moreover, although teachers are practicing techniques and approaches that are designed to promote autonomy of the learners, they do not know what their purpose is. They need more awareness on the importance of learner autonomy and its

individual and social effects on learners as well as the significant influence of out-of-class tasks and activities on the learning of their students. Therefore, the concept of learner autonomy should be introduced to them more explicitly and more thoroughly. It is worth noting that, lack of time, restrictions imposed by the preplanned syllabus and standards of evaluation as well as lack of teaching equipment are some of the challenges that obstruct progress of teachers in training autonomous learners.

In addition, it can be claimed that integration of technology as a teaching and learning tool is the least addressed issue in education in Iran, which calls for more attention in the present digital era. You cannot find many language institutions which are equipped with computers and internet for the use of teachers and learners. Although almost all the teachers have internet access at home, they still need to be given directions on how to use the Internet as a resourceful tool for self-directed learning, which can largely contribute to their professional development.

Likewise, it should be noted that teacher autonomy and learner autonomy are dynamically associated. Little (1991) contended that learner autonomy is concerned with the capacity of taking control of one's own learning which can be cultivated and developed in classrooms managed by autonomous teachers. Addressing this issue in the context of the present study seems critical, where teachers have little say over choosing the content of what they teach and setting their own goals and objectives according to the needs of their students, assessing their students' learning, etc. (Khezerlou, 2013). As to the relationship between teacher autonomy and professional development, it should be highlighted that professional development is considered as a sub-component of teacher autonomy (LaCoe, 2008).

Although the related literature is abundant with studies focusing on each of the aforementioned issues (i.e., concepts of learner autonomy, teacher autonomy, and professional development through online mediums), to the best of the knowledge of the researcher there is no study which investigates all of these issues in one context. Despite the fact that the concept of learner autonomy has been explored in several studies in Iran (e.g. Ajideh, 2009; Bagheri & Aeen, 2011; Nazari, 2014; Negari & Solaymani, 2013), teachers' professional development through online mediums and more specifically, its interrelationship with learner autonomy and learner-centeredness as well as teacher autonomy has not received due attention in that context. Therefore, the present study was conducted intending to fill this void in the literature, especially in the context of Iran.

## 1.3 Aim of the Study

Based on the discussion above, this study intends to explore how an online PD initiative cohered around the themes of learner autonomy and learner-centered instruction by the participating teachers in a community of practice is perceived. The study also attempts to figure out how the perceived professional growth affects the development of teacher autonomy. More specifically, the present study intends to take a step towards contributing to the professional development of teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Iran via a Web 2.0 tool, namely 'blog', to investigate how this kind of PD facilitation would be perceived by the participating teachers regarding their professional development and autonomy with respect to the notions of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness in theory and practice.

To this end, the study addresses the following research questions:

1) How did the participating teachers perceive the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness before undertaking the offered online PD initiative?

2) How did the participating teachers perceive their professional growth with respect to the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness after undertaking the offered online PD initiative?

3) How did the perceived professional development of the participating teachers affect their autonomy?

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

Regarding that many teachers are most often reluctant to take part in professional development programs which assign them some extra tasks and responsibilities (Akbari, 2008) and in response to the question posed by teaching professionals as "whether the idealized vision of professional development can be realized online" (Vrasidas & Zambylas, 2004, p. 326), the present study provided the participating teachers with a learning environment that could be accessible anywhere, anytime. In addition to its availability, the content of the learning environment was purposefully designed to address the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness both in theory and practice, so that the learners whose teachers were the participants of the study were indirectly involved as well. This approach was adopted based on the belief that teachers are not willing to undertake any change, as regards their attitudes or instructional practices, unless they can see its result in the form of achievement or improvement in their learners (David, 1994; Guskey, 2002). In that sense, the study would enable the participating teachers to realize the relationship between their

practices in class and the impact of these practices on students, and thus become more open to change.

Besides gaining awareness on the concepts of learner autonomy, teacher autonomy, and professional development, the participating teachers experienced a learning opportunity through an online community of practice. Moreover, the online learning environment was expected to make the participating teachers aware of a means of self-directed learning which contributed to their own autonomy as language teachers.

## 1.5 Definition of Key Terms

**Blog:** Blogs, as technological online platforms, are similar to online journals in which the order of posts is reversely chronological. Every post in a blog has a URL (permalink) or address through which cross-blog sharing of ideas and discussing opinions are facilitated. Blogs are useful instruments for providing and sharing ideas, knowledge, and information, which can be used by individuals for self-directed learning and development (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006; Freeman & Brett, 2012).

**In-service Teacher:** The term in-service teacher designates a teacher that has certification or is already teaching in a classroom, in contrast to a preservice teacher, who is in the process of preparing to become a teacher (Koellner & Greenblatt, 2018).

**Learner Autonomy:** Learner autonomy is "the ability to take charge of one's learning and to have and to hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning" (Holec, 1981, p. 3) through determining learning objectives, defining learning contents, selecting certain techniques and methods, monitoring acquisition/learning procedures, and evaluating acquisition/ learning.

**Learner-centeredness:** Learner-centeredness includes changes in teaching techniques, alteration in learners' motivation from extrinsic to intrinsic, shaping a more democratic interaction between teacher and learners as well as a shift in the belief in acquisition of a fixed body of information and knowledge towards creation of new knowledge (Schweisfurth, 2013).

**Online Professional Development:** Online professional development is defined as experiences, opportunities, programs, or activities that are undertaken by teachers through the use of the Internet and its gadgets leading into the achievement and enhancement of the objectives set in a particular learning context (Kabilan, 2004).

**Teacher Autonomy:** Teacher autonomy is obtaining autonomy in personal responsibility as regards teaching, exercising cognitive and affective control over the process of teaching through constant reflection and analysis, and exploring the freedom conferred by these activities (Little, 1991, 1995).

## 1.6 Summary

This chapter first presented background information on professional development of English language teachers. Then, the problem statement and aim of the study were explained along with the research questions. Finally, the significance of the study was emphasized and a number of key terms were defined.

# Chapter 2

# REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter explicates the concept of teacher professional development including its definition, models, and effectiveness. Moreover, several topics such as teacher and learner autonomy, teacher- vs learner-centeredness, and online professional development along with their sub-themes, which are relevant to the focus of this study, are reviewed. The last section addresses the studies in the literature which are relevant to the focus of this research.

## 2.1 Professional Development and Teacher Knowledge
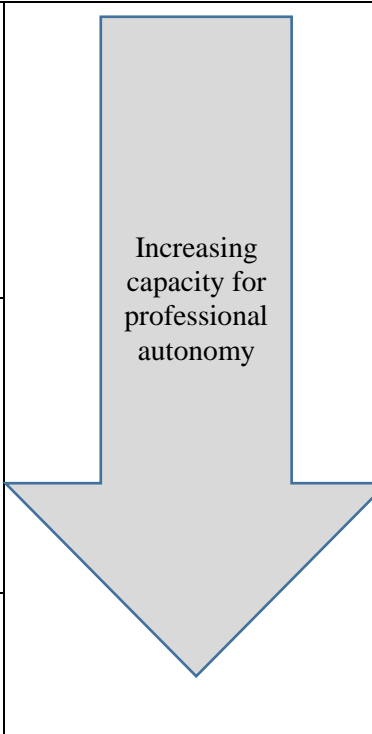
Fullan (1991) defined professional development as any formal or informal learning which a teacher experiences in his/her career from pre-service training to the time s/he is retired. The ultimate objective of a professional development program is promoting effective teaching in a way that leads into students' learning.

According to Knight (2002), pre-service or initial teacher education does not contain all the required knowledge and cannot support the type of knowledge that grows through constant practice. Development is demanded for empowering teachers to adapt to and accept changes such as alteration in the syllabus or to manage a new problem created by a learner, which has not been encountered before; therefore, a life-long learning is called for.

### 2.1.1 Models of Professional Development

As regards professional development of teachers, a variety of models have been proposed by different scholars. For instance, Kennedy (2005) introduced nine models categorized as: "1) Training, 2) Award-bearing, 3) Deficit, 4) Cascade, 5) Standards-based, 6) Coaching/Mentoring, 7) Community of practice, 8) Action research, and 9) Transformative" (p. 236). The models were then fitted into three categories of transmission, transitional and transformative (p. 248).

Table 2.1: Spectrum of CPD models (Kennedy, 2005)

| Models of Continuing Professional Development | Purpose of Model | |
|---|---|---|
| The training model<br><br>The award-bearing model<br><br>The deficit model<br><br>The cascade model | Transmission | Increasing capacity for professional autonomy |
| The standards-based model<br><br>The coaching/mentoring model<br><br>The community of practice model | Transitional | |
| The action research model<br><br>The transformative model | Transformative | |

Bearing in mind that each proposed model is neither exhaustive nor exclusive necessarily, a brief definition of each model is presented referring to Kennedy's (2005) work as follows.

The Training Model is fundamentally skill-based and helps teachers to update themselves as far as their teaching skills are concerned. Delivery of information and determining the agenda are responsibilities of an 'expert'. The participants have a passive role in this model.

According to Kennedy (2005), in the Award-bearing Model, completion of a training program is emphasized. Usually certain universities as external validating bodies control and assure the quality of the program which bears an award such as a certificate, degree, or diploma upon its successful completion.

Another type of professional development proposed by Kennedy (2005) is the Deficit Model, which addresses a deficit perceived in the performance of teachers by making attempts to find remedies and treating weak points recognized in every individual teacher. This model is often criticized for attributing underperformance and failure to the teachers not to the collective organizational responsibilities and management performances.

Following Kennedy's (2005) professional development model, where limited resources are available, the Cascade Model can be applied. That is, some teachers attend teachers' training events and later disseminate the information to other colleagues who didn't have the opportunity of participating in the training program.

The other model is the Standards-based Model, which intends to develop a teaching system and teacher education that are able to create connections between student learning and effectiveness of the teacher. The model is based on behaviorist principles and perspectives of learning which focus on individual teachers' competence and the resulting rewards that are the consequences of collegiate and collaborative learning.

As Kennedy (2005) pointed out, when one-to-one relationship between two teachers is signified, then the Coaching/Mentoring Model is applied. However, mentoring is mostly based on professional friendship and counseling, whereas coaching is skill-based. Generally, mentoring involves a relationship where one teacher is considered as novice while the other one has more experience in teaching.

Another model introduced by Kennedy (2005) is the Community of Practice Model. A community of practice consists of more than two participants and confidentiality is not necessarily concerned. Learning occurs as a result of interactions, not as a mere result of preplanned episodes of learning like courses. Learning in such a context can be either a passive or a proactive and positive experience depending on the role each individual member plays in the community.

Action Research is yet another proposed model that involves study of a particular social context in which the participants are the researchers. They make attempts to improve actions' quality which can be interpreted as the understanding of both situation and practices. The impact of action research on practice would enhance when communities of practice share it and get engaged in it. However, collaboration is not necessarily a prerequisite of this model as in Community of Practice model.

The last model is the Transformative Model, which involves a combination of conditions and processes from other models outlined above; hence, rendering a clear definition for transformative model is not quite possible. Effective integration of the previously mentioned models along with awareness of power issues (i.e., whose agenda is the process addressing?) is considered as transformative model's key characteristics.

Although each model possesses a number of unique qualities of its own, it does not imply that the individual model should or will stand alone. Therefore, a framework can be created through which continuing professional development practices and policies can be compared and analyzed.

As shown in Table 2.1, Kennedy (2005) further maintained that each model or combination of the models can be used to serve certain purposes as 'transmission, transitional, and transformative'. A professional development program which intends to prepare teachers for implementing reforms follows 'transmission' view of continuing professional development (CPD) including 'training', 'award-bearing', 'deficit' and 'cascade' models. On the other hand, a CPD which supports teachers as contributors who can shape educational practices and policies with 'transformative' purposes aligns itself with models of 'action research' and 'transformative'. The other three models (i.e., standards-based, coaching/mentoring, and community of practice) are regarded as 'transitional' since they are able to support the agendas which are compatible with either 'transmission' or 'transformative' purposes of CPD.

As another model of professional development, Knight (2002) proposed three practices to be implemented for continuing professional development. Firstly, teachers can share their teaching stories and familiarize other colleagues with strategies and techniques which might be novel to them and have been seemingly implausible to be applied. This practice is referred to as 'building collective pedagogical repertoire'. Teaching stories would be the description of presentational tools, tasks and activities, assessment and evaluation methods, materials and resources, etc. Building repertoire can be developed by exploring literature for new approaches and applications.

As a second approach, teachers can choose from the repertoire. A certain teaching topic can be chosen and, then, scanned in the repertoire of each individual in search of different ways to handle it. Although web and books can easily prompt memory, collective exploration of a topic or issue seems to be more efficient in gaining information and transferring knowledge. The last approach proposed is that, teachers can audit each other to find out 'who does what, when, where, and with whom'. Auditing provides the opportunity for teachers to share their expertise and enables them to identify different techniques and methods which enhance students' learning as well as to determine if the current practices are effective enough to support learning goals and objectives (Knight, 2002).

Among all PD models introduced above, this research adopted 'Community of Practice' professional development model, as proposed by Kennedy (2005), rendered through an online medium to develop the participating teachers professionally and develop their autonomy with respect to the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness both in theory and practice.

## 2.1.2 Conceptualization of Teacher Knowledge

Similar to their students, teachers do not learn by simply being instructed on what to do; rather, they need to be provided with opportunities to build up new understandings and knowledge and further reflect on what they have learned (Sherin & Han, 2004). According to Caena (2011), for both teachers and students, meaningful learning is an uncertain and slow process in which a number of elements would alter more easily and faster than others depending on the interplay with attitudes and beliefs of the teachers that are rooted deeply. Generally speaking, as shown in the figure below, teacher knowledge is basically composed of three core components: 'content knowledge' (CK), 'pedagogical knowledge' (PK) and 'technological knowledge' (TK). However, as a result of interactions and overlaps among the above mentioned components, new bodies of knowledge would emerge which are described in details below.
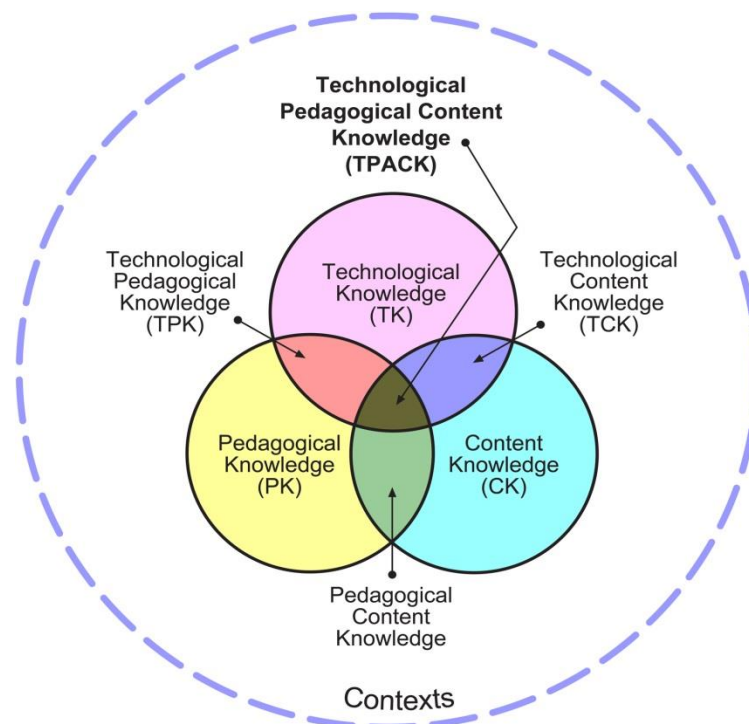


Figure 2.1: The TPACK framework and its knowledge components

In 1980s, the general assumption was that teachers would have the ability to teach successfully by having content knowledge; that is, the 'what and why' of a certain content area taught to learners. Teachers need to understand and know the subject matters they teach, which includes knowledge of theories, concepts, procedure and facts within a particular discipline; knowledge of frameworks which are explanatory and contribute to the organization and connection of ideas, and lastly, knowledge of certain rules that are used as proof and evidence (Shulman, 1987).

However, scholars and practitioners have come to a consensus that a command of a variety of knowledge forms is required for teachers in addition to content knowledge. In order to be an effective teacher, possession of pedagogical knowledge is demanded as well (Doering, Miller, Scharber & Veletsianos, 2009). Pedagogical knowledge encompasses knowledge about practices, processes, and methods of learning and teaching and includes educational values, purposes and aims. This type of knowledge is generically involved in a variety of issues such as class management, development of lesson plan, student learning and evaluation (Mishra & Koehler, 2008). This idea is mainly based on the seminal work of Shulman (1987), which conceptualized teacher knowledge as the dynamic synergy between pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge, referred to as pedagogical content knowledge:

> The key to distinguishing the knowledge base of teaching lies at the intersection of content and pedagogy, in the capacity of a teacher to transform the content knowledge he or she possesses into forms that are pedagogically powerful and yet adaptive to the variations in ability and background presented by the students. (p. 15)

Subject matter or content knowledge covers the breadth and depth of knowledge in a particular area. On the other hand, knowledge of teaching and learning a certain

content area is the building block of pedagogical knowledge. However, following

Shulman's conceptualization, a third component to the knowledge base of teachers

called technical knowledge was added. Based on the description proposed by Mishra

and Koehler (2008), technical knowledge involves both standard (e.g., blackboard,

chalk and books) and advanced (e.g., digital video and internet) technologies. This

type of knowledge requires special skills for operating certain technologies.

As a result of the coalition of the three knowledge types, a new framework as

'technological pedagogical content knowledge' (TPCK) was introduced by Mishra

and Koehler in 2008 (Doering et al., 2009). Mishra and Koehler (2008) further

elaborated that TPCK is:

> An understanding that emerges from an interaction of content, pedagogy, and
> technology knowledge. Underlying truly meaningful and deeply skilled
> teaching with technology, TPCK is different from knowledge of all three
> components individually. TPCK is the basis of effective teaching with
> technology and requires an understanding of the representation of concepts
> using technologies; pedagogical techniques that use technologies in
> constructive ways to teach content; knowledge of what makes concepts
> difficult or easy to learn and how technology can help redress some of the
> problems that students face; knowledge of students' prior knowledge and
> theories of epistemology; and knowledge of how technologies can be used to
> build on existing knowledge and to develop new epistemologies or strengthen
> old ones. (p. 10)

However, it should be noted that TPCK acronym was later updated to TPACK which

is believed to be a better representative of the interplay and interdependence of the

three domains of knowledge in a 'Total PACKage'. Emergence of TPACK

framework was a step forward in reframing teacher education programs for both pre

and in-service teachers, which can be infused in teacher professional development

programs and activities, as well (Doering et al., 2009).

The online professional development environment created in the present study offers information and activity types to assist the participating English teachers in developing all components of their TPACK as regards the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness. However, it is assumed that in order to learn effectively the participating teachers need to go through the steps of cognitive apprenticeship which is described below.

**2.1.3 Cognitive Apprenticeship**

Cognitive apprenticeship from the point of view of Collins, Brown, and Holum (1991) is an instructional model that attempts to give visibility to thinking. In order to explain this view, Collins et al. (1991) made a comparison between cognitive and traditional apprenticeship. The first point is that thinking processes which are less observable are the concern of cognitive apprenticeship whereas traditional apprenticeship involves tasks which can be observed more easily. For example, in tasks such as writing, reading, and problem solving, tacit processes of thinking need to be made more explicit by the teacher. Learners should be acquainted with relevant cognitive as well as meta-cognitive processes of thinking and approaches of understanding a certain problem and addressing it.

Second, contrary to traditional apprenticeship which occurs in situations of a real world context, cognitive apprenticeship typically involves tasks which are separate from the real contexts in which they are expected to be used. For instance, learners are taught how to write literature review in the context of classroom, which may be used later for preparing a proposal. Therefore, cognitive apprenticeship emphasizes that abstract tasks should be situated in order for the learners to make sense of them.

The third point shared by Collins et al. (1991) concerns with skills which are related directly to a particular task at hand in traditional apprenticeship; whereas, they need to have the potential of being transferred to a variety of different situations in cognitive apprenticeship. Learners should develop the ability of adapting skills to new situations (e. g., use of writing skills in different types of papers) as far as cognitive apprenticeship is concerned. According to Austin (2009), applying the theory of cognitive apprenticeship in actual learning environments engages steps of "modeling, coaching, scaffolding, articulation and reflection, and promoting transfer of learning" (p. 175) each of which is briefly explained below.

'Modeling' involves demonstration of the work or task by the teacher in order for the learner (i.e., the teacher learner in this study) to understand it conceptually and observe the steps and procedures of accomplishing the task. The next step which is 'coaching' can be provided by the teacher in a variety of ways. The teacher can assist learners to choose a task or parts of a particular work which they are interested in, can give hints or suggestions, diagnose and analyze problems, provide feedback, recognize weaknesses and target them for correction or more practice. 'Scaffolding' as the third step involves guiding learners and encouraging them to more difficult and challenging parts of the work. The teacher can offer step-by-step instructions, assessment rubrics, checklists, or examples of both poor and excellent works.

'Articulation and reflection' as the next step requires teachers to encourage learners to ask themselves questions about their work as well as the thinking processes they are going through while being engaged in a problem solving task. According to Collins et al. (1991), this step teaches learners "to articulate their knowledge, reasoning, or problem-solving processes" (p. 10). The last step is 'promoting transfer

of learning' through which the teacher guides learners to apply their thinking process to a range of different situations. The learners will be encouraged to formulate their own questions and problems and to apply their skills in various contexts.

Computer-based technologies are believed to be contributing largely to the approach of cognitive apprenticeship as pedagogical tools which have the ability to expand and enhance the flexibility and power of the resources that can be employed to support different components of cognitive apprenticeship explained above. The approach of cognitive apprenticeship, in turn, can provide a solid basis for the instructional design in the environments which are computer-based whether it is web-based, hypermedia, multimedia, or any other technological systems of delivery (Casey, 1996). Supporting Casey's claim, Lambdin, Duffy and Moore (1997) proposed that teacher educators can lead discussions which are focused on a particular subject and promote teachers' reflections through web-based applications like multimedia allowing for simulated and cognitive apprenticeship as well as providing activities which support learning.

### 2.1.4 Self- directed Learning

Self-directed learning originated from John Dewey's proposal in 1938 highlighting that people are born with the capacity and potential of unlimited development and growth (Metsärinne & Virta, 2012). Accordingly, self-directed learning has been regarded as a salient quality of adult education in terms of both practice and theory to the extent that some scholars consider self-directed learning and adult education as synonymous concepts which affect creativity, future aspiration, and academic performance positively (Metsärinne & Virta, 2012). Therefore, the role of the teacher

or educator is to help adult learners in proceeding from dependent learners to self-directed ones.

According to Lieberman and Linn (1991), self-directed learning is composed of knowledge of the topic, procedural, and self-monitoring skills. Describing self-directed learning as both procedure and goal, Candy (1991) proposed a conceptual framework which consisted of four discrete phenomena: i) personal autonomy, ii) learner control, iii) self-management, and iv) autodidaxy. Thus, an independent learner possesses the ability of making choices and feels confident when it comes to finding and adjusting to solutions. An independent learner is ready to receive feedback while is able to monitor and evaluate him/herself. Being curious and open to challenges are other features of independent learners. In the same line, Brookfield (1993) as an ardent proponent of self-directed learning, argued that this type of learning honors critical traditions and humanistic dimensions of adult education and allows for achieving autonomy both 'in' learning and 'through' learning.

To clarify how the concept of self-directed learning contributes to the present study, it should be noted that self-directed learning has the potential to alter the degree of engagement in learning when integrated with digital technologies (Bullock, 2013). Earlier, Shirky (2010) posited a phenomenon called 'cognitive surplus' which is the result of the combination of access to digital technologies and free time that leads to meaningful self-directed learning. In the same vein, Candy (2004) stated that:

> The boundaries between online learning and other life activities are becoming increasingly indistinct because technologies are becoming seamlessly woven into work, leisure, shopping and banking, social activities and other domains of people's lives and, the blurring of boundaries between entertainment on the one hand and education on the other may prove to be one of the defining convergences of our age, with dramatic implications for both domains but particularly for education. (p. 5)

**2.1.5 Features of Effective Professional Development**

According to Dunne (2002), professional development can be considered by teachers as most relevant when it is concentrated on their real work, furnishes them with opportunities to make decisions and choices as far as their learning is concerned, is long term, and contributes to construction of professional learning through collaboration. Generally speaking, three key characteristics of the effective programs which intend to develop teachers professionally are summarized by Wilson and Berne (1999). As the first feature, professional development, in order to be effective, needs to engage learning communities that are making an attempt to redefine practice of teaching. This claim was also echoed in the research of some other scholars such as Britt, Irwin, and Ritchie (2001) as well as Little and McLaughlin (1993). They highlighted that these types of communities should provide participating teachers with a platform to rethink about activities which render definitions of 'being a teacher' through getting engaged in novel experiences.

The second feature concerns teacher learning which is activated in an effective professional development. The main goal of such a program is enhancing awareness of teachers in terms of their learning potentials not merely delivering a set of pedagogical strategies (Wilson & Berne, 1999).

The third characteristic of an effective professional development program is critical colleagueship which describes an environment in which the participants take part in a professional discourse that is built upon mutual trust and includes critique. In such an atmosphere, participating teachers encounter conflict and disagreement while they are taking responsibility for their peers' learning and their own (Wilson & Berne, 1999).

However, Dunne (2002) elaborated on this issue referring to the seven principles of effective professional development proposed by the National Institute for Science Education as follows. As to the first principle, an effective professional development is "driven by a vision of the classroom" (p. 68), that is, certain teaching context and learners of a teacher should be the pillars of a bridge which connects interest to relevance through examining and analyzing new knowledge. The second principle emphasizes that an effective professional development helps teachers develop the knowledge and skills to create vision. It gives teachers opportunities to enhance both their content and pedagogical knowledge to be able to create a clear image of the means that lead to the success of their learners. The third principle postulates that an effective professional development mirrors methods to be used for students. In other words, teachers need to experience what they are expected to offer to their learners before teaching them in the real class.

'Building a learning community' and 'developing teacher leadership' are the next two features of an effective professional development. When a collaboration culture is developed in an educational context, not only teachers can learn from and with each other but also students will be positively affected as regards their learning. It should be noted that leadership is not bound to only formal or administrative positions. Engaging teachers in the process of leadership would significantly contribute to the improvement and development of educational contexts.

The sixth principle suggests that professional development is effective when it is 'linked to the system'. In other words, professional development should not be regarded as a panacea; rather a component of a larger system which can be effective when works in harmony with other components. For this principle to be realized in

real contexts, collecting and analyzing data regarding learning and teaching goals and objectives, teachers' and learners' needs, curriculum, assessment, outcomes of the past professional development activities, etc. are required to design and implement an appropriate professional development initiative.

Desimone (2009) argued that 'focus on content', 'learning actively', 'coherence', 'collective participation', and 'duration' are the key components of an efficient professional development. 'Focus on content' in teacher learning is considered the most influential element as it enhances knowledge and skills of the teachers, which in turn enables them to create a link between tasks and activities that concentrate on the content of subject matter and how learners acquire that content.

Regarding the next component, Desimone (2009) articulated that getting involved in 'active learning' through being observed by or observing experts in teaching, participating in interactive discussion and feedback sessions, reviewing work and performance of the learners, etc. is directly related to effective professional development. The next key feature is 'coherence' which refers to the consistency between teacher learning and teachers' beliefs and knowledge. The other core feature highlighted by Desimone (2009) is 'collective participation' which can be realized through grouping teachers who are similar in terms of the subject matter they teach, their teaching context, etc. in a learning environment that sets up potentials for interactions that lead to teacher learning.

The last critical element suggested by Desimone (2009) is 'duration'. Professional development needs to be continued in a sufficient duration of time for the pedagogical and intellectual change to occur (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Supovitz &

Turner, 2000). Desimone (2009) added that "research has not indicated an exact "tipping point" for duration but shows support for activities that are spread over a semester (or intense summer institutes with follow-up during the semester) and include 20 hours or more of contact time" (p. 184).

## 2.1.6 Measuring the Effectiveness of Professional Development

Evaluating professional development as a challenging issue has been addressed by many researchers and scholars such as Kirkpatrick (1996), Guskey (2002), Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002), Shaha, Lewis, O'Donnell and Brown (2004), Hansen and Rush (2008), Desimone (2009), Opfer and Pedder (2011), and Evans (2014). However, among all the models, the evaluation models of Guskey (2002) and Evans (2014) which were used in this study for framing the second interview questions and analysis of the data, respectively, will be elaborated below.

### 2.1.6.1 Guskey's Critical Levels of PD Evaluation

According to Guskey (2002), to evaluate effectiveness of professional development five major levels are required to be considered. Collecting evaluation data and information as a process gets more complex with each level succeeding. Since each level contributes to the next, success in lower levels is necessary for achieving success in higher levels of the model (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Five levels of professional development evaluation

| Evaluation Level | What Questions Are Addressed? | How Will Information Be Gathered? | What Is Measured or Assessed? | How Will Information Be Used? |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Participants' Reactions** | -Did they like it? Was their time well spent? -Did the material make sense? -Will it be useful? -Was the leader knowledgeable and helpful? -Were the refreshments fresh and tasty? -Was the room the right temperature? -Were the chairs comfortable? | Questionnaires administered at the end of the session | Initial satisfaction with the experience | To improve program design and delivery |
| **2. Participants' Learning** | Did participants acquire the intended knowledge and skills? | -Paper-and-pencil instruments -Simulations -Demonstrations -Participant reflections (oral and/or written) -Participant portfolios | New knowledge and skills of participants | To improve program content, format, and organization |
| **3. Organization Support & Change** | -Was implementation advocated, facilitated, and supported? -Was the support public and overt? -Were problems addressed quickly and efficiently? -Were sufficient resources made available? -Were successes recognized and shared? -What was the impact on the organization? -Did it affect the organization's climate and procedures? | -District and school records -Minutes from follow-up meetings -Questionnaires -Structured interviews with participants and district or school administrators -Participant portfolios | The organization's advocacy, support, accommodation, facilitation, and recognition | -To document and improve organization support -To inform future change efforts |
| **4. Participants' Use of New Knowledge and Skills** | Did participants effectively apply the new knowledge and skills? | -Questionnaires -Structured interviews with participants and their supervisors -Participant reflections (oral | Degree and quality of implementation | To document and improve the implementation of program content |

| | | and/or written) -Participant portfolios -Direct observations -Video or audio tapes | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **5. Student Learning Outcomes** | -What was the impact on students? -Did it affect student performance or achievement? -Did it influence students' physical or emotional well-being? -Are students more confident as learners? -Is student attendance improving? Are dropouts decreasing? | -Student records -School records -Questionnaires -Structured interviews with students, parents, teachers, and/or administrators -Participant portfolios | -Student learning outcomes: -Cognitive (Performance & Achievement) -Affective (Attitudes & Dispositions) -Psychomotor (Skills & Behaviors) | -To focus and improve all aspects of program design, implementation, and follow-up -To demonstrate the overall impact of professional development |

The most common and easiest form of evaluation of professional development is the 'reaction of the participants'. Questions in this level concentrate on whether or not participating people liked their professional development experience in terms of time efficiency, material authenticity, knowledge of the leader, etc. This type of information can be collected through questionnaires at the end of the activity. The second level of this model addresses 'learning of the participants' in terms of skills and knowledge. Information at this level can be gathered through portfolios or personal reflections of the participants either written or oral, simulation or demonstration of skills attained, or simply a paper and pencil assessment. The purpose to be served here is documenting if certain learning goals outlined before beginning of the program or activity have been attained.

Any endeavor to develop professionally can be sabotaged if it is not supported by the certain organization even though individual efforts are undertaken and accomplished successfully; therefore, at the third level the focus of the evaluation is shifted to the 'organization'. However, "the lack of positive results in this case doesn't reflect poor training or inadequate learning, but rather organization policies that undermine implementation efforts" (Guskey, 2002, p. 148). The next level of evaluation attempts to find out if any change has been made in the professional practice of the participants through the 'use of new skills and knowledge'. It should be emphasized that sufficient time should pass for the participants to adjust the new practices and ideas to their own context. Therefore, this level is recommended to be evaluated at some time intervals through implementing questionnaires or interviews, examining portfolios or journals, written or oral personal reflections of the participants, direct observations, or reviewing audio or videotapes.

The bottom line of the proposed model of Guskey (2002) is concerned with 'learning outcomes' of the students. The particular expected outcomes depend on the goals and objectives defined for a certain professional development program or activity. Typically, student learning measures consist of cognitive indicators of learner performance and accomplishment such as scores and grades obtained in standardized tests or portfolio evaluations. Affective outcomes like dispositions and attitudes or psychomotor ones such as behaviors and skills can be measured as well. In this regard, changes in student's behavior in the classroom, class attendance, study habits, completion of homework and self-concepts can be considered. In addition, information elicited through questionnaires and interviews with administrators, teachers, parents and students can be used for evaluation purposes. "Level 5

information about a program's overall impact can guide improvements in all aspects of professional development, including program design, implementation, and follow-up" (Guskey, 2002, p. 149).

**2.1.6.2 Evan's Framework for PD Evaluation**

Giving a central agency to individual teachers, Evans (2014) posited that an effective PD demands vision, resourcefulness, flexibility, and awareness of the significance of considering and interacting with teachers as individuals who decide what is conceived as a 'better way' depending on their priorities, goals, and agenda. Teachers' reaction to the same stimulus may be considerably different and teachers would be engaged with new or different forms of ideologies or practices provided that they perceive them as improvements to their existing practices. Therefore, creating environments and offering PD activities through which such developments flourish and adult learning occurs would be a challenge for educators and PD facilitators. Evans identified eleven dimensions of change for her proposed model, which are categorized under three primary components (see Figure 2.2).

*i) Behavioral Component*

The behavioral component according to Evans' model pertains to what teachers do physically in the classroom. It comprises of 'processual change' (changes to processes that people apply to their practice), 'procedural change' (alteration of procedures within praxis), 'productive change' (change in how much people do, produce, or achieve), and 'competential change' (enhancement of competences and skills).

*ii) Attitudinal Component*

The attitudinal component relates to the attitude(s) held by every single teacher as the practitioner which encompasses 'perceptual change' (modifications of beliefs,

perceptions, and viewpoints, '(e)valuative change' (changes to practice- or professional- related values), and 'motivational change' (changes to morale, job satisfaction level, and motivation).

*iii) Intellectual Component*

The intellectual component, according to Evans' model, relates to teachers' knowledge and understanding as well as their knowledge structures. The sub-components of intellectual element include 'epistemological change' (changes to knowledge base and structures), 'rationalistic change' (change to the nature and extent of reasoning applied to practice), 'comprehensive change' (augmentation of understanding and knowledge), and 'analytical change' (change to the nature and degree of analyticism applied to work).

professional development

| behavioural development | attitudinal development | intellectual development |
|---|---|---|
| processual change | perceptual change | epistemological change |
| procedural change | (e)valuative change | rationalistic change |
| productive change | motivational change | comprehensive change |
| competential change | | analytical change |

Figure 2.2: The componential structure of professional development (Evans, 2014)

The definition of each component along with its dimensions is given in the table below according to Evans' (2014) PD model (see Table 2.3)

Table 2.3: Definition of the componential structure of PD

| Professional Development | |
|---|---|
| **Behavioral development:** The process whereby people's professional performance is modified with the result that her/his professionalism may be considered to be enhanced, with a degree of permanence that exceeds transitoriness. | |
| **Processual change** | Change(s) to processes that people apply to their work |
| **Procedural change** | Change(s) to procedures that people apply to their work |
| **Productive change** | Change(s) to output, productivity and achievement – how much people 'do' and what they achieve |
| **Competential change** | Change(s) to people's skills and competences |
| **Attitudinal development:** The process whereby people's work-related attitudes are modified with the result that her/his professionalism may be considered to be enhanced, with a degree of permanence that exceeds transitoriness. | |
| **Perceptual change** | Change(s) to perceptions, beliefs and views held - including those relating to oneself, hence, self-perception |
| **Evaluative change** | Change(s) to people's values and the things that matter to them or are important to them |
| **Motivational change** | Change(s) to people's motivation, job satisfaction and morale |
| **Intellectual development:** The process whereby people's professional-related knowledge, understanding or reflective or comprehensive capacity or competence are modified with the result that her/his professionalism may be considered to be enhanced, with a degree of permanence that exceeds transitoriness. | |
| **Epistemological change** | Change(s) to the bases of people's knowledge and their knowledge structures |
| **Rationalistic change** | Change(s) to the nature and degree of reasoning that they apply to their practice |
| **Comprehensive change** | Change(s) to what they know and understand |
| **Analytical change** | Change(s) to the nature and degree of their analyticism |

The model suggests that change often occurs across more than one component. However, for PD to occur, it does not require change to take place in every single dimension. Furthermore, Evans (2014) asserted that PD is multi-dimensional which comes about through a chain of reactions at micro-level; that is, one change would lead to another, which subsequently makes a cycle of chain-reaction episodes.

### 2.1.7 Online Teacher Professional Development (OTPD)

In comparison with more traditional modes, online professional development seems to have a promising future as regards the proliferation of its advantages thanks to its features and qualities that make time and geographical factors easy to transcend (Kabilan, 2004; McNaught, 2003). Kabilan (2004) defined online professional development (OPD) as experiences, opportunities, programs, or activities that are undertaken by teachers through the use of internet and its gadgets, which, in turn, leads into the achievement and enhancement of the objectives set in a particular learning context.

Online teacher professional development (OTPD) programs are often created with the aim of providing teachers with an ongoing, resourceful and creative platform for development. As Chen, Chen and Tsai (2009) state, such programs "are available to teachers at their convenience and are more scalable than professional development that depends on local resource and face-to-face interactions" (p. 1156). OTPD is an alternative professional development opportunity offered to educators. Online teacher professional development makes anyplace, anytime development through employing a variety of digital resources to improve teaching pedagogy (Ryan & Scott, 2008). Through the use of various online modes, OTPD has the privilege of meeting different needs and demands of the participating teachers. Another potential benefit of OTPD is the opportunity it provides for the participants to reflect on questions and issues in a richly interactive environment (Chen et al., 2009).

However, professional development activities that are expected to be undertaken by teachers in their own time away from their workplace turn out to be quite challenging. First of all, the teachers need to be highly motivated; otherwise, OPD

would rank as the last in the priority list of the teachers (Chen et al., 2009). The second challenge, as Schlager and Fusco (2003) claimed, is un/familiarity of the teachers with online learning environments. Regardless of the challenges and complexities, OTPD is believed to be an efficient means of deepening teachers' knowledge in terms of both content and pedagogy, which, consequently, would result in improvement of learners' performance.

**2.1.7.1 Information and Communication Technology**

Recent decades have witnessed revolutionary technological changes bringing inter-connectivity to everyday aspects of life from which learning and teaching cannot be excluded. Information and communication technology (ICT) as integral constituent of the processes of teaching and learning contributes to the promotion of thinking strategies and skills (Hismanoglu, 2012). Through making learning and education more accessible to teachers and learners, ICT plays a critical role in improving the education quality. Hence, nurturing ICT awareness of teachers is vital as regards meeting teaching as well as their own and their learners' learning demands. According to Hismanoglu (2012, p. 1) although ICT is defined by administrators and teachers as "a content to be learned and as a skill to be mastered", little significance is attributed to ICT pedagogy which "requires considering learning and teaching processes, organization of curriculum and reflection on people, machine relationships in learning community as well as developing learners' ability to employ computers competently".

To sum up, considering the importance of ICT, educators are required to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills of using ICT both in their learning and teaching to be prepared for the potential future encounters with information and

communication technologies throughout their teaching experience. In the same vein, as Costa (2009) asserts, the panoply of information and communication technologies and tools and easy access to them have provided teachers and educators with plenty of opportunities for professional development which is the concern of the present study.

**2.1.7.2 Web 2.0**

The term Web 2.0, attributed to Tim O'Reilly, refers to a second generation of applications which are web-based and is also known as 'read/write Web'. Encompassing a variety of diverse meanings, Web 2.0 emphasizes on the content which is generated and shared by users through personal and collaborative efforts using different types of social software, interacting with applications that are web-based, and deploying web as an environment for generating, consuming, or re-purposing content (Franklin & Harmelen, 2007). Blogs, wikis, podcasts, image sites, social networking sites, and shared bookmarks are some of the technologies associated with Web 2.0.

Generally speaking, Web 2.0 provides users with opportunities to have supervision and control over their own information and data through interactive services. Dearstyne (2007) contended that web 2.0-related technologies have largely contributed to changing the means of creating, using, distributing, and sharing information and documents among online users through providing easy access to the tools and software for quick creation, analysis, and exchange of data and information.

As regards learning and teaching, Web 2.0 applications are claimed to be rooted in constructivism underpinnings of pedagogy supporting approaches such as social

learning, active learning, and self-learning (Ferdig, 2007). Moreover, as instructional tools, Web 2.0 technologies seem to be appealing as they provide flexibility, functionality, interaction, ease of use, and ubiquitousness of access (Boulos, Maramba, & Wheeler, 2006). Interactive Web 2.0 platforms foster creativity and exploratory approaches in learners taking social dimensions in account.

In order to integrate online learning pedagogy with its social dimension, Minocha and Roberts (2008) proposed "the synthesis of the cognitive constructivist and social constructivist approaches" (p. 3). Cognitive constructivism focuses on the cognition occurring in every individual's mind while the learner attempts to make sense of certain materials intellectually on his/her own. On the other hand, in social constructivism, the emphasis is on the cultural and social aspects of the context in which cognition is in process and shared endeavors contribute to the construction of knowledge. Therefore, it can be inferred that in online learning environments such as wikis, forums, and blogs, discussions and collaborations enable individual construction of knowledge which is socially mediated. Built upon this theme, the present study attempts to provide an online learning environment in which the principles of constructivism are considered and employed through the use of blog as a Web 2.0 tool.

### 2.1.7.3 Blogs

Blogs, as technological online platforms, are similar to online journals in which the order of posts is reversely chronological. Moreover, this application provides users with features that enable them to develop social connections and communications. Every post in a blog has a URL (permalink) or address through which cross-blog sharing of ideas and discussing opinions are facilitated.

Generally, blog is accepted increasingly as an educational technology which serves different pedagogical purposes (Davi, Frydenberg, & Gulati, 2007; McLoughlin & Lee, 2010; Sim & Hew, 2010; Williams & Jacobs, 2004). Considering that learners have a command of a variety of written genres and different forms of engagement which are content- and instructor-based, Burgess (2006) maintained that blogging develops "emergent systems of literacy, including new computer literacies, and unstable contested genres" (p.107). Moreover, Chong (2010) contended that the informal essence of blogs allows learners to reveal their subjective thoughts and emotions. In addition, blog use in educational contexts is credited with ameliorating engagement of the learners with offered materials as a particular course while increasing their ability to reflect and scaffolding their collaborative learning (Davi, Frydenberg & Gulati, 2007; Stiler & Philleo, 2003).

Deng and Yuen (2011) identifed two benefits for educational blogs as being 'reflective' and 'interactive'. Blogging provides learners with a personal space for writing, reflecting on their learning, and revisiting emerging ideas either by themselves or peers throughout the process of blogging and learning. To sum up, blogs are "useful not only for dissemination of information, for communication and for reflection but also for providing teachers and learners with multiple possibilities to enhance their daily practice due to their multimedia features and interactivity" (Montero-Feleta & Perez-Sabater, 2010, p. 774). These points would justify deploying 'blog' as a web 2.0 device for serving the purposes of the present study.

### 2.1.8 Community of Practice

The major reason of increment in interest in developing communities of practice (CoP) is lack of satisfaction with learning methods and approaches and arenas which

are traditional. The origin of CoP is attributed to the seminal study of Lave and Wenger's (1991) on situated learning and what they refer to as "legitimate peripheral practice" (Henderson, 2007, p. 2). Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasized on the holistic view of learning where the individual learner is situated in a cultural and social environment in which as Henderson (2007) put it knowledge and practices are transmuted.

As an alternative to traditional communities of practice, virtual communities which utilize networked technology set up a platform for establishing collaboration among members of the community across a variety of time zones and geographical barriers (Johnson, 2001). Johnson (2001) further added that virtual communities are shaped based on identification of a particular task or idea and developed upon rise of a need. In contrast with traditional communities, norms are not dominating; rather, there is more space for individual control. In other words, formal boundaries are removed and internet is considered as the communities' place (Squire & Johnson, 2000).

In order to design a virtual community of practice, Wenger (1998) proposed a framework referred to as 'learning architecture' (cited in Henderson, 2007, p. 164) (Figure 2.3). It consists of four basic dualities as 'reification/participation, designed/emergent, local/global, identification/negotiability'. The dualities are mainly established upon the percept that CoPs are characterized with fluidity and the community members have the opportunity to negotiate and form their identities anew (Henderson, 2007).
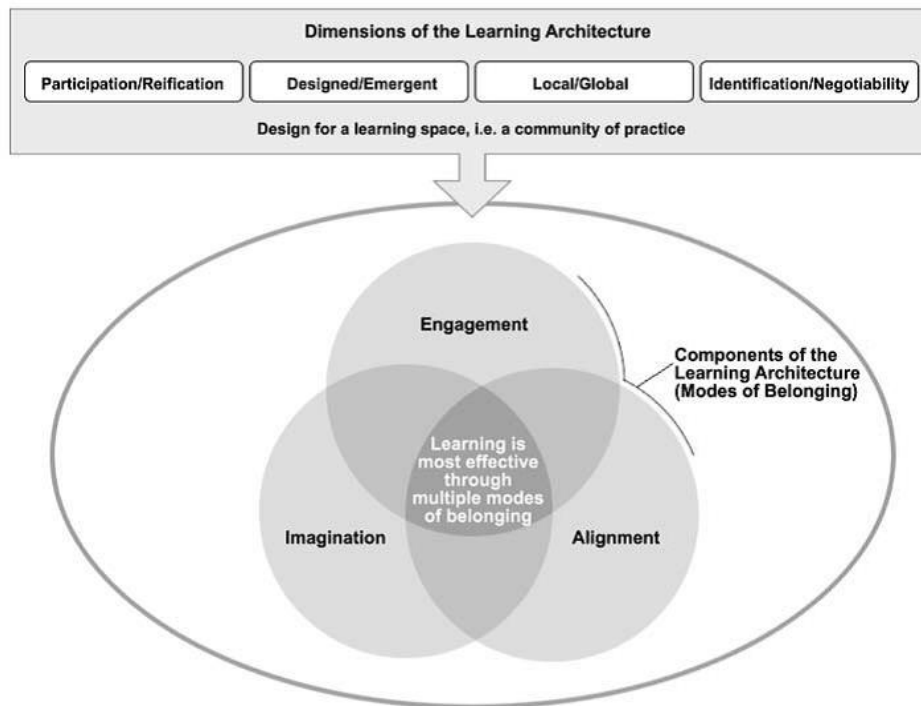
Figure 2.3: Learning architecture (cited in Henderson, 2007, p. 165)

In Wenger's (1998) design, providing members with the opportunity to take part in multiple belonging modes including engagement, imagination, and alignment, comprises the core of 'learning architecture'. 'Engagement' encompasses formation of the community by means of social networks, intercommunication and sharing personal ideas, opinions, and histories, and collaborating in a social context. 'Imagination' refers to the necessity for the members to revisit their engagement position and investigate alternative perspectives, scenarios, and connections. As the third belonging mode, 'alignment' is concerned with the essentiality for the members to link the activity of the community with the broader issues which they encounter outside of the certain community they belong to (Henderson, 2007).

Considering these three core elements, Vangrieken et al. (2017), introduced a variety of community of practice called 'member-oriented' community which is established

upon a pre-defined agenda. Member-oriented communities are basically formed to provide teachers with opportunities to a) exchange teaching-related issues, perspectives and ideas, b) enhance teachers' information about different sources of knowledge, c) discuss practice-related challenges, d) share teaching techniques and strategies, e) deepen and broaden teachers' content knowledge, f) develop skills and competencies to implement their new knowledge, g) carry on research, and h) do class observations and give/receive feedback. Following the principles of member-oriented community of practice (excluding the last two items) and by setting objectives focused on learner autonomy and learner-centered practices, this research intends to facilitate the professional growth of the participating teachers through an online community of practice.

## 2.2 Teacher Autonomy

Little (1991& 1995) is one of the first scholars who discussed the notion of 'teacher autonomy'. From his point of view, a successful teacher is one who has obtained autonomy in personal responsibility as regards his/her teaching, who exercises cognitive and affective control over the process of teaching through constant reflection and analysis, and explores the freedom conferred by these activities.

It is believed that 'teacher autonomy' is as challenging as 'learner autonomy' and lacks transparency (McGrath, 2000; Smith, 2000). To clarify the concept of 'teacher autonomy', Smith and Erdoğan (2008) distinguished between notions of teaching (professional action) and teacher-learning (development) or, in other words, between teacher autonomy and teacher-learner autonomy. They also made a distinction between freedom and capacity. A fundamental conceptualization of the term 'teacher autonomy' is indicated by the amount of the teachers' ability to improve themselves

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in terms of teaching throughout research-oriented or reflective approaches. Moreover, freedom in teaching in the way one desires manifests teacher autonomy.

As MacGrath (2000) pointed out, an autonomous teacher engages in "self-directed professional development" (p. 100) and acts freely without being controlled by others. Smith and Erdogan (2008) argued that the concept of 'teacher autonomy' can be viewed from several dimensions clarifying its associations with 'learner autonomy' (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4: Dimensions of teacher autonomy (Smith & Erdogan, 2008)

| In relation to professional action: | |
|---|---|
| A. Self-directed professional action | i.e. 'Self-directed teaching' |
| B. Capacity for self-directed professional action | i.e. 'Teacher autonomy (capacity to self-direct one's teaching)' |
| C. Freedom from control over professional action | i.e. 'Teacher autonomy (freedom to self-direct one's teaching)' |
| In relation to professional development: | |
| D. Self-directed professional development | i.e. 'Self-directed teacher-learning' |
| E. Capacity for self-directed professional development | i.e. 'Teacher-learner autonomy (capacity to self-direct one's learning as a teacher)' |
| F. Freedom from control over professional development | i.e. 'Teacher-learner autonomy (freedom to self-direct one's learning as a teacher)' |

The left column of the table contains different dimensions of teacher autonomy and the right column includes alternative expressions that are useful for the clarification of a certain dimension referred to. To unpack the above distinction, it should be elaborated that development and professional action of teaching are not the same

necessarily. Although we can be self-directed in our teaching, we might not be self-directed learners. Moreover, the willingness or the capacity for self-directed teaching (or learning) and the actual behavior of self-directed teaching (or learning) should be distinguished from each other bearing in mind that the term 'autonomy' is used to refer to the former one.

However, Pearson and Moomaw (2006) contended that literature does not offer a clear definition of teacher autonomy. What is considered autonomy from the point of view of one teacher might be viewed as isolation by another. For one teacher, autonomy might be gaining freedom from supervision or interference, while another interprets it as being free in developing relationships with colleagues and doing tasks out of the context of classroom (Frase & Sorenson, 1992).

## 2.3 Learner Autonomy

It has been a long time since 'autonomy' gained popularity in foreign language teaching discussions (e.g., Dickinson, 1995; Little, 1991). The concept of autonomy is in accordance with many critical pedagogical preoccupations such as our attempts to help learners in developing independence from their teachers both in the process of learning and in using the acquired/learned language, our belief about the necessity of learners' active involvement in language learning, our endeavors to make learner-centered method known and practiced. Autonomy is not only a language teaching/learning concern, but also an educational one which attempts to train learners who have the ability to learn, think, and behave independently (Hammond & Collins, 1991).

One of the simplest and most influential definitions of learner autonomy was proposed by Holec (1981) as "the ability to take charge of one's learning and to have and to hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning" (p. 3). Holec (1981) provided a list specifying the decisions needed to be made to become an autonomous learner as: a) determining learning objectives, b) defining learning contents, c) selecting certain techniques and methods, d) monitoring acquisition/learning procedures, d) evaluating acquisition/ learning. Different variants of the above definition exist in the literature. Benson (2007) mentioned some variations in the use of terms such as 'capacity' instead of 'ability' or 'take control of' as a substitute for 'take charge of'. Moreover, a number of definitions stress 'willingness' as a notion irrespective of the 'capacity' of learner. They assume that autonomy will not be developed unless the learner is willing to take charge of his/her learning.

Litttlewood (1996) contended that learner autonomy depends on two major different components: willingness and ability. Therefore, a learner might be able to make choices but does not have any willingness to do so or vice versa. Notions of willingness and ability each consist of two components. Willingness involves possessing confidence and motivation to take charge of required decisions and choices. Ability, on the other hand, is concerned with having knowledge about available alternatives and having required skills for conducting the most appropriate decisions made.

Opposite to the previous discussions, Little (1991) offered a definition explaining what learner autonomy is not. Learner autonomy does not imply learning without a teacher or self-instruction. Learner autonomy does not ban initiative or intervention

of the teacher. As Little (1991) puts it: "It is not something teachers do to learners; i.e. a new methodology; …   it is not a single easily identifiable behavior; …   it is not a steady state achieved by learners once and for all" (p. 37).

Having all these in mind, Sinclair (2000) postulated a comprehensive definition of learner autonomy covering many different aspects. Sinclair (2000) defined autonomy as a construct of capacity which also involves learners' willingness to take responsibility of their learning. He maintained that learners' willingness and capacity are not necessarily innate. Sinclair (2000) contended that autonomy has variable and unstable degrees so that achieving complete autonomy is too idealistic.  Autonomy is not merely placing learners where they are considered independent. Learners should develop an awareness of the process of learning through making decisions and reflection. According to Sinclair (2000), autonomy occurs both outside and inside the classroom and has individual, social, psychological, and political dimensions. He also added that different cultures interpret autonomy differently.

Similar to many other theoretical concepts and discussions, there is a gap between the theory of learner autonomy and what teachers understand and practice in reality. Palfreyman and Smith (2003) attributed this gap to the manner which contributes to the conceptualization of learner autonomy with particular reference to political, psychological, technical, or sociocultural perspectives. A variety of theoretical assumptions bear out such perspectives; for instance, physical context of learning is the focus of technical perspective while political perspective stresses issues of control and balance of power. Mental attributes that contribute to learner autonomy are the psychological concerns while sociocultural perspective is concerned with the role social participation and interaction play in the process of development of

autonomy. Palfreyman and Smith (2003) stated that "while it is useful to distinguish the different perspectives mentioned above, in real educational settings such perspectives are not black-and-white alternatives" (p. 4).

A critical point to be highlighted is that having the required capacity and willingness would not ensure that learners will achieve autonomy. To clarify this issue, Dynamic Inter-relational Space was proposed as a theory by La Ganza (2008), which addressed the relationship between teacher and learner. This theory assumed that the realization of 'learner autonomy' as an inter-relational construct depends on the capacities of both the learner and the teacher.

In other words, the extent to which learners can achieve learner autonomy in terms of taking control over learning, knowing and exercising strategies for learning, etc. depends to a large extent on the relationship between the learner and his/her teacher. Therefore, teacher and learner are constantly negotiating 'autonomy' within their relationship. La Ganza (2008) maintained that, to develop learner autonomy, both the teacher and learner should possess the capacity to create and maintain the inter-relational environment meanwhile teachers hold back from having excessive influence on the learner and learners avoid seeking influence of the teachers. Learner should become persistent in employing various resources including the teacher; and, on the other hand, the teacher needs to know how to communicate with the learner during the process of learning.

It should be noted that learners would not achieve the same autonomy level but all of them need help to raise their awareness and are required to learn to reflect on what they experience in the process of learning, and to share their understandings and

reflections with their peers and teachers. They need to be encouraged to develop a positive attitude towards and competence in autonomous learning (Zou, 2011). Hence, the role of the teacher is critical in holding the context together. The teacher needs to reassure and relieve learners who are struggling with their anxieties throughout the process of learning, while is developing a capacity to come over her/his own anxieties related to facilitating the process of learning and nurturing learner autonomy. La Ganza (2008) believed that "the learner's failure to complete the task would also feel like a failure for the teacher" (p. 66). In order for teachers to be successful facilitators and contribute efficiently to the development of autonomy in their learners, they need to be autonomous themselves which means 'teacher autonomy' is an integral part of 'learner autonomy'.

### 2.3.1 Typology of Autonomy

Ecclestone (2002) acknowledged that 'autonomy' as a term is vaguely used and quoted an implicit definition of autonomy in learning context from Law (1992), who stated:

> We have some idea of what we are talking about when we use it- when our students or clients are acting consciously (not without thought), independently (not compliantly), imaginatively (not routinely) and with commitment (not remotely). (p. 152)

Therefore, it can be inferred that autonomy, critical thinking and independence are not synonymous. They are integral attributes or skills to the ability of autonomously acting in defining what is acceptable morally, in choosing among ideas which are in conflict, and in having one's own mind (Boud, 1988). In the light of this perspective, autonomy can be considered both as the goal as well as all the processes contributing to its realization (Ecclestone, 2002). Autonomy is portrayed as a cognitive process

which targets critical thinking and critical acting as its ultimate goals while addressing learning activities and their effectiveness.

Different types of autonomy were differentiated by Ecclestone (2002) as procedural, personal, and critical. Procedural autonomy refers to the ability of an individual in controlling the timing and pace of a certain work and evaluating it. It enables learners to negotiate preferred types of activities and recognize their own achievement's evidence. This type of autonomy provides learners with confidence as well as the ability to employ required processes or techniques independently. According to Ecclestone (2002), "`proactivity', `independence', `self-reliance' and `confidence with language' are integral to procedural autonomy" (p. 36). As regards models of teaching/learning, procedural autonomy is related to transmission model in which knowledge, content, processes, and predefined outcomes are transferred to the learners by teachers or computer-based materials.

Procedural autonomy might also involve transaction over the way tasks are done sustained by external motivation. Thus, teachers should have the ability to cajole or persuade non-motivated learners throughout the requirements of assessment. Both self- and teacher assessment check whether the set criteria are met and intend to reward short-term outcomes. Since replication of information is a main focus, procedural autonomy would be criticized for encouraging surface learning (Ecclestone, 2002). Procedural autonomy is believed to be a co- or pre- requisite form of other more sophisticated types, namely critical and personal autonomy.

The second type which is personal autonomy, also called 'practical' autonomy, is based on the knowledge of an individual about his/her own weaknesses and

strengths, habits of learning, and possible choices to be made in terms of action and advancement, that help him/her to become self-directing. It is possible for someone to have personal autonomy in a certain context, but is not personally autonomous in a learning context where there is not enough engagement and motivation. This type of autonomy is mainly sustained by intrinsic motivation. To develop personal autonomy, achievement is attributed to engagement and effort as well as transaction and good relationships between peers and teachers. This is in parallel with student-centered learning which is based on the negotiation of expected outcomes and the means of achieving them. "There is an emphasis on positive interdependence amongst learners, co-operative approaches to problem-setting and problem-solving, and negotiated processes of evaluation, review and recording of achievement" (Ecclestone, 2002, p. 38). Therefore, personal autonomy involves social processes, constructivist views on learning, as well as individual activities and traits.

The third type of autonomy in Ecclestone's (2002) typology is critical autonomy which is considered as the furthest goal to be achieved in education because conceptions of democratic citizenship which are fundamentally supported by critical intelligence, enable learners to break the strict frameworks based on which they generally think and act. It is believed that critical autonomy emerges by means of expertise in a subject where getting engaged in conventional bodies of thought and taking part in conversations associated with them enable individuals to develop understandings over and beyond established wisdom and insights (Ecclestone, 2002). Critically autonomous learners determine their learning content or, in other words, the educational knowledge.

For learners, critical autonomy is integral to their cultural and social needs which require intellect and the ability to connect concepts and ideas. According to Ecclestone (2002), critical thinking is inseparable from personal and critical autonomy yet not synonymous with either of them. Critical autonomy is generated through transformation and transaction which are based on collaboration and problem-solving within a certain context or subject, and the idea that knowledge is contestable, uncertain, and dynamic.

### 2.3.2 Learner-centered Teaching

Theory of learner-centeredness proposes that through active construction and assimilation of knowledge rather than passive addition of facts to the existing supply of knowledge, human beings would learn effectively (Hardman et al., 2008). Epistemologically speaking, constructivism on which instructions of learner-centeredness are based, postulate that knowledge is nonobjective, constructed internally, mediated by socio-cultural factors, and temporary. Learner-centered instruction posits that, as groups or individuals make sense of the worlds they experience, they construct knowledge actively (McClellan & Soden, 2004).

Accordingly, in an authentic context, the interplay among learners' needs, interests, abilities, types of intelligences, learning styles and educational goals make the basis of a learner-centered system of instruction (APA, 1997; McCombs & Whisler, 1997). Moreover, attitudes, beliefs, existing knowledge and skills of the learners are deemed important in such a system (Weimer, 2002) and the subject matter and instructions are tailored by the teacher according to the capacities, interests, and needs of the learners. In the learner-centered approach, student is considered as the principal learning agent whose learning is the main goal. Learner-centeredness encourages an

active interaction between the teacher as the facilitator and the learner. It is not important how frequently information is transmitted, but the focus is on how well the learners learn and how effective the instructions are (APA, 1997; Henson, 2003; McCombs & Whisler, 1997). All of what is explained above can be summed up in the definition of learner-centeredness rendered by McCombs and Whisler (1997):

> The perspective that couples a focus on individual learners (their heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs) with a focus on learning ( the best available knowledge about learning and how it occurs and about teaching practices that are most effective in promoting the highest levels of motivation, learning, and achievement for all learners). This dual focus, then, informs and dives educational decision-making. (p. 9)

### 2.3.3 Teacher-centered Versus Learner-centered Teaching

As a response to the dominant teacher-centered education, which is criticized for encouraging rote-learning and preventing creative and critical thinking and learning, learner-centered education emerged (Jessop & Penney, 1998; Rowell, 1995). Weimer (2002) stated that teacher-centered education is less demanding for pupils; whereas learner-centeredness involves active learning and defines active roles for learners through the processes of teaching and learning. Mtika and Gates (2010) contended that in order to implement a learner-centered education system, the curricula and structure of schools or any teaching/learning environment are required to be redefined and restructured in a way to engage interests and ideas of the learners and, subsequently, achieve development in skills and knowledge.

Therefore, to shift the role of the teachers from mere distributors of knowledge and information, learner-centered approach employs a variety of methods to facilitate learning and develop an appropriate context for learning to take place. It is an approach that mainly concentrates on students' learning rather than teachers' actions (Blumberg, 2009). Following, two paradigms offered by Huba and Freed (2000) and

Allen (2004) both comparing teacher-centered and learner-centered approaches are

presented.

Table 2.5: Comparison of teacher-centered and learner-centered paradigms (Huba & Freed, 2000)

| Teacher-centered paradigm | Learner-centered paradigm |
|---|---|
| Knowledge is transmitted from professor to students | Students construct knowledge through gathering and synthesizing information and integrating it with the general skills of inquiry, communication, critical thinking, problem solving and so on. |
| Students passively receive information | Students are actively involved |
| Emphasis is on acquisition of knowledge outside the context in which it will be used | Emphasis is on using and communicating knowledge effectively to address enduring and emerging issues and problems in real-life contexts. |
| Professor\s role is to be primary information giver an primary evaluator | Professor's role is to coach and facilitate Professor and students evaluate learning together |
| Teaching and assessing are separate | Teaching and assessing are intertwined |
| Assessment is used to monitor learning | Assessment is used to promote and diagnose learning |
| Emphasis is on right answers | Emphasis is on generating better questions and learning from errors |
| Desired learning is assessed indirectly through the use of objectively scored tests | Desired learning is assessed directly through, papers, projects, portfolios, and the like |
| Focus is on a single discipline | Approach is compatible with interdisciplinary investigation |
| Culture is competitive and individualistic | Culture is cooperative, collaborative, and supportive |
| Only students are viewed as learners | Professor and students learn together |

Table 2.6: Comparison of teacher-centered and learner-centered paradigms (Allen, 2004)

| Concept | Teacher-centered | Learner-centered |
|---|---|---|
| Teaching goals | • Cover the discipline | • Students learn:<br><br>-How to use the discipline<br><br>-How to integrate disciplines to solve complex problems<br><br>-An array of core learning objectives, such as communication and information literacy skills |
| Organization of the curriculum | • Courses in catalog | • Cohesive program with systematically created opportunities to synthesize, practice, and develop increasingly complex ideas, skills, and values |
| Course structure | • Faculty cover topics | • Students master learning objectives |
| How students learn | • Listening<br>• Reading<br>• Independent learning, often in competition for grades | • Students construct knowledge by integrating new learning into what they already know<br><br>• Learning is viewed as a cognitive and social act |
| Pedagogy | • Based on delivery of information | • Based on engagement of students |
| Course delivery | • Lecture<br>• Assignments of exams for summative purposes | • Active learning<br><br>• Assignments for formative purposes<br><br>• Collaborative learning<br><br>• Cooperative learning<br><br>• Online, synchronous, self-directed learning<br><br>• Problem-based learning |
| Course grading | • Faculty as gatekeepers<br>• Normal distribution expected | • Grades indicate mastery of learning objectives |
| Faculty role | • Sage on the stage | • Designer of learning environments |

| Effective teaching | • Teach (present information) well and those who can will learn | • Engage students in their learning |
|---|---|---|
| | | • Help all learners master learning objectives |
| | | • Use classroom assessment to improve courses |
| | | • Use program assessment to improve programs |

In order to shift from teacher-centered approach and develop learner-centered teaching, Weimer (2002) introduced five areas of practice that are required to be changed. The first is 'functions of content'. A solid knowledge base should be built and the learners need to be enabled to apply the provided content and act more independently in the process of learning. Learners are required to understand why they are supposed to learn certain content and be able to develop their own interpretation and meaning of the content rather than mere memorization of what the instructor delivers. 'Role of instructors' is the second area to be changed. The instructors should concentrate on students' learning and help them in their learning experiences. They need to create an atmosphere where easy learning can occur through implementation of learning/teaching methods which facilitate learning and are compatible with goals and objectives of the offered course.

As the third area a new 'responsibility for learning' is needed. There should be a shift from the instructor to the learner. Learners are required to be motivated by proactive assistance of teachers in order to feel responsible for their own learning. Moreover, in order to assist learners' improvement, instructors need to provide learners with constructive and constant feedback on their performance rather than only assigning scores which involves a shift in 'processes and purposes of assessment'. Since

assessment is regarded as a part of learning process, assessment and feedback giving should be integrated. The last area to be considered is 'balance of power'. Instructors are supposed to share decisions with students. There should be a power balance between learners and the instructor. Students should have the opportunity to express their perspectives and their preferred methods of learning/teaching and assessment.

## 2.3.4 Principles of Learner-centered Teaching

Philosophy of learner-centered teaching has led to the development of a variety of teaching principles and frameworks. Principles of learner-centeredness involve the interaction of various psychological and contextual factors. Therefore, learners' internal psychological factors as well as environmental factors which affect learning need to be well defined and recognized. In 1997, American Psychological Association published a report based on a psychological and educational research which introduced a framework consisting of fourteen learner-centered principles (see Table 2.7).

Table 2.7: APA learner-centered principles

| Cognitive and Meta-cognitive Factors | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Principle** | **Description** |
| 1 | Nature of the learning process | The learning of complex subject matter is most effective when it is an intentional process of constructing meaning from information and experience. |
| 2 | Goals of the learning process | The successful learner, over time and with support and instructional guidance, can create meaningful, coherent representations of knowledge |
| 3 | Construction of knowledge | The successful learner can link new information with existing knowledge in meaningful ways. |
| 4 | Strategic thinking | The successful learner can create and use a repertoire of thinking and reasoning strategies |

| | Principle | Description |
|---|---|---|
| | | to achieve complex learning goals. |
| 5 | Thinking about thinking | Higher-order strategies for selecting and monitoring mental operations facilitate creative and critical thinking. |
| 6 | Context of learning | Learning is influenced by environmental factors, including culture, technology, and instructional processes. |
| **Motivational and Affective Factors** | | |
| | **Principle** | **Description** |
| 7 | Motivational and affective influences on learning | What and how much is learned is influenced by the learner's motivation. Motivation to learn, in turn, is influenced by the individual's emotional states, beliefs, interests and goals, and habits of thinking. |
| 8 | Intrinsic motivation to learn | The learner's creativity, higher order thinking, and natural curiosity all contribute to motivation to learn. Intrinsic motivation is stimulated by tasks the learner perceives to be of optimal novelty and difficulty, relevant to personal interests and providing for personal choice and control. |
| 9 | Effects of motivation on effort | Acquisition of complex knowledge and skills requires extended learner effort and guided practice. Without learner's motivation to learn, the willingness to exert this effort is unlikely without coercion. |
| **Developmental and Social Factors** | | |
| | **Principle** | **Description** |
| 10 | Developmental influences on learning | As individuals develop, there are different opportunities and constraints for learning. Learning is most effective when differential development within and across physical, intellectual, emotional, and social domains is taken into account |
| 11 | Social influences on learning | Learning is influenced by social interactions, interpersonal relations, and communication with others. |
| **Individual Differences** | | |
| | **Principle** | **Description** |

| 12 | Individual differences in learning | Learners have different strategies, approaches, and capabilities for learning that are a function of prior experience and heredity. |
|----|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13 | Learning and diversity | Learning is most effective when differences in learners' linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds are taken into account. |
| 14 | Standards and assessment | Setting appropriately high and challenging standards and assessing the learner as well as learning progress—including diagnostic, process, and outcome assessment—are integral parts of the learning process. |

Learner-centered principles regard learning as a process which is both constructive and natural. Productive learning would be achieved when the content is meaningful and relevant from the point of view of the learners and the environment is appropriate. This approach considers a learner as a holistic entity that would extend beyond the time and space of the learning context. Thus, different perspectives of learners should be taken into account and a challenging environment needs to be created.

In order to implement learner-centered principles, instructors should recognize the existing capacities of learners and support them along the way to achieve the desired outcomes. Learning occurs through a practical process which involves both cognitive and physical manipulations. Learner compares and contrasts what s/he says and does with the expected results and constantly adjusts and adapts his/her behavior and mental schemata (Illera & Escofet, 2009). Norman and Spohrer (1996) proposed that learner-centered teaching should be viable, engaging, and effective. It should support needs of the curriculum, focus on the process of learning and its consequent outcomes, and provide learners with proper interaction and feedback. Teachers and learners should actively collaborate with each other and identify various means of

learning and learning enhancement bearing in mind each individual learner's unique capacities, learning experiences, and talents. It is reported that higher learner motivation and achievement would be exhibited when the learners perceive that their instructor is implementing learner-centered principles (McCombs & Whisler, 1997).

## 2.3.5 Challenges of Learner-centered Teaching

Philosophy of learner-centeredness and its principles are applied by various educators to develop capabilities of leadership (Orr, 2007), strategies in classroom practices, and instructional expertise (Thompson et al., 2003). Moreover, scholars believe that techniques of learner-centered teaching should be incorporated into course and project designs especially where multimedia and technology play a critical role (Norman & Spohrer, 1996; Schwienhorst, 2002). A major challenge regarding the issue of learner-centeredness is the gap between reality and rhetoric. Biggs (2003) contended that many instructors, educators, and institutions claim that they practice learner-centered principles, but it is not the case in reality.

Literature reveals that most resources are allotted to research rather than learner-centered teaching. In attempts to find out reasons creating the mentioned gap and finding ways to tackle the challenges concerning learner-centeredness, scholars all over the world have addressed the issue from different perspectives in various fields and areas. Following a number of conducted studies and their findings will be reviewed.

Yilmaz (2008) carried out a qualitative research probing views of teachers in the field of social studies towards learner-centered instruction. The researcher showed that the participating teachers had positive attitudes as regards learner-centered instruction admitting that learner-centered approach makes the process of learning

enjoyable, challenging, engaging, and relevant. The study also indicated the tendency of the participating teachers to constructivist and cognitive approaches rather than behaviorist ones.

Assuming that engagement is a significant construct in learners' learning performance, Wu and Huang (2007) investigated emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement of ninth graders in student-centered and teacher-centered technology-enhanced classroom in Taiwan. Their findings showed that in the student-centered class, learners were more emotionally engaged, but the level of emotional engagement didn't have any influence on the achievement of students. Students spent a long period of class time on cognitive engagement in both classes; however, qualitative differences were found in terms of behavioral and cognitive involvement between the two groups. One of the main differences was reflection-making which was observed only in learner-centered class in the form of self-assessment. In addition, in the student-centered class, simulations were used to provoke interaction through discussions, while in the teacher-centered class the approach of 'initiation-response-evaluation' was implemented. Overall, the research proposes that both learner- and teacher-centered approaches contribute to the promotion and development of learners' conceptual understanding and provide a variety of opportunities for learners to get involved in the process of learning.

Maintaining that there should be a shift from 'inside out' approach in education, where the insiders determine what is best for the outsiders, Lea et al. (2003) proposed that educational authorities should consult with learners about teaching and learning processes. They investigated learners' attitudes towards and perceptions of learning in a learner-centered system and found that views of learners were generally

positive. However, they were not sure if available resources could sufficiently support such an approach in terms of implementation and maintenance.

With the belief that English language teaching is an attempt to foster aspiration and desire to become an effective and efficient English teacher, Nakamura (2005) developed a teaching practicum project to expose pre-service teachers to interactive and learner-centered principles in order to enable them to create a link between the theories they have already been taught through their studies and the real classroom practices. The emphasis was on communicative tasks to be employed in a learner-centered classroom. At the end of the project almost all of the student teachers attested the significance of encouraging learner participation through meaningful communicative activities in a learner-centered environment. This type of training with a focus on learner-centeredness was interesting to them because they had the opportunity to express and share their views and understanding of approaches and methods before implementing them in their own classrooms. They were enabled to put the theory they had learned into practice. Moreover, the project contributed to raising their awareness and promoting their motivation as regards their prospective profession.

## 2.4 Related Studies

Professional development of teachers is addressed in a myriad of ways from different perspectives across the world (e.g. Glackin, 2018; Hill, Corey & Jacob, 2018; Kennedy, 2016; Kohnen & Whitacre, 2017; Misra, 2018; Svendsen, 2020; Yue, 2019) - just to name a few. However, the context-specific review of the literature revealed that this issue has not received due attention by the scholars in this field in Iran, especially with respect to the PD of English language teachers. In general,

studies investigating PD of English language teachers in Iran can be divided to two categories: a) studies surveying attitudes and perceptions or PD interventions without the use of technology (e.g., Adel, Zareian & Mardekhoda, 2015; Alibakhshi & Dehvari, 2015; Asa'di & Motallebzadeh, 2013; Ashraf & Kafi, 2016; Ghanbari & Rasekh, 2012; Mohammadi & Moradi, 2017; Motallebzadeh, Hosseinnia & Domskey, 2017; Safari & Pourhashemi, 2017), and b) studies surveying attitudes and perceptions or PD interventions through the use of technology (e.g. Alimirzaee & Ashraf, 2016; Ebrahimi, Faghih & Marandi, 2016; Mashhadi, Biria & Lotfi, 2020; Nami, Marandi & Sotoudehnama, 2016; Nazari & Xodabande, 2020; Zandi, Thang & Krish, 2014). Given the above background, the studies which are closer to this research in terms of purpose and approach, that is, professional development facilitated by means of technology in a community of practice, will be briefly touched upon below.

Considering the surging dominance of applying technology to educational settings both as a teaching and learning tool, Zandi, Thang and Krish (2014) launched a blog as an interactive platform for a number of teachers to share their knowledge and experiences with their peers. Observing the performance of seven Iranian English language teachers for one semester, Zandi, Thang and Krish (2014) suggested that sharing knowledge and practices within a community of practice, facilitates peer collaboration and has a positive impact on teachers' learning. Their preliminary findings indicated that blogging provides an efficient opportunity for the involved community of teachers to share knowledge and benefit from technology as a learning and teaching tool.

In a recent study, Nazari and Xodabande (2020) offered a PD initiative exploring beliefs and attitudes of language teachers about mobile phone usage. Provided with a synchronous online venue, the participating teachers were encouraged to negotiate and exchange their mobile-related practices and ideas. Findings of their study revealed that the participating teachers developed a substantial understanding of the value and exploitability of mobile gadgets as well as theoretical and pedagogical issues pertaining to their usage. Overall, the teachers' beliefs towards the focal theme of the study and their cognitive structure were significantly influenced by their participation in the offered online PD activity.

In another research, as an alternative to transmission-based approach in teacher education, Mashhadi, Biria and Lotfi (2020) examined the practicality of action research in a collaborative setting. To foster teachers' PD in a community of practice, seven Iranian English teachers were added to a group on WhatsApp. The selected teachers had to take part in online classes which taught them to problematize a context-specific issue and provided them with related practical experiences by means of dialogic mediation while going through action research projects as the treatment of the study. The data showed that the teachers in a networked community of practice developed professionally through collaborative dialogue and were empowered to transform their pedagogical knowledge and practice.

Seeking the effect(s) of sharing knowledge with peers on professional development of English language teachers through an online medium, Alimirzaee and Ashraf (2016) carried out a study with a total of 50 Iranian teachers assigned to control and experimental groups. Both groups were given instructions addressing various teaching-related topics such as class management, teacher- versus student-centered

classrooms, error correction techniques, etc. However, only the experimental group had the opportunity to share their knowledge and practices, and discuss their ideas on a virtual environment. The results of the study indicated that professional development of the experimental group was successfully fostered through the employment of online knowledge sharing approach.

## 2.5 Summary

Review of the literature revealed that professional development of teachers as a crucial issue to empower teahers to deal with their professional-related challenges has long been addressed. In addition, to minimize the shortcomings of traditional means of professional development, incorporating online technologies to professional development initiatives has become a prevalent trend. The context-specific review of the literature showed that online professional development of tecahers has been attended from differen perspectives in the last decade. However, no study with a focus on promoting teachers' professional growth with regard to a particular practice-oriented challange of Iranian English languge teachers was found, which justifies the necessity and timeliness of conducting this research.

# Chapter 3

# METHODOLOGY

This chapter elaborates on the research methodology along with its associated topics such as the design of the study, data collection procedures and instruments as well as the process of data analysis.

## 3.1 Overall Research Design

To serve the purposes of this study in terms of the methodology of the research, mixed-methods and multiple-case study approaches were adopted.

### 3.1.1 Mixed-methods Research

To investigate the in-service teachers' perceptions about the professional development opportunity provided via a Web 2.0 tool, this study adopted a mixed-methods research approach. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) stated that mixed-methods research was introduced and implemented in 1950s when researchers developed an interest in utilizing more than one research method in a study. Mixed-methods is defined as a research through which data is collected and analyzed, findings are integrated, and by using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, inferences are drawn (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007).

A mixed-methods research integrates both approaches in a single study to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and to verify different sets of findings against each other (Dörnyei, 2007). Advocates of mixed-methods research, as Dörnyei (2007) asserted, believe that using multiple theories,

perspectives, and research methods is considered a significant strength in conducting educational research. They assume that compared to the studies that employ either quantitative or qualitative methods, studies produced by mixed-methods are in superiority. Moreover, it is argued that a feature of a true mixed-methods research is integrating findings of both quantitative and qualitative approaches at some stage of the study, be it throughout the procedure of collecting data, analyzing data, or the interpretation stage (Kroll & Neri, 2009).

Mixed-methods approach is further categorized by Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) into three different types and demonstrated in a form of continuum (see Figure 3.1). As shown in the figure, mixed-methods research contains some overlapping groups. Broadly speaking, the central area of the figure moving towards the poles in both directions is where mixed-methods approach falls. The 'pure' or strongest type of the mixed-method research is located at the center where both qualitative and quantitative approaches are applied equally.
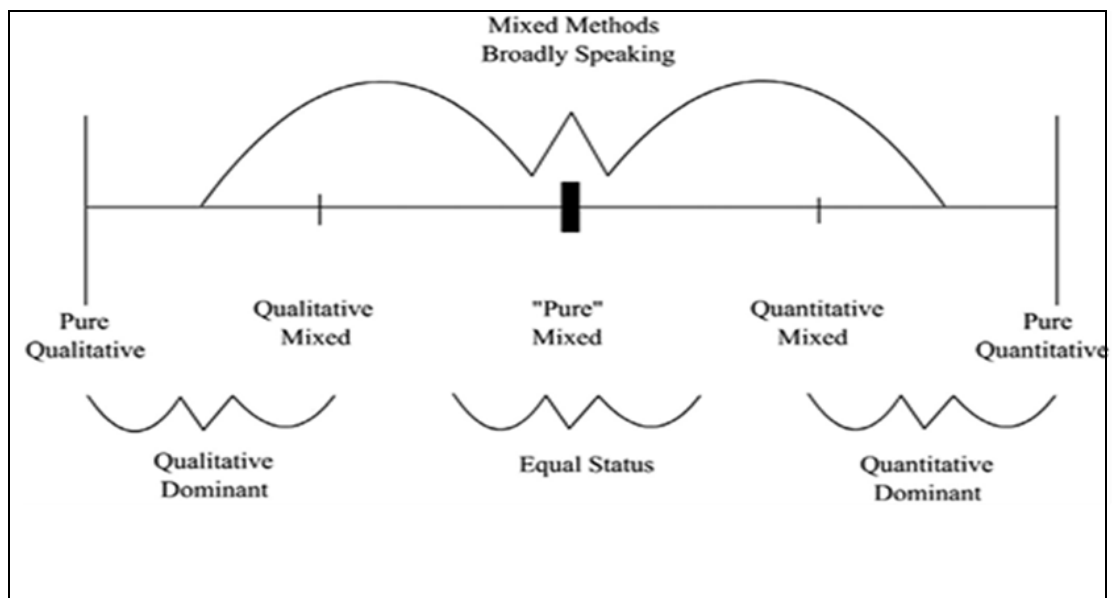


Figure 3.1: Subtypes of mixed methods research (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007)

Another type of this research method is known as 'qualitative dominant' which is placed to the left of the continuum. Qualitative dominant mixed-methods research is defined by Johnson et al. (2007) as follows:

> Qualitative dominant mixed methods research is the type of mixed research in which one relies on a qualitative, constructivist-poststructuralist-critical view of the research process, while concurrently recognizing that the addition of quantitative data and approaches are likely to benefit most research projects. (p. 124)

The third type which is 'quantitative dominant' is located opposite to the 'qualitative dominant' type on the right side of the continuum. Johnson et al. (2007) maintained that, "this area on the continuum would fit quantitative or mixed-methods researchers who believe it is important to include qualitative data and approaches into their otherwise quantitative research projects" (p. 124).

The design of the present study makes the use of mixed-methods data analysis obligatory. Since data is collected through questionnaires, interviews, and participants' self-reports through comments lefts on the blog, both qualitative and quantitative approaches are deployed. However, referring to the typology of Johnson et al. (2007), the method used is more qualitative dominant.

### 3.1.2 Multiple-case Study Approach

As a research method, case study is very useful because it allows for expansion and generalization of theories through integration of new empirical findings and insights and the theoretical knowledge already existing (Yin, 2009). Case study gains more importance when topics which have received little attention in previous studies are being investigated (Vissak, 2010). A case study approach can be employed when: a) the researcher is going to find answers to 'why' and 'how' questions; b) the behavior of the participants cannot be manipulated; c) relevant contextual conditions need to

be covered; d) the boundaries between the context and phenomenon are not clear enough (Yin, 2009).

Yin (2009) identified two types of case studies as single (holistic) and multiple-case studies. Simply put, if more than one case is involved in a study, a multiple-case design is deployed. In other words, a multiple case study involves more than one observation of the same phenomenon, where replication and extension are possible because each case can disclose complementary and additive aspects of the same phenomenon and confirm propositions and emerging constructs. This approach is used to examine and figure out the differences and similarities between the participating cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008), and the results are more generalizable and solid (Yin, 2009).

A critical issue in multiple-case studies is sampling. Sampling is theoretical rather than random. Certain cases are chosen for the sake of filling categories, replicating prior findings, or extending theories emerging. In addition, the researcher is able to make adjustments in the selection of cases throughout the study as s/he gains clearer insights about required categories and fitting cases by which replication and extension of results and theories are possible. Multiple-case studies can use both quantitative and qualitative data. Typically, the emphasis is on the latter one because interviews, observations, portfolios, stories, etc. can provide rich data for in-depth analysis and understanding of a certain phenomenon (Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Liao, 2004).

The present study aimed to explore the perceptions of the participating teachers related to their professional development with respect to the theory and principles of

learner autonomy. To achieve this purpose, a multiple-case study design was adopted because a comparative and intensive analysis of the four cases under study was required. Moreover, this design enabled the researcher to delineate the particularity and complexity of each participant. The following two sections describe the context of the study and the participants, respectively.

## 3.2 Context

The online professional development initiative of the present study was designed and specifically implemented for a number of participants who were teaching English at private language institutes in Iran. These teachers were located in two different cities of Iran, namely Tehran and Semnan. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, and also based on my own teaching experience, professional development of English teachers in general and professional development opportunities which involve the use of computers and the Internet in particular does not receive due attention in the country. This may be taken as an overgeneralization, but it applies to the majority of the teachers, including the participating teachers in this study.

The reason of looking for volunteers among English teachers in private institutes was that, compared to state school teachers, they had the privilege of confronting less restrictions as regards practicing principles of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness which were the main themes of the study. Moreover, the concept of learner autonomy was more compatible with the method of CLT which is more prevalent in language institutions compared to state schools. In contrast with state school teachers who are obliged to follow the policies of the Ministry of Education strictly, teachers working in English institutions have more freedom in making trivial

changes in their practices in the classroom. Therefore, private English institutes in Iran provided a suitable context for conducting the study.

## 3.3 Participants

The present study adopted 'convenience sampling' technique for selecting the potential participants. As the term 'sampling' suggests, it requires a small group of people to be selected out of a larger population for the conduct of a certain study. The sample is supposed to be representative of the larger group; and in order to avoid bias, random sampling, which gives every single member of the larger population a chance to be selected, is desirable. However, it should be noted that random sampling is less feasible in educational settings. Therefore, an accessible group referred to as 'convenience sample' can be used. Unfortunately, convenience sampling has limitations as regards generalization of the findings. Because the sample group might possess features and qualities (e.g., being more enthusiastic or more motivated), which are not representative of the population that is considered as the target. On the other hand, rich qualitative information can be provided by adopting convenience sampling (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993).

The present study was conducted within the context of in-service English teachers working in foreign language institutes in Iran to explore how they perceive their professional development through getting involved in a professional development opportunity provided via a Web 2.0 tool. Initially, sixteen in-service English teachers volunteered to participate in the study and completed the 'Needs Analysis Questionnaire' but only four of them continued their contribution to the study by following the materials provided on the blog, filling out the follow up questionnaires, and participating in the interviews. As far as their age range concerns, all of them

were between 30 and 35 years old. Three of the respondents held a master's degree in English language teaching and one of them was a graduate of bachelor's in Applied Physics. As regards the participants' teaching experience, all of them had teaching experience of between 6 and 10 years.

As the participants reported, teachers teaching any of the proficiency levels, i.e. beginner, pre-elementary, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, advanced, were available in the participating group. It is worth noting that all the participating teachers had attended teacher training courses (TTC) before initiating their career as an English teacher. None of the participants was taking part in a professional development program at the time the survey was being conducted and all expressed their enthusiasm and interest in participating in and contributing to the present study.

## 3.4 My Role as the Researcher

Besides conducting the research, the researcher in this study can be identified as the designer and administrator of the offered professional development initiative as well as the moderator. The online professional development medium was designed both content- and format-wise according to the preliminary collected data based on the lacks, needs and wants of the participants.

In order to implement the study, edublog platform was used as a Web 2.0 tool. At this stage the researcher as the administrator was responsible to create the blog, add the participating teachers to the list of users, and upload posts based on the objectives set. One of the most demanding and time-consuming responsibilities, both as the

researcher and administrator, was finding appropriate material which was not only relevant and beneficial but also interesting to the users.

In order to design and launch the blog and upload materials, the researcher had to update her technological knowledge as regards new applications, tools, and software. Since edublog imposed some restrictions in terms of the type and size of the videos allowed to be uploaded, the oversized videos were first uploaded to 'Vimeo' which is a website for sharing videos, similar to 'Youtube', and then embedded in the blog. Sometimes the researcher needed to edit and cut some videos or slides using particular tools to make them appropriate for being uploaded. The researcher was also in contact with the technical support team of the edublogs to solve frequently occurring problems. It should be noted that, since edublog did not allow the participants to download the videos and because of the low internet speed in Iran, they could not watch some videos online, the researcher had to email all the videos to the participants as well, to give them the opportunity to download them and watch at their convenience. Moreover, in order to encourage the users to answer the questions, reply others' comments, and participate in the discussions, notifications and reminders were frequently sent to them individually through their emails.

## 3.5 Data Collection

With regard to the ethical issues concerning the participants, the researcher followed the guidelines proposed by Fisher and Anushko (2008). Prior to the onset of the study, the participants filled out an informed consent form and were provided with the required information about the purpose of the study, its procedure, and duration. They were ensured that confidentiality would be strictly kept and that they had the right to withdraw from participation at any time. The participants were given the

contact information of the supervisor/researcher in case they had any queries about the research or other matters. As an incentive for participation, it was declared that they would be registered for an international English Language Teaching (ELT) webinar as soon as they felt ready after the completion of the study.

The study consisted of three phases. First, in order to recognize the needs, lacks, and challenges of the participating teachers as regards their professional development, and to probe their perceptions concerning the concepts of teacher and learner autonomy, three separate surveys entitled as 'Needs Analysis', 'Learner Autonomy' and 'Teaching Autonomy' were conducted through three different questionnaires. The first two questionnaires provided the researcher with profile and background information of the participants and included open-ended questions to serve the descriptive and qualitative approach of the data analysis.

Based on the findings of the data analysis of the first phase, a professional development initiative focusing on the concept of teacher and learner autonomy in theory and practice was designed by the researcher and implemented via edublog as a Web 2.0 tool. The participating teachers were given instructions through their emails on how to utilize the tool and were requested to actively get involved in the program. Throughout the implementation period which lasted for twelve months, the participants' needs and interests in the types of activities they would like to engage with was inquired informally and individually and the researcher made modifications accordingly.

Finally, at the end of the determined period, the perception of the participants towards their professional development with respect to the concept of teacher and

learner autonomy was explored through an interview. For the sake of triangulation and to get in-depth responses from the participants, the participating teachers were asked to leave comments after reading or watching the postings on the blog and share their personal experiences in terms of teacher and learner autonomy if they had used or practiced any of the theories, activities, recommendations, etc. posted to the blog.

### 3.5.1 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection procedures of the present study involved implementation of 'Needs Analysis', 'Learner Autonomy', and 'Teaching Autonomy' questionnaires before applying the online professional development initiative. Data was also collected during the implementation based on the comments participants left on the posts and their discussions.

After the completion of the determined period of the study, the participatin teachers were inquired about their perceptions towards their own professional development through an interview to find out if any changes occurred as the result of the professional development endeavor concerning the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness.

### 3.5.2 Data Collection Tools

In order to collect data and further describe the phenomenon of professional growth of the participating teachers, three data collection instruments, namely questionnaires, interviews, and blog entries were used.

### 3.5.2.1 Needs Analysis Questionnaire

Inspired by different needs analysis questionnaires implemented in different studies (e.g., Beaven et al., 2010; Kusumoto, 2008; Yutdhana, 2004), a questionnaire was devised. Since the questionnaire needed to address a particular group of teachers as

participants and to be administered in a certain context, it was specifically designed to serve the purposes of this study.

The questionnaire was piloted with 10 M.A. and PhD candidates as a judgment sample majoring in English language teaching at Eastern Mediterranean University, Northern Cyprus. The online link of the questionnaire *(https://docs.google.com/forms/d/10iQcJu5bnzaV4Eb8pTfUF636yEgmtK1Qkn5dQuJ QU/edit)* was sent to the participants through email and they were required to fill out the attached pilot test checklist and provide feedback. This questionnaire was also piloted by an expert who is a full professor in the department of English language teaching at Eastern Mediterranean University and an expert in the field of testing and research techniques in language teaching. Based on the feedback of the pilot group, a number of modifications, which mainly addressed rewordings to avoid potential ambiguity of the questions, were made.

The 'Needs Analysis' questionnaire was composed of two sections: 'A) Background Information' and 'B) Needs Analysis'. The first section consisted of thirteen questions including multiple-choice, open-ended, essay-type, and scale-type questions. It aimed to elicit information about participants' profile as regards their age, sex, educational background, teaching experience, etc., and probed the level of their familiarity with, and interest in different means of professional development as well as the amount of their access to the internet. The respondents were also asked to express the potential difficulties and challenges they encountered while using the Internet, especially for their own learning and professional development. The second section was composed of three questions in total. The first one was presented in the form of multiple-choice investigating the level of agreement/disagreement of the

respondents with a number of proposed topics and issues to learn or to know about through an online professional development initiative. Since the concern of the questionnaire was finding out the needs, lacks, and challenges of the participants, the other two questions were proposed as essay-type aiming at eliciting ideas, views, and recommendations of the participants as supplementary to the issues and topics offered by the researcher in the previous questions. The questionnaire was accessible through an online link and sent to the participants via email. The responses were received online as well.

### 3.5.2.2 Learner Autonomy Questionnaire

Since the main focuses of the study was 'learner autonomy and learner-centeredness' in terms of both theory and practice, eliciting the participating teachers' beliefs about the issue was essential. Therefore, a small scale survey on this issue was conducted through a questionnaire which was adopted from a study by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) upon the permission of the authors. Similar to the 'Needs Analysis' questionnaire, this questionnaire was also created by Google Docs application. Then, the online link of the questionnaire *(https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1yqPnVlEZ9doQ8lTYt4oXf99rgrOdfjlW5fgWAVCsj -g /edit)* was sent to the participants through email. They were required to fill out the form and submit it online.

The questionnaire was composed of four main sections. The first part with the heading 'Learner Autonomy' consisted of thirty-seven Likert-type questions evaluating the level of agreement/disagreement of the respondents with a variety of issues concerning learner autonomy. Section two of the questionnaire ('Desirability and Feasibility of Learner Autonomy') offered a number of items addressing the

areas in which learners can get involved in decision making and develop their abilities. Through a Likert-type question, the participants were asked to rate the degree of desirability and feasibility of each proposed item.

The third section which was headed as 'Your Learners and Your Teaching' consisted of two questions which can be regarded as both multiple-choice and open-ended. The questions provided the respondents with an agreement/disagreement scale (in the form of multiple-choice questions) and asked them to comment why they had chosen a certain alternative. The last section 'About Yourself' sought the profile and background of the participants and included questions about their gender, age, education, years of experience, etc.

It should be added that the original questionnaire adopted from Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) was composed of five sections. Section five was an inquiry about the willingness of the participants to attend follow-up workshops and discussions. Since the participants of the present study were asked a similar question in the 'Needs Analysis' questionnaire (Q: 8.b) which inquired about their willingness to participate in an online professional developmentinitiative, this section was removed to avoid repetition.

### 3.5.2.3 Teaching Autonomy Questionnaire

The other focal theme of the present study was 'teacher autonomy'. Perception of the participating teachers towards the concept of 'teacher autonomy' was elicited through implementing a questionnaire adopted from a study by Pearson and Moomaw (2006). Since the full questionnaire was not available in the article, the researcher communicated with one of the authors of the article, L. Carolyn Pearson,

through email to ask for the original copy of the questionnaire and permission to use it in this study, and permission was granted.

Similar to the previous questionnaires, 'Teaching Autonomy' questionnaire was created by Google Docs application. Then, the link of the questionnaire *(https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1qNS3jNSIUhjZpM1hl0v8Mldjy7JbLSgJWMK3YYv iewform)* was sent to the participants through email. They were asked to fill out the questionnaire and submit it online. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: A) Background Information and B) Teaching Autonomy Scale. Seeking the profile of the respondents, the first section included questions about gender, age, education, and teaching experience. The second section, which was an exact copy of the original questionnaire mentioned above, consisted of eighteen Likert-scale items which investigated perception of the participating teachers towards their own autonomy as English teachers. The respondents were required to rate the degree of their autonomy by choosing one of the four Likert-type points offered, ranging from 4 (definitely true) to 1 (definitely false). It should be noted that the scale does not contain a neutral response.

The questionnaire addressed teacher autonomy in two categories of curriculum autonomy and general autonomy. Curriculum autonomy encompassed questions pertaining to teaching guidelines, teaching contents and skills, student learning goals and objectives, and material selection. General autonomy questions probed participating teachers' perceptions towards their autonomy with regard to behavior standards, time scheduling, classroom space management, creative approach and alternative procedures, student learning activities, teaching methods and strategies as well as evaluation and assessment activities.

**3.5.2.4 Blog**

Edublog is a variety of blog which is created to serve educational purposes. Edublog offers learning support to both teachers and students through providing a platform for questioning, reflecting, and collaborating. Blogs, in general, are useful instruments for providing and sharing ideas, knowledge, and information, which can be used by individuals for self-directed learning and development (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006; Freeman & Brett, 2012).

As to the first step of creating the blog, its domain was defined as emutpd2015.edublogs.org by signing up through edublogs.org. Then, participants were added as users by the administrator and an automatic email containing their username and password to log into the blog was sent to them.

The most challenging part of running the edublog was determining its content. Based on the collected data through the questionnaires in the first phase of the study, a syllabus elaborating aim and objectives of the materials to be uploaded along with the related material to be offered was planned as follows:

**Aim:**

The goal of the study is to facilitate professional development of the teachers through an online medium (i.e., a blog) focusing on theories and practices of learner and teacher autonomy.

**Objectives (and the materials to be used to address these objectives):**

By the end of the professional development initiative, the participants will:

- develop an **awareness** of the concepts of learner and teacher autonomy.

    1. Professional development (Video)

2. Professional development (Video)

3. Learner autonomy (Slide show)

4. Teacher autonomy and learner autonomy (Article)

5. Teacher autonomy (Video)

6. What makes a good teacher? (Video)

7. Peer observation and teaching practices (Video)

- learn about **teaching and learning theories** related to the concept of learner autonomy.

    1. History of language teaching (Video)

    2. Teaching styles (Article)

    3. What teaching style is best for today's students? (Article)

    4. Reflective teaching (Video)

- be able to know their students better as regards **learner types and learning styles**.

    1. Learning strategies (Video)

    2. Individual learner differences (Video)

    3. Younger learners (Video)

    4. Mixed-ability teaching (Article)

- develop skills to **interact** with learners and **motivate** them to promote learner autonomy.

    1. 10 Commandments for motivating language learners (Article)

    2. Motivating language learners to succeed (Article)

- learn how to apply class **management strategies** which are based on learner and teacher autonomy principles.

    1. Classroom management strategies (Article)

2. Classroom management strategies for difficult students (Article)

- learn how to **integrate technology** into their teaching.

    1. Integrating technology into the classroom (Video)

    2. Blogs (Video)

    3. Online videos (Video)

- be able to train autonomous learners through **practicing particular tasks and activities** designed for this purpose.

    1. Best classroom techniques (Video)

    2. Best books for language learners (Video)

    3. Best ideas for teachers of English (Video)

    4. Posters (Video and article)

    5. Teaching speaking techniques (Video)

    6. Dictogloss dictation (Video)

    7. Using flashcards (Video)

    8. Contextualizing language (Video)

    9. Building language awareness (Video)

    10. Integrating skills (Video)

    11. Pair and group work (Video)

    12. Authentic materials (Video)

    13. Critical and creative thinking skills (Video)

    14. 7 reading strategies your ESL learners must know (Article)

    15. How to teach writing (Video)

    16. Teaching reading in an ESL classroom (Video)

    17. Strategies for teaching reading (Video)

- be able to utilize means of **evaluation and assessment** which are consistent with learner autonomy principles.

    1. Feedback

    2. Teaching speaking techniques- Feedback (Video)

    3. Teaching speaking techniques- Monitoring

    4. Alternative assessment (Video)

The syllabus was designed in a way to cover all areas of concern of the study. It initiated with materials about professional development, teacher and learner autonomy to raise awareness of the participants and clarify the main goal of the study. The participants, then, were provided with materials about theories of learning and teaching, learning and teaching styles, approaches of interacting with and motivating learners, class management strategies, and technology integration methods as they had asked for in the 'Needs Analysis' questionnaire. Meanwhile, relevant tasks and activities were recommended to enable them to put the above-mentioned theories and approaches into practice and empower them as autonomous teachers. The last issue addressed was learner autonomy-oriented evaluation and assessment which helped them to evaluate the performance of their learners to find out if their practices have been effective or not.

## 3.6 Data Analysis

With respect to the qualitative-dominant nature of the study, all the data collected through the questionnaires, interviews, and blog entries were transcribed and analyzed descriptively. To analyze the perceptions of the participating teachers towards the focal themes of the study before and after undertaking the PD initiative, adopting a qualitative approach was mandatory. The qualitative analysis of the data

seeks to interpret how the participating teachers construct and associate meaning to their experiences. In other words, according to Ebbs "the voice of the researched is valued and occupies a central position in the research process" (as cited in Azungah, 2018, p. 384).

The research also adopted an emic perspective which, according to Azungah (2018), associates with qualitative, subjective, and insider terms. In accordance with emic approach principles, this research studied a phenomenon within a specific context and focused on the understanding of this phenomenon, i.e., professional development, as the members of that particular context, i.e., the participating teachers perceive it. Hence, to minimize the potential of researcher bias, member checking technique was used. To verify the accuracy and credibility of the collected data, the participating teachers were asked to review the transcriptions and interpretations of the findings and check their trustworthiness (Birt et al., 2016).

### 3.6.1 Thematic Analysis

Designed for the analysis of non-numerical data, thematic analysis is employed for identifying patterns through assigning codes to themes with relevance to the focus of the research, research questions, context of the research, and the theoretical framework (Roberts, Dowell & Nie, 2019). Braun and Clarke (2006) contended that, as a qualitative research method, thematic analysis can be used across a variety of research questions and epistemologies. This method can be applied to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and finally report the emerged themes out of a data set. In order to facilitate the rigorous process of thematic analysis, a widely accepted step-by-step procedure is proposed which consists of six phases: i) getting

familiarized with data, ii) setting initial codes, iii) seeking themes, iv) reviewing themes, v) defining and labeling themes, and vi) reporting the findings.

*i) Getting Familiarized with Data*

It is crucial for the researcher(s) to get immersed in the data to capture the breadth and depth of the data content. To get sufficiently immersed in the data requires repeated reading of the available data seeking patterns and relevant meanings (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend that before initiating coding, researchers should read the whole data set at least one time, because then ideas would shape and potential patterns might be identified throughout the process of familiarization with data.

*ii) Setting Initial Codes*

Moving from unstructured data to the formation of ideas about the content of the data in more details, researchers get involved with coding process. Coding facilitates simplification of the data and allows the researcher to focus particular characteristics of the data. Throughout coding, important parts of a certain text are identified and labeled in order to index a certain theme or topic (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017).

*iii) Seeking Themes*

After initial coding and collating the codes, a list including different codes is developed. The key action to take in this phase is to sort and subsequently collate all the coded data into relevant themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By assembling fragments of ideas and/or components of experiences, themes are identified. Then they appear to be meaningful concepts that bind significant portions of the data together. To accomplish this phase, researchers may use tables, code manuals, or templates (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017).

*iv) Reviewing Themes*

The fourth phase initiates after themes have been devised and are ready to go through the refinement process. During this stage, the data extracts which have been coded for each theme should be closely examined to assure that a coherent pattern is formed, and the themes reflect the accurate meanings as evident in the set of preliminary data. Moreover, the researcher should expect the need for data set recoding as, in general, the process of coding is ongoing and organic (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

*v) Defining and Labeling Themes*

Braun and Clarke (2006) maintain that during this stage the researcher should "determine what aspect of the data each theme captures and identify what is of interest about them and why" … and "conduct and write a detailed analysis, identifying the story that each theme tells" (cited in Nowell et al., 2017, p. 10). Moreover, theme names should clearly express what their pertaining theme is about.

*vi) Reporting the Findings*

As the last phase of thematic analysis, the researcher needs to report the final analysis in a way that creates a comprehensive story about what each theme reveals about the research subject matter. The report based on the thematic analysis should be coherent, logical, concise and non-repetitive (Braun & Clarke, 2006). King (2004) recommended researchers to include participants' direct quotes in the final report as the essential components.

**3.6.1.1 Deductive Thematic Analysis**

As a thematic analysis approach, deductive analysis serves the purposes of this research allowing for systematic testing of an existing theory. As opposed to inductive thematic analysis which relies on the themes emerging from the data,

deductive analysis is informed by conceptual frameworks which have already been established. In such a case, the researcher can follow the template approach (Yukhymenko et al., 2014). Following the principles of deductive thematic analysis, this research adopted Evan's (2014) professional development model which is summarized below.

### 3.6.2 Evan's PD Model as a Framework

In order to analyze the elicited data and track the professional development of the participating teachers, the study inclined to PD models which give more agency to teachers in general. The rationale for such a decision rooted in the fact that the study did not directly observe the achievement(s) of the learners whose teachers undertook the PD initiative. Among all models and approaches which were proposed for the analysis and evaluation of teachers' professional growth, such as Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002), Desimone (2009), Evans (2014), Guskey (2002), and Opfer and Pedder (2011), this study used Evans' (2014) PD model as a framework. Evans (2014) claimed that the majority of PD models fail to illuminate the cognitive process through which teachers internalize professional development due to its complexity. Therefore, she proposed a model which attempted to shed light on the cognitive process undertaken by teachers and called the process 'micro-level development'. Evans (2014) defined micro-level development as:

> the enhancement of individuals' professionalism, resulting from their acquisition, through a consciously or unconsciously applied mental internalization process, of professional work-related knowledge and/or understanding and/or attitudes and/or skills and/or competences that, on the grounds of what is consciously or unconsciously considered to be its/their superiority, displace(s) and replace(s) previously-held professional work-related knowledge and/or understanding and/or attitudes and/or skills and/or competences. (p. 186)

It is noteworthy that the data collected from the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews conducted prior to the implementation of the PD initiative mainly helped the researcher to get to know the participants, and identify their specific needs, lacks, and challenges. Moreover, it was used as guidance in making decisions about the objectives and content of the blog. The first interview along with the responses to the questionnaires were fully transcribed and analyzed descriptively (reported earlier). However, it should be emphasized that, the answers to the final interviews and comments left on the blog determined which preliminary data would be further used. The researcher only applied the data and information which provided the opportunity of comparison and contrast to identify changes in the participants with regard to their potential professional growth.

In order to manage the data deductively, a pre-existing template consistent with Evans' (2014) PD model was utilized. For securing the dependability of the qualitative study, the same dataset was coded separately by the researcher and an ELT PhD graduate as the external rater. To check the consistency of coding, percent agreement measure was used to assess inter-rater agreement. Calculations yielded an agreement of 75%. Therefore, data was reviewed by the researcher and the external rater together to identify the cases and reasons of disagreement, to settle the ambiguities and finalize their decision. Moreover, code-recode approach was employed after a 2-month interval to assure the consistency of data analysis. Thus, the same set of data was given to the same rater to conduct coding, which resulted in a 90% consistency rate between the first and second coding by the same rater. Subsequently, the themes encoded with the same code number were compiled in a file and were labelled to express the theme they represented. Then, codes were

assigned to first- and second-order themes as illustrated in Table 3.1. To clarify the

coding approach used, some examples are provided in the same table. The accounts

are selected randomly but for each second-order theme code at least one instance is

provided.

Table 3.1: Themes' codes

| First-order theme codes | Second-order theme codes | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Code #1 Behavioural development | Code 1.1 | Processual change |
| | Code 1.2 | Procedural change |
| | Code 1.3 | Productive change |
| | Code 1.4 | Competential change |
| Code #2 Attitudinal development | Code 2.1 | Perceptual change |
| | Code 2.2 | (E)valuative change |
| | Code 2.3 | Motivational change |
| Code #3 Intellectual development | Code 3.1 | Epistemological change |
| | Code 3.2 | Rationalistic change |
| | Code 3.3 | Comprehensive change |
| | Code 3.4 | Analytical change |

**Examples**

- [**Code 2.2**][Involving parents and using technology are two good points of this activity.] [**Code 3.2**][This would work for the learners who are shy and more introvert and do not like to present in front of their classmates.] / Blog
- [**Code 1.1 & 1.2**][Therefore, first I grouped them into pairs so that they can help each other remember the sentences.][**Code 1.3**] [The next time they did it individually and it was lots of fun.] / Blog
- I imitated it and [**Code 1.3**] [got great reactions from my students.] [**Code 1.1 & 1.2**] [They were encouraged to exchange ideas with each other and correct their peers in their own groups. Then as a whole class they corrected the sentences with my guidance. ] [**Code 1.4**] [I'm going to do this again.] / Blog
- [**Code 3.3**] [After watching this video I understood I have to extend the activity types which need to be done at home to give each student to work at his/her own pace.]….[**Code 3.4**] [The only concern is that they can copy from different sources especially when they are given a writing task.]……/ Blog
- [**Code 2.2**][The video gave me the idea that it would have been much easier if the setting of the class was not that formal being equipped only with a board, some chairs which were too big and uncomfortable for them, and a video player]…./ Blog

- …..but following this text [**Code 3.1**] [I learned that I have to give reasons and clarify the purpose of my feedback for the learners. If they feel there is logic behind a feedback they will take it more seriously and learn better.] / Blog
- …… [**Code 1.3**] [When I entered the class the next session, I saw them sharing what they had done with each other and checking how many words they had in common.] / Blog
- It (the PD initiative) helped me to review the things I already knew……[**Code 2.3**] [It helped me to become more confident and autonomous.] / Interview 2
- Reading and watching on the blog was interesting and easy for me. I thought it would be the same for my students and [**Code 1.4**] [decided to create a blog…..I practiced….did the first steps to see how it look likes and works]…../ Interview 2
- ….to discuss what's going to be observed…..and [**Code 2.1**] [try to look at it (peer- observation) as something helpful and constructive, not for finding fault with or criticizing each other.] / Interview 2

## 3.7 Summary

In this chapter, the research design of the study was presented thoroughly with reference to the research questions. The chapter included detailed information of the setting, participants of the study, instruments used, the pilot study, data collection procedures, and data analysis process. The following chapter explains in-depth data analysis procedures and displays the results of the data analysis in relation to the research questions.

# Chapter 4

# DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the findings of this research through a comprehensive analysis of the data collected by means of the questionnaires, interviews, and blog entries recorded by the participating teachers.

## 4.1 Analysis of the Data

As pointed out in previous chapters, the present study primarily investigated the perceptions of teachers towards their professional development with respect to the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness, in theory and practice. It also probed the potential effect(s) of the perceived professional development of the participating teachers on their own autonomy. Teachers with the pseudonyms as Anahita, Sarah, Lina, and Mahtab were interviewed before the beginning of the study and were required to fill out three questionnaires entitled as 'Needs Analysis', 'Learner Autonomy', and 'Teaching Autonomy'. After twelve months of participation in the online initiative during which they were encouraged to leave their comments and reflections on the blog, they were immediately interviewed again to find out if/how their perceptions towards the concepts under question have altered and if they consider themselves as developed professionally. Therefore, each teacher has a data base of two interviews, three questionnaires, and the comments she left on the blog. Following, the data collected is described and analyzed case by case in answer to the proposed research questions.

## 4.2 Research Question (RQ) 1

**RQ 1# How did the participating teachers perceive the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness before undertaking the offered online PD initiative?**

### 4.2.1 Case 1: Anahita

Anahita studied English translation in a state university in Tehran, Iran, and is a Master's graduate of English Language Teaching. She had been teaching English to students of different levels and ages for nine years by the time she got engaged with this PD initiative. To start her career as an English teacher, she had taken a written exam and an oral interview. Then she attended an intensive teacher training course (TTC) for one month in which she learned basics of teaching practice and approaches and techniques of communicative language teaching. At the end of the training period, she did a twenty-minute demonstration, teaching one unit of the book taught at the institute. After successfully passing the TTC, she was eligible to start teaching. She started her work teaching kids and children under thirteen but now she is dealing with teens above fifteen years old and adults from elementry to upper intermediate levels.

Participating in the present study was Anahita's first systematic attempt for developing herself professionally, and her sporadic use of the Internet was confined to webpages which helped her in improving her general English. In addition, she refered to some websites for finding supplementary exercises and information to provide her students with. Moreover, she maintained that she would prefer computer-based means of professioal development over face-to-face ones such as workshops or seminars.

Being asked to define the concept of 'learner autonomy', Anahita contended that "learner autonomy is the ability of a learner to learn independently and knowing what to do to learn better". She further added that the main characteristic of an autonomous learner is that he or she knows the reason of learning English. However, she admitted that most of her students were not autonomous at all. Anahita believed that her learners have the ability to become autonomous but she stated "they don't know how to become autonomous just like me. We talked about my autonomy as a teacher. I think it's the same". One of the main reasons of not being autonomous learners, she believed, is the teacher-led school system in which the learners are brought up. She continued that the situation is the same to a large extent in private English institutes in Iran, especially regarding the expectations and mentality of the parents and students while the teachers are more flexible and prone to change.

Anahita had also filled out the 'Learner Autonomy' questionnaire. Regarding the relationship between age and development of learner autonomy, Anahita believed that language learners of all ages are able to become autonomous. However, she maintained that adult learners are easier to become autonomous because they attend the classes willingly and they have a more clear aim compared to many teenagers and kids who participate in English classes because their parents want them to, or they assume that it would positively affect their performance at school. Therefore, different types of motivations affect differently. In her view, the variety of motivations affects the expectations of the learners from both the teacher and themselves.

The next theme elaborated on was proficiency. Referring to the answers given to the questions in the questionnaire, Anahita thought that promoting learner autonomy

with beginners is harder than with proficient learners. She explained that more proficient learners can become more autonomous because they have more self-confidence. Moreover, she believed that there is a mutual relationship between effective  language learning and developing autonomy. As far as individual differences are concerned, Anahita found motivation and self-confidence as largely influencing development of learner autonomy. The next issue addressed was the impact of cultural background on development of learner autonomy, which, in Anahita's opinion, is not an effective factor and learners of all cultural backgrounds are capable of achieving autonomy regardless of being Western or non-Western.

As regards the next theme which is the role of the teacher, Anahita contended that learner autonomy does not mean learning without teacher and a supportive teacher can influentially contribute to the development of autonomy in learners. She further confessesed that: "it [developing learner autonomy] has never been a goal for me". She blamed the educational system, teacher trainers and administrators for not paying attention to this issue. In a comment Anahita left on the blog addressing learner autonomy she explicated:

> Unfortunately, learner autonomy is not the main goal of any English institute in our context. It is possible to develop learner autonomy in Iran provided that many factors are available. First of all, the authorities should consider it as a priority when they make decisions. We, as teachers, can not develop learner autonomy on our own because we have to follow the plans and syllabus given to us. We need to have a degree of freedom without being worried about the time a lesson is covered, or the topic discussed in the class. Developing learner autonomy also needs teaching and learning facilities like internet, books, etc. which are rarely available in our institutes.

Concerning the roles of learners, three sub-themes namely 'decision making', 'monitoring learning', and 'independence' were inquired about in the questionnaire and also discussed in the interview. Anahita agreed that autonomy implies learners'

ability to make choices about the ways they learn and activities they do. Moreover, being involved in making decisions about what to learn as a learner can promote autonomy. Although Anahita strongly agreed that the other factor contributing to the development of autonomy in terms of learners' role is learners' ability to monitor and evaluate their own learning, she admitted that it has never been deliberately addressed or noticed in her classes ever since she had been teaching English. As regards learners' independence, Anahita believed that providing learners with opportunities to complete tasks on their own and guiding them to figure out how to learn are central to developing autonomy; yet, she disagreed with the idea, as posed in a number of items of the questionnaire, that promoting autonomy requires learners to be completely independent of the teacher.

Based on Anahita's answers to the questionnaire, besides learners' own role, peers have a significant role in promoting each others' autonomy by learning from each other through doing tasks and activities, which necessitates working co-operatively in groups. Regarding the context of learning, Anahita agreed that independent study in self-access centers or doing relevant activities outside of the classroom can effectively develop autonomy. She added that although this is a critical factor in development of autonomy, it has some restrictions in the context she works at. For example, she pointed out "there is no self-access center or library in the institutes, younger students have some limitations especially for using the Internet, and their out of class task is confined to doing their workbook". According to the responses given to the items of the last theme, teacher- vs learner-centeredness, Anahita agreed that teacher-centered classrooms and traditional teacher-led approaches of teaching cannot promote learner autonomy as opposed to learner-centered classrooms.

Being asked about the desirability and feasibility of involving learners in making decisions about certain items questioned in section 2 of 'Learner Autonomy' questionnaire (questions 2 and 3), Anahita felt that it is slightly desirable to engage learners in decision making in terms of objectives of a course, materials used, learning assessment, teaching methods used, and classroom management. She further added that even she as a teacher is not involved in many of the items under question which are determined through a top-down process and make the involvement of learners either unfeasible or slightly feasible. However, Anahita considered 'engaging learners in making decisions' quite desirable as far as the types of tasks and activities they do and the topics discussed are concerned.

Regarding questions 4 and 5 (section 2) which probed the desirability and feasibility of particular abilities that learners need to have to develop autonomy, Anahita considered identifying their own needs, weaknesses and strengths, as well as monitoring their own progress, evaluating their learning, learning co-operatively and independently very desirable. On the other hand, she thought that identifying their own needs, monitoring their own progress and evaluating their learning are slightly feasible while identifying their own strengths and weaknesses, learning independently and co-operatively are quite feasible for learners. In general, she believed that her learners are not autonomous and depend too much on her. Anahita maintained that her efforts for encouraging independent learning has encountered resistance: "My learners have always been too much dependent on me. It is common in Iran, as far as I have experienced, to blame the teacher for the weaknesses of the students. If a teacher tries to promote autonomy, she will encounter resistance and complaints from the families". However, she admitted that promoting learner

autonomy has never been a major concern for her and she is not knowledgeable enough in this regard.

**4.2.2 Case 2: Sarah**

Sarah held a Master's degree in English Language Teaching and studied English Language Literature as her Bachelor's studies. She had been teaching English to students of different ages and levels for almost seven years  by the time she volunteered to participate in this study. To become an English teacher in a private institute, she had taken an oral interview and a written exam with a focus on language proficiency. After passing the exam successfully, she registered in a teacher training course and learned essentials of teaching based on communicative language teaching approaches. At the end of the one-month teacher training course, she had a teaching demostration as a result of which she became a certified English teacher. She teachers English to both adults and teenagers at intermediate and upper intermediate levels.

The first issue discussed was 'learner autonomy'. Sarah associated this concept with independence of the students from the teacher and their ability to find the best techniques of learning on their own. She thought that her students are not autonomous suggesting that first of all "the foundations of our education need to be revised to be able to move towards training autonomous students". Then, "teachers should be trained to learn how to develop autonomy". Moreover, Sarah pointed out that "all the people involved like decision-makers, parents, students and teachers, should become aware of the concept of learner autonomy".

Sarah had also filled out the 'Learner Autonomy' questionnaire. Although the answers given were generally consistent, she was asked to elaborate on them more in

the interview based on the defined themes by the researcher. Regarding the relationship between age, proficiency level and the ability to develop autonomy, Sarah agreed that students of all ages and levels of proficiency are able to become autonomous; however, this can be easier for the older and more proficient ones. She believed that younger learners are more teacher-centered because of the effect of the public schools in which they are educated. She continued that older students attend the classes in private centers with a defined goal and higher degree of motivation which make them more autonomous or prone to become autonomous. Similarly, those who are more proficient do not confine themselves to the books and lessons given in the class because they feel more confident in seeking other sources for their own learning. Therefore, it could be inferred from her explanations that she believed in the influence of individual differences such as motivation and self-confidence on the development of autonomy. Sarah was against the idea that learner autonomy is a concept associated with Western culture only and believed that regardless of the cultural background, autonomy can be developed while accepting that it is quite difficult for learners with Eastern cultural background.

The next theme questioned was the role of the teacher in developing autonomous learners. Sarah confirmed the significant role a teacher can play to train autonomous learners and strongly agreed that learner autonomy does not mean learning without a teacher. On the contrary, the teacher should be there to support and help students on the way to become autonomous. Yet, Sarah complained that in many cases a teacher's attempts fail because:

> students expect us (teachers) to be experts and the source of all knowledge, who are responsible to transfer them (the knowledge) to their brains. They are used to the traditional teacher-centered approaches as practiced at

schools…….my (teaching) style is student-centered-dominant but being teacher-centered in our context can't be avoided.

When it comes to the role of learners, three different issues as 'decision making', 'monitoring learning', and 'independence' can be discussed based on the items of the questionnaire. Although Sarah agreed that learners should be involved in making decisions as regards what to learn, what activities to do, and how to be assessed in terms of their learning and achievement, many of them are not feasible at all, "as we, as the teachers, do not have any control over them". In Sarah's opinion, monitoring one's own learning would contribute largely to the development of autonomy provided that you know how to approach it. She further added that, she had never made any attempts to teach her students how to monitor themselves to pinpoint their own weaknesses and strengths admitting her own lack of knowledge in this regard. Sarah strongly agreed that providing learners with opportunities to complete tasks alone and showing them how to learn and work alone contributes significantly to the development of autonomy; yet, this does not imply total independence from the teacher.

The next addressed theme was the role of peers on developing autonomy, which, in Sarah's opinion, would work effectively on the condition that it goes hand in hand with the teacher's supervision. Moreover, she pointed out that the majority of her students are more individualistic as a result of the trend common in state schools. Sarah explained that "for my beginner students, it usually takes a few sessions to get used to pair/group activities and understand how it (pair/group activity) works". Sarah also believed that the context of learning, available facilities and equipment, and out-of-class activities are important factors contributing to learner autonomy.

However, she reported that "out-of-class activities are not appreciated by learners. They are still too much dependent on me".

Overall, Sarah believed that involving learners in making decisions about objectives of the course and materials used is unfeasible while she considers engaging learners in selecting topics of discussion, teaching methods, classroom management strategies, and types of tasks and activities to do is slightly feasible in her classrooms. In her view, only asking students' opinions about tasks and activities to do and topics to discuss is quite desirable. On the other hand, she found the rest of the items mentioned above slightly desirable to be shared with students for making decisions.

### 4.2.3 Case 3: Lina

Lina did her Bachelor's studies in English literature in a state university in Mashhad and was a master's graduate in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). She started learning English when she was nine years old. She began teaching English from the age of seventeen. Lina had been an English teacher for almost nine years by the time of conducting the interview. She had also been the educational supervisor of a private language institute for four years. She taught students at intermediate and upper intermediate levels. She had participated in many workshops and had the experience of being a member of a webinar which could be considered as attempts to develop herself professionally. She was interested in participating in professional development activities to keep herself updated and refresh her knowledge and information. Similar to the other participants, Lina completed all the administered questionnaire, did two interviews, and left her

comments on the blog after reading each article or practicing any of the recommended teaching techniques in the videos posted to the blog.

Being asked to define the concept of 'learner autonomy', Lina stated that "an autonomous learner is a learner who takes responsibility for his or her own learning. If he takes responsibility, it means that he knows what he is doing, (it) means he has had an autonomous teacher or a teacher who has taught him to take responsibility". In addition, "an autonomous learner usually gives comments on what he or she wants to learn and what they want to discuss in class..... an autonomous student takes learning out of the class with him or her". Lina perceived autonomous learners as those who "watch, read, and listen. The book is not the beginning and the end for them. The book is one minor part of learning" and considerd only a few of her students as autonomous learners. Overall, Lina believed that:

> It's one hell of an arduous job to develop autonomy in our context. But it's definitely NOT an impossibility and I'm talking from experience. What we need most now is to familiarize 'teachers'- before everyone else!- with such concepts and help them put them in practice in their classes. Teachers need guidelines, a rough framework, and models to follow for they themselves may have never been autonomous while being a student. We need to discuss the implementation of such ideas in their classrooms and make sure to hold follow-up sessions with them to see if there are any problems.What I'm trying to say here is: us teachers come first here.

Lina had also filled out the 'Learner Autonomy' questionnaire. Her answers to the questionnaire items along with her complementary comments in the interview are reported below. Regarding the relationship between age and development of learner autonmy, Lina agreed that students of any age can be trained to become autonomous; however, she believed that promoting autonomy in adult learners is easier.

Being asked about the effect of culture on the development of autonomy and if Eastern learners can be autonomous, Lina stated that: "I'm not saying that they cannot be autonomous but they are not! Culture is a main factor there". She believed that "in Eastern culture, they want to be part of a group, have a leader, they want to follow somebody, but Western people are more individual and individualism is more highlighted. That's what functions as a block here.

Proficiency as a factor contributing to the development of autonomy was introduced as the next theme for discussion. Overall, Lina assumed that the more proficient students possess a greater degree of capability and willingness to develop autonomy as they can seek other sources of information more easily with the least amount of the teacher's interference. Yet, she believed that individual differences of the learners are significantly influential maintaining that those who are more motivated and confident are better in developing autonomy: "Those who have identified their needs and set goals before attending English courses are more motivated; therefore, seek their goal even out of the class and without the presence of the teacher".

Generally, Lina believed that learner autonomy does not mean learning without the teacher. On the contrary, it means being directed and supported by the teacher. She described her role as a teacher encouraging learner autonomy:

> I'm more of a student-centered approach follower. I see my students as cognitive apprentices who do need my help on the way, but they also need me to let go of them at times and help them learn how to learn on their own. There have been times, though, when I was the formal authority in my class, or even the expert since I needed to exercise more control over my students or even gain their trust.

Lina asserted that to develop autonomy in learners, learners' role in decision making, monitoring their own learning, and independence from the teacher cannot be ignored, and the teacher should trust the sense of recognition of the students and involve them in the process of decision making in cases such as choosing the type of a task or activity to do, the topic to write or speak about, etc. She emphasized that teachers should respect independence of the learners and develop a sense of mutual trust.

The next issue discussed was the role of peers in developing autonomy. Lina strongly agreed with the positive effect of pair and group work on learning and development of autonomy especially when it lessens the interference of the teacher. She gave an example of her own learning as a French language learner and said "I'm a French student right now and one thing I do intentionally is that I change my seat every other session. I want to try different partners and learn their personal strategies. I'm sure that students learn from each other".

As to the effect of out-of-class activities on promotion of learner autonomy, Lina pointed out that it largely depends on the type of the activity and type of the learner. In her view, sometimes the activity is so complicated which leads only to confusion or frustration and makes reference to the teacher inevitable. Lina remarked that learners need to be trained about how to use other sources of information. For example, if a student would like to watch a film, he or she should know how to use the film as a tool for language learning. She concluded that interference of the teacher cannot be removed before assuring that the student has learned how to be independent. In general, Lina believed that to train autonomous learners we need to train our teachers first. She claimed that she favors learner-centeredness though she is sometimes acting in a teacher-centered manner and sees no harm in it.

### 4.2.4 Case 4: Mahtab

Mahtab studied Physics at the university. Yet, she was eager in learning English, and she took English courses since her childhood. She was encouraged by one of her English teachers to pursue teaching English as her career. Mahtab was teaching English for six years to the students of elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate levels at the time of this inteview. Her students were mainly teenagers. To begin her career as an English teacher, she had been a teaching assistant in a speaking class for one year and learned many teaching techniques in practice. Mahtab also took a one-week intensive teacher training course (TTC). Though short, she evaluated the TTC as beneficial especially for her with a non-English educational background. She believed that she had learned some fundamental and crucial strategies of teaching English.

Learner autonomy was the first theme discussed in the interview with Mahtab. She described the concept of learner autonomy as learner independence and knowing how to learn. Mahtab stated that her students are not autonomous and attributed the lack of autonomy to the personality of the students, their cultural and social background as well as lack of knowledge of teachers regarding this issue. Generally, she assumed that any student at any age can be trained to become autonomous. Mahtab added that, since she had been teaching English, she had not done any deliberate or systematic effort to encourage her students to develop autonomy, though she mentioned that:

> After doing the questionnaire you gave, I noticed that I have always been doing some activities that encourage autonomy in my students but unconsciously. I think these were not enough because my students did not know why they were doing a special task. Why I have referred them to a dictionary or a classmate. Why I have asked them to read an external story book, etc.

Overall, Mahtab commented that "autonomy should be taught from the very beginning of learning. This issue should be taught to the parents as well. They can help a lot cooperating with teachers in developing autonomy". She explained that lack of autonomy in students in English classes is partly because of the "public schools where the students spend most of their time and are brought up with policies that are not contributing to learner autonomy".

As to the relationship between proficiency of the students and development of autonomy, Mahtab stated that:

> Proficient students might be faster in developing autonomy because besides themselves, the teacher can trust them more. Because of the level of their proficiency using other resources like the Internet, books, newspapers, films, etc. is easier and less challenging for them. Less proficient ones can still use these resources but should be guided more I think.

Regarding the role of the teacher in develpment of autonomy, Mahtab asserted teachers play the most important role as they have the responsibility of "teaching students how to learn on their own and become independent learners". She maintained that after the awareness raising and teaching the basics of learner autonomy development, the role peers and the individual learner can play become bolder.

In general, Mahtab accepted that she does not involve her students in the process of decision making regularly and has been ignorant of its importance in the development of autonomy. She also shared that:

> when dealing with beginners who are experiencing pair or group work for the first time, it is very awkward. They prefer individual work but after a while they get used to it. And nowadays, pair or group work is the most common thing happening in all English classes in the institutes.

She further complained that her students do not welcome out-of-class activities as "most of them are school and university students and have a lot of assignments to do at home, they consider the activities I assign to do at home as an extra load….I mean….they are not happy with that usually".

Based on the discussion with Mahtab, it can be inferred that she does not have a clear idea about the concepts of teacher and learner autonomy though she feels the need to develop them. Mahtab admitted that she does not run learner-centered classes but believed that the degree of her teacher-centeredness should be minimized.

## 4.3 Discussion of Findings # RQ 1

In order to achieve a better view of the perception of the participating teachers towards the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness before their engagement in the online professional development initiative, which was the concern of the first research question posed, a cross-case comparative analysis was implemented to find out if any prevalent trend emerges.

The core theme investigated in the first research question was the perception of the participating teachers towards the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness. Participants' remarks implied that all of them were practicing principles of learner autonomy more or less, but for three of them (Anahita, Sarah, and Mahtab) it had never been a matter of concern. Except Lina, the other three were not able to define 'learner autonomy' very clearly and associated it with learners' independence and knowing how to learn. In addition, they mentioned that the 'Learner Autonomy' questionnaire they filled, which was merely a data collection tool in this study, had given them some ideas and they found out that they had been

practicing some learner autonomy principles without being aware of their outcomes. In contrast, Lina was able to give a more comprehensive definition of learner autonomy and characteristics of an autonomous learner. All the four cases agreed upon the factors hindering development of autonomy in learners including the lack of both teachers' and learners' awareness and knowledge, cultural issues, lack of motivation in learners, and lack of facilities in institutes.

To elaborate on the issue, the themes emerged from the items of the 'Learner Autonomy' questionnaire were asked throughout the interview and compared with the responses given to the questionnaire items. Regarding the effect of the age of the learners on developing autonomy, they all agreed that learners of all ages can be trained to become autonomous, highlighting that it would be easier with adults due to the fact that most adults start learning English with a set of certain goals which motivates them. Moreover, according to the participants, considering the fact that out-of-class activities play a significant role in the development of autonomy, the more proficient learners would be more confident in promoting autonomy.

The other factor negatively affecting development of autonomy in the context of the study was culture. The respondents agreed that though learner autonomy was not merely suited to Western learners, they admitted that it was not prevalent in their context. Therefore, it necessitated collaboration and cooperation of different bodies of authorities, administrators, and even parents with teachers to begin the process of developing learner autonomy from state schools.

The participants disagreed with the idea that learner autonomy means learning without a teacher. They emphasized learners could become autonomous provided

that a knowledgeable teacher trained and guided them along the way. Besides teachers', learner's own role through getting involved in making decisions, monitoring their own learning, and learning how to work and learn on their own should be considered. Yet, there is a consensus among the participating teachers in that they rarely engage their students in decision making either because it is not desirable or not feasible. Moreover, they maintained that they were not sure how this type of involvement would contribute to the development of learner autonomy.

The other effective factor was the role of peers. All the interviewees reported that pair/group-work was an indispensable component of their class practices though they were not aware of its impact on the development of autonomy. From the point of view of the participants, learning context could have a positive effect on autonomy development; however, they believed their context did not have the potential of contributing to learner autonomy as learners did not have access to any self-access center, library, etc. and out-of-class activities were not generally appreciated. The last theme examined the effect of teacher- vs learner-centered classes on the promotion of autonomy. Although they all agreed that traditional teacher-led approaches of teaching and class management would have negative effects on the promotion of autonomy, they confessed that they usually practiced them. Following, the responses given to the first section of the questionnaire are tabulated (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Responses to learner autonomy questionnaire (Section 1)

| | | Item # | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| | | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| | | 20 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Proficiency | | 9 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | | 26 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | | 34 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Effective Learning | | 5 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| | | 12 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| | | 36 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Individual Differences | | 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| | | 33 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Culture | | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| | | 23 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Teacher's Role | | 8 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | | 18 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| | | 35 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Learners' Role | Decision Making | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| | | 7 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| | | 14 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| | | 22 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | | 27 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| | Monitoring Learning | 32 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| | | 37 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| | Independence | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| | | 29 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| | | 30 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| | | 24 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Peers' Role | | 16 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| | | 19 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| | | 25 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Learning Context | | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| | | 6 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| | | 21 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| | | 31 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Teacher- vs Learner-centeredness | | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| | | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| | | 28 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 |

The above findings would justify the necessity of implementation of a professional development initiative as a facilitating approach and a means of altering the participating teachers' perceptions towards the concepts of learner autonomy and

learner-centeredness through exercising learner-centered instructions and practices. Following, the effects of the offered online professional development initiative, as perceived by the participating teachers, are investigated and evaluated in response to the second research question proposed by the present study.

## 4.4 Research Question 2

**RQ 2# How did the participating teachers perceive their professional growth with respect to the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness after undertaking the offered online PD initiative?**

### 4.4.1 Case 1: Anahita

Being the most enthusiastic and active participant of the study, Anahita was ready for the final interview. To give a general frame to the semi-structured interview, Guskey's (2002) 'Five Levels of Professional Development Evaluation' was used. As to the first question, Anahita was asked how she liked the PD initiative in terms of the medium (i.e. blog), its content, etc. She positively replied that:

> .... for me it was a great new experience. I had not participated in any similar studies. I mean I had never been a member of a blog community or something. It was interesting. I wish I had this opportunity earlier or …. all the time…. I mean throughout my teaching experience.

She continued that, contrary to what she expected before participating in the study, it was not much time-consuming. She said that she spent maximum 20 minutes on each post and believed that it was really beneficial.

Then, Anahita was asked if the material offered made sense to her and her needs. Fortunately, she found them relevant and claimed that she had watched and read 95% of the postings on the blog. Though she admitted that the texts and articles were enlightening and rich in information, she preferred the videos as they were easier to

comprehend the gist of the matter and be remembered better. Moreover, it seemed that she liked the content saying that:

> They were all about the things that we see in the class every day. Some of them were the things I knew but when, for example, I see another teacher doing it…I say "well done"! You are on the right track. But I should say that most of them, most of the material was new and challenging. I really learned a lot.

The next question addressed the usefulness of the professional development initiative offered and Anahita described it in one short sentence: "I would say it was an eye opener". She added that this experience helped her to find out where she was standing as a teacher. She said she learned a lot besides reviewing, modifying and revising what she already knew. She claimed that it helped her to become more confident because "when you see some people are doing the same things as you do or the things you are doing have a theoretical basis and can lead to good results, then you feel more confident". Anahita was also asked to evaluate the performance of the supporter (administrator of the blog and researcher of the present study). Fortunately, the response was positively appreciative in terms of the selection of the medium and the content of the materials uploaded in addition to the materials sent to her individually upon her request.

To find out if the participant learned the intended knowledge and skills, each objective set (see Chapter 3) was addressed individually. Emphasizing that she did not have any clear image of the concepts of teacher and learner autonomy and even professional development, she stated:

> Now I know that some of the things I have always done in the classroom help to develop learner autonomy, I didn't know how they would help. I mean I didn't know the purpose. But now I do them consciously and I know what the purpose is. And also I know how to do them better.

It was interesting to hear that:

> In one of the questionnaires you had asked about the things which are possible to do or are desirable to do for learner autonomy. After reading those I learned the elements of learner autonomy which I didn't have any idea about. Then when I was reading the blog, I mean the posts or watching the videos, I tried to link them and see if it is possible to do them in my class.

Sharing that she was not much interested in learning and teaching theories she had studied during her academic education, Anahita liked the related material on the blog as they refreshed her mind; yet, she believed that "it is useless to know theories if you don't know how they work". Regarding the content addressing learner types and learning styles, she stated:

> I had read these before for passing a course at university but I had forgotten them all. You know, when I was at school, I was not teaching but now that I am a teacher, I can see the differences in my students. It was really thought-provoking.

Although Anahita considered these issues challenging, she believed that understanding these differences was necessary to help students learn accordingly and she was at least able to notice these differences even though she might have difficulty finding the best way to approach them.

In answer to the question of whether the content of the blog helped her to develop skills to interact with her students and motivate them to promote their autonomy, she stated:

> After watching all those videos I have increased my individual interactions. It is very useful because they [learners] feel that they are important to me and, for example, if I talk about the performance of a student individually she feels that I know what is going on and….and I care about her. I think this makes them feel more responsible and improve.

As to the next objective, i.e., class management strategies, Anahita claimed that class management had never been an issue for her; yet, she tried imitating the recommended strategies in videos and adopted a less traditional class management strategy. Anahita pointed out:

> I'm trying not manage the class like state schools I mean traditionally. I should also add that facilities which we don't have (laughter) are very important in how you manage the class. The environment of the class has an influence on the activities you do in the class and this affects class management.

Addressing the next objective, Anahita was asked if she learned how to integrate technology in her classes. The response was promising as she said:

> It's a big yes! Well, the videos I watched on the blog were a reminder that it is the time of technology and new generation of students are very good at it…I mean most of them….I can imagine myself when I started watching and reading on this blog it was much easier and….much…much more interesting. I think it's the same for my students. So I decided to make …… to create a blog. You know that because I asked you how to do it.

It is noteworthy that she had not started her blog at the time this interview was conducted because she was waiting for the new semester to begin and ask her students if they were willing to contribute, which was good news in terms of applying what was offered throughout this study: technology integration and involving learners in decision making.

In answer to the next question she was asked if she felt able to train autonomous learners, Anahita replied:

> I can't say a hundred percent yes but at least I know that I have to do it and I know how to do it to a large extent but I need to practice and work more on it… I have learned that I can make a change maybe not in all my students but I'm sure I can help them to become autonomous, I can show them the way towards autonomy. It is good for me too because it shifts some of the responsibilities from me as the teacher to the students themselves.

The last objective addressed was the ability to utilize means of evaluation and assessment consistent with learner autonomy principles. Anahita claimed that she had developed the ability to evaluate the performance of her students in skills such as speaking and writing. She learned a variety of strategies for giving feedback and adopted constructive means of eliciting peer feedback.

Although the present study did not intend to involve the institutes where the participating teachers worked at, following the model of Gusky (2002), Anahita was asked if she received any organizational support or witnessed any change as the result of participating in this study. Surprisingly, the reply was affirmative. Anahita explained that one of her colleagues (Sarah) and she, both of whom were participating in the present study, asked the manager of the institute they were working at to change the function of the institute's book store and instead of selling the books, lend them to those who were interested. She added that the manager liked the idea and  promised to do so. Moreover, she shared one of the videos which was about teachers' peer observation with the educational supervisor of the institue and hoped that the supervisor would change her observation approach and consider observations more as a constructive and helpful act rather than a tool for blaming teachers or finding fault with them.

The last section of the interview addressed the effect of the participant's learning on the performance and achievement of her learners. Anahita pointed out that as a result of what she had acquired through the professional development initiative, she started to raise awareness of her students by asking them to list the reasons of why they were attending an English class, their expectations from their teacher, and their needs as far as learning English was concerned. She described this as motivating for the

learners understanding what they were seeking. Moreover, by expanding out-of-class activities and encouraging out-of-class communication and interaction among peers, she tried to lessen the dependence of the learners on the teacher. Anahita reported that she increased the amount of peer feedback both in and out of the class attempting to help the learners trust their own and their peers' knowledge and learn how to monitor their own learning. As she mentioned several times in the comments left on blogs' postings, the ambiance of her classes changed positively as a result of practicing different types of activities such as role plays, discussions, games, and competitions recommended in the videos and texts.

**4.4.2 Case 2 : Sarah**

As the other active participant of the study, Sarah was invited for the final interview after leaving comments on most of the postings of the blog. Similar to the interview done with the other participant, Anahita, the interview with Sarah was conducted based on the professional development evaluation framework of Guskey (2002). As the first question, Sarah was asked to express her opinion about the medium of the online professional development initiative offered and its content, in general. She evaluated the use of the blog, as her first experience of an online professional development activity, very efficient and stated "the articles were short but full of information. I really enjoyed watching the videos. All of the videos had something new to introduce or to recommend". Moreover, Sarah described the content of the edublog as "up to date", "addressing her main concerns in teaching", "relevant" , "easy to follow", and "thought provoking". In addition, she mentioned "besides the new strategies and techniques I learned, there were others that I do in my classes similar to videos and these made me think that I'm not much behind the current practices".

The next part of the interview intended to find out if the goals and objectives set (see Chapter 3) were achieved by the end of the online professional development initiative. Though Sarah's answer to the previous question implied that the initiative functioned properly at the level of awareness raising, she was asked to evaluate the initiative as regards raising her awareness towards the notions of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness. Regarding the concept of 'learner autonomy', she mentioned that she had read about it before at university and had the theoretical image of the concept; however, she claimed that she learned how to practice the theoretical principles in reality by watching the videos on the blog. Sarah added "there were many videos for developing learner autonomy. In some of them I found out that I'm doing them but I didn't know the purpose. I think this is a real awareness raising".

The next objective addressed was theories of learning and teaching which, from her point of view, were beneficial and helpful when integrated with strategies and techniques to practice them in the classroom. Among all, Sarah referred to the theories about learner types and individual learners' differences which were interesting to her though she said "I had studied them in a second language acquisition course but I had almost forgotten them" and stated:

> In my context it is very difficult to attend every individual learner differently. I know that their particular needs should be taken into consideration but we have many limitations. I think…I still need to expand my knowledge about this issue and learn how to recognize students' learning styles. I believe that in the stage of practice I have lots of obstacles because…because of lack of time, lack of facilities and lack of experience…I mean I'm inexperienced in dealing with it. . I love the atmosphere of the classes shown in these videos. They seem to be ideal. Each student has his/her own space. Books, toys, computers, etc. are not extra facilities but the basic requirements.

Learning how to interact effectively with and motivate learners was the other objective addressed. Sarah asserted that the content of the blog postings largely affected the way she interacted with her students and the techniques she employed for the sake of motivating them. As an example, she reported "in the past, I used to collect their writings and correct at home and …aaa...and give them back the next session but now after giving feedback on the paper, I explain the main points to them individually". Despite her attempts in creating a more dynamic and friendly class environment, Sarah felt frustrated:

> I would love to create a friendly environment so that learners enjoy and learn at the same time. But I'm afraid it is not possible most of the times. I'm not sure if it is a cultural issue that gives the class a formal shape and atmosphere. Sometimes lack of homogeneity in the class regarding age of the students causes the formality of the class.

Although Sarah claimed she never had major class management issues, she acknowledged that watching the videos and reading the articles on the blog helped her to adopt new techniques and strategies to create a better class environment through individual interactions, engaging students in making decisions whenever/if possible, and giving a degree of freedom to the students to create a distinction between being in an English class in a private institute and classes they attend in their public schools. Sarah expressed:

> I loved this quote: "Teachers must win their students' hearts while getting inside their students' heads". I think this is the key of success in class management. If the class environment is friendly and the students consider you as a friend not a teacher only and if this is done along with a good and effective teaching when the students observe their own learning, then class management won't be a challenge. But as a matter of experience, I like to add that sometimes the good relationship between the teacher and students becomes problematic especially in classes of teenagers. Some of them pass the red lines and the matter of respect is overlooked. The 'positive psychology' was interesting. It will be very useful and reminds me of some cases where I could have used this technique If I knew about it.

In answer to the question whether the content of the blog helped her to develop skills of integrating technology into her teaching, Sarah affirmed the usefulness of the offered materials; however, she doubted their practicality in her own teaching context as the required technological equipment was not not available in the classrooms. Believing that she had started developing awareness about the necessity of technology integration, Sarah started to utilize technology in out-of-class activities due to in-class limitations. She reported one instance of use of technology:

> Inspired by the first activity shown in the video (song), I gave all of them a short animation and asked them to watch it at home, write down all the words which are new to them and add a simple definition or picture to define the word on a card. This gives them the opportunity to learn at their own pace as recommended by the video. Then in the class, we watched the video together and discussed the new words. I categorized the cards into verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs and attached to the board and explained their function. It was an enjoyable experience and I'm quite sure that they learned a lot.

Although Sarah admitted that these types of activities might not represent the commonly accepted implications of the use of technology, that is, the use of the Internet, smart phones and their applications, she maintained that she couldn't go further at the moment because of the age of her students. She shared another experience from her adult's class:

> They [Sarah's students] have made a group in Telegram -- a mobile phone app… They chat in English, post proverbs, idioms, etc. and discuss. I'm a member as well. I learn many new things and sometimes they ask me to help or…or interfere if there is an issue they can't agree.

Sarah stated that she got many ideas from the videos she had watched and besides being curious to find out how tools such as Moodle or Blog work, she was planning to implement one of them in near future for both adults and young learners provided that she could assure appropriate use of the Internet at home for the latter group.

Being asked if she was enabled to train autonomous learners after getting engaged in the online professional initiative, Sarah pointed out that she needed more knowledge and experience both in terms of theory and practice, though she admitted that she learned the fundamental issues:

> First of all my own attitude towards some issues has changed. Before watching the videos and seeing the performance of different teachers, I used to be more or less teacher oriented myself. I felt guilty if I didn't cover every single part of the book or left an exercise undone. When I saw how those teachers involve students in activities and as said in one of the videos "take the back seat", I felt relieved and now I try to encourage them to do more without me. I tell them that no matter if you do a true/false question wrong, it is important that you comprehend the whole idea or can discuss the idea.

The last objective to discuss was the ability to utilize the techniques of evaluation and assessment consistent with principles of learner autonomy. Emphasizing that she, as the teacher, had a passive role in preparing final or mid-term exam questions, Sarah asserted that she had raised the level of her students' sensitivity in terms of their own and their peers' language production through the encouragement of monitoring their own learning and feedback giving to their peers. Sarah claimed that she watched the videos about feedback giving and assessment on the blog:

> I think performance assessment is the most common assessment in our context besides peer feedback. The second one creates some challenges for me because they do not trust each other. Therefore, I should be there for confirmation or correction. After watching this video, I'm going to increase the practice of peer feedback and encourage them to use resources of information other than me. I have an upper-intermediate class. I will ask them to make portfolios voluntarily. Let's see if anyone does….!!!

The present study did not intend to affect the organization (i.e. the institutes) in which the participating teachers worked; however, to follow Guskey's (2002) evaluation framework, Sarah was asked if her participation had any impact on her teaching context including her colleagues. She believed that the impact was not

significant and shared the same experience as Anahita because both of them worked at the same institute. Anahita and Sarah had shared some videos, among which teachers' peer feedback can be mentioned, with the supervisor of the institute. Referring to post 38 on the blog entitled: 'Peer observation in teaching', Sarah said "we rarely, or I should say, we don't have peer observation. Only the supervisors observe us. I loved their approach, very friendly and constructive instead of being competitive as it is common here". In her comment on the post, Sarah explained that:

> The attitude towards peer observation in my context is not very positive. We are observed by the educational supervisor from time to time but not on a regular basis. We never know what aspect of our teaching is going to be observed. There is no pre-observation discussion similar to what we see in the video and which I assume is very important. I wish our supervisor had watched this video!!!

As to the last section of the interview, Sarah was asked about the effect of her participation in the online professional development initiative and her learning on the performance and achievement of her students. Sarah highlighted that from the beginning of her participation in the study, she was dealing with different groups of students as a result of which she couldn't comment on their overall achievement. Nevertheless, Sarah believed her students "began to learn that they can play a significant role contributing to their own learning". They attempted to 'define their expectations and objectives', 'try to pinpoint their weaknesses and strengths', 'be active learners both in and out of class', 'create a better relationship with and learn from their peers', and 'be more reflective rather than passively taking things for granted'. She added that, by encouraging more out-of-class activities and tasks, her students began to develop more independence knowing that there were many other sources of information to resort to other than the teacher. Sarah reported that the environment of her classes had changed thank to practicing more learner-oriented

techniques. She described one of the activities she had assigned her students to do as inspired by one of the videos:

> I liked the idea of making an album shown in the video. I tried something similar. I gave them different topics like advertising for hotels, tours and trips, etc. They were free to use any source of information like books, other available brochures, catalogs, online websites, etc. to get authentic information and find photos, charts, etc. But they had to write the explanations and descriptions in their own words. They were also free to choose to do it in groups of two or individually. The result was fantastic. I took some photos of the catalogs they had prepared but could not upload them because of the speed of the Internet.

### 4.4.3 Case 3: Lina

In order to elicit Lina's perception towards the main themes of the study, i.e. learner autonomy and learner-centeredness, she was interviewed, similar to the other participants, at the end of her engagement in the online professional development initiative. It should be noted that her interview was conducted through Skype, the report of which is followed along with the comments she left on the blog.

As to the first question, according to Guskey's (2002) professional development evaluation model, Lina was asked how/if she liked the content offered and its medium of delivery. She pointed out that she had taken part in many workshops and webinars but her experience with the blog was different. Lina continued "I like sharing ideas and experiences" and "enjoyed reading and watching every single post. Some of them were mind refreshing and some were totally new ideas giving me insights. Overall, there was nothing I feel sorry for spending my time".

Noticing the number of comments she left on the blog, which was less than the other participants, Lina was asked for an explanation and said:

> Though I'm not a voracious reader, I read almost all the texts and articles, and watched all the videos. Sometimes I watched a video at a time, then got

busy doing something else and forgot to leave a comment; but I made notes for myself while watching to be used later.

Overall, Lina contended that she preferred the posted materials which were focusing on practical teaching techniques. She added:

> In addition to the things I had never heard about or practiced in the class, most of the videos gave me the opportunity to compare and contrast what they are doing; I mean other teachers worldwide with what I do. Finding the similarities was encouraging in that I'm doing the right thing and the differences made me and helped me think of new ways and solutions to overcome the existing limitations and deficiencies in my context.

Then she was asked if she learned about teaching and learning theories related to the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness. Lina replied "I had studied them while I was a student but I found them easier to understand when depicted by videos". Lina asserted that:

> I believe for every teacher to be able to make pragmatic decisions considering the judicious application of the materials and even the approaches and activities in her class it's quite necessary to have one such knowledge (of teaching and learning theories). This could also function as a basis for us to make further progress along the way.

The next objective addressed was the ability to identify types of learning and learning styles, and needs of the students accordingly. From Lina's point of view:

> It's easy to speak about it in theory. Things are different in reality. It is an essential and fundamental skill. A teacher should be able to know her students' learning styles and different types of learners but 'what to do next', and 'how' are the questions to be answered.

Further, she stated that attending every individual student's needs has always been a concern for her and by the knowledge she obtained through her own readings and the materials offered on the blog, she claimed she developed the ability to identify learner types and learning styles. Lina felt more responsible in this regard as the

supervisor of an institute and the knowledge and information resource of her teachers.

Enabling the participating teachers to develop skills to effectively interact with learners and motivate them to promote autonomy was another objective of the present study. Reviewing Lina's comments on the blog revealed that she had already had a command in interacting with and motivating her students. However, as to the effect of the blog content on the development of these skills, Lina mentioned in the interview that:

> I had already been practicing some of them and by reading the material on the blog, I made sure that I have been on the right path. I found that the way I interact with my students goes hand in hand with motivating them.

Regarding the integration of technology which was a skill intended to be developed by the materials offered, Lina expressed "I'm kind of addicted to technology myself and as I see, it is a fad nowadays". She had been employing technology for the learning of her students in different forms such as communicating with them through email or asking them to search the Internet for information. Lina also added that she was interested in creating a blog, similar to the one she was engaged with in this study, for she believed that she could monitor and control both the content and participation of her students.

As the last objective, Lina was asked to evaluate her ability in utilizing means of evaluation and assessment contributing to learner autonomy. She considered herself an expert in assessment and evaluation, and thought that she needed more advanced materials; meanwhile, she reported that "as a supervisor I used the materials you

posted in one of the meetings I had with some colleagues….the less experienced ones".

In answer to the question if she was better able to train autonomous learners after her engagement in the online professional development initiative, Lina answered positively and stated that she had become more 'reflective' and encouraged her students to practice 'reflectivity' more:

> I try to reflect on what I'm doing right when I'm doing it. I also ask for my students' feedback and try to make sure we have an understanding about what's going on in the class, the expectation, and aims and objectives. It's that sometimes I feel like teaching is a job which never stops when the class is over; you keep thinking about what happened in the class, how things could've gone better in certain situations, why things went that special way, and all sorts of things.

Lina continued that throughout her participation in the offered online initiative, she got the chance to compile all her knowledge and information, add to them, and put them into practice. In her point of view, as she felt more autonomous, development of autonomous learners was the guaranteed by-product. She also praised the blog and its content:

> There should be some source for the teacher to go to and make sure she is on the right track. The source, I believe, could be the formal/ informal meetings where everyone gathers to discuss their reflections, or some blog like this one in which teachers could share their concerns and help each other out.

**4.4.4 Case 4: Mahtab**

Following the trend of data collection of the study, like the other three participants, Mahtab was interviewed after being engaged in the online professional development initiative for twelve months. As the first question she was asked to report her evaluation of the online initiative offered in terms of the medium of delivery and its content. Emphasizing she never had any similar experiences in order to develop

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herself professionally, Mahtab described her participation as "a great opportunity" since she "never had the chance to study these issues formally or academically". She continued that because many of the introduced and recommended strategies, techniques, theories, and ideas were new to her, as someone who had a non-English educational background, they affected her class performance in many ways. Mahtab expressed "it's like a new beginning for me because I had never looked at my job as a teacher from this perspective".

Though the materials covering theoretical principles of teaching and learning were interesting and useful, Mahtab liked the materials concentrating on the practical aspects of teaching and learning more. As the result of participation in the offered online professional initiative, she asserted that "I know that I should be an autonomous teacher although it is difficult in my context and I should help my students to become autonomous. These were not my concern before". Based on Mahtab's comments, it can be inferred that the first objective of the online professional development initiative, i.e. creating awareness, has been successfully achieved.

The next objective set to be approached was learning about teaching and learning theories consistent with principles of learner autonomy and learner-centered instructional principles. Mahtab believed that "knowing about these theories should be a must for every teacher. I am somehow a proficient English speaker but I think I'm not knowledgeable enough in this regard, I mean teaching English and its principles". She admitted that after getting familiar with some theories and principles she perceived English language teaching as a field similar to other scientific ones.

Then Mahtab was asked if she had developed the ability to identify learner types and learning style of her students. Highlighting that these issues were touched upon very briefly in the TTC she had attended years ago, Mahtab maintained:

> I have started trying to know my students better as individuals. I had observed that what I do and say in the class doesn't work for everyone equally; now I know the reason. But it's still very difficult for me to analyze my students' types and needs individually….. but at least I will make attempts and try to find some ways know them better.

Developing the ability to interact with learners and motivate them more efficiently was the next objective discussed. Mahtab was impressed by the ways different teachers interact with their students as depicted in the videos on the blog; however, she found it difficult to adopt the same interaction approaches because of some hindering factors such as the age of her students and the teacher-student interaction stereotype common in her context, which imposed a rather formal class environment. Mahtab shared that motivating students had always been a challenge for her especially when dealing with young learners who generally attend English courses because their parents force them to do so. Noting that she knew the reason of lack of motivation in her students, she appreciated the recommendations offered on the blog asserting that "all of them can be practiced very easily if the teacher has enough knowledge".

Although Mahtab claimed that she rarely had class management problems, she was asked if the offered material on the blog had any effect on her class management strategies. The reply was positive; however, she maintained the classes she was running in her context were totally different from the ones she had seen on the videos from many perspectives. Yet, inspired by the recommended approaches, Mahtab said, she increased the amount of peers and teacher-student interaction that

contributed to a less formal and friendlier class environment in which willingness for learning and sense of belonging were encouraged.

The next objective addressed was the ability of integration of technology into teaching. Mahtab said she had been using technology for teaching and learning purposes but rarely. She attributed this deficiency to the lack of facilities in institutes. Moreover, the age of her students who were usually between ten and sixteen years old was another factor contributing to the scant use of technology especially for out-of-class activities. Becoming aware of the significant role technology played in learning of the students, as the result of watching videos on the blog, Mahtab thought of an innovative approach which worked despite the limitations in her teaching context: "I asked their parents to cooperate in this task and supervise their children whenever they are doing an assignment which needs use of the Internet and monitor the time…I mean the amount of the time they spend on the net". She stated that due to the facts that "nowadays most parents are educated and internet access is available in every house, they (parents) liked the idea and appreciated me because of informing them". Then she explained how she employed technology as an out-of-class learning tool:

> I found some websites on the Internet which provide lessons, exercises and games for learning English with songs and colorful pictures which I think is a great supplement for the book. They can have fun and learn at the same time. There are online quizzes too, which they can test themselves.

As to the last intended objective of the online professional development initiative, Mahtab was asked if the blog's materials enabled her to utilize different means of evaluation and assessment consistent with principles of learner autonomy. Her reply was negative as she believed "this issue is beyond my capabilities". Mahtab

continued "I have never been involved in preparing exam questions. I have always administered prepared tests. I think assessment and evaluation is very complicated".

Then she was reminded (by the interviewer) of some posts which addressed in-class feedback-giving basically focusing on the process rather than the final production of the learners. Mahtab mentioned, inspired by the evaluation-related videos, she largely increased the amount of peer- and self-evaluation and gave an example:

> After they do a writing task I ask them to go over it again and check if they find any mistakes and if there is a point they are not sure about….then I ask them to share it with a partner and see if…if she can correct it before me…before I interfere.

Mahtab, then, was questioned if her participation in the online professional development initiative and what she learned had any influence on the administrators of the institute she worked at or on her colleagues, and if she received any support from them. The reply was disappointingly negative:

> Sometimes I shared the techniques I learned with the colleagues…. some of them said that they knew them or were not interested in practicing them. You know what….because I come from a non-English major, the other teachers underestimate me and my knowledge and they react negatively sometimes if I try to share something I know with them.

The last part of the interview probed the effects of the online professional development initiative on Mahtab's students and their learning. She said "I benefited more than my students and I suppose if I had the chance to continue with the same students, then they could benefit as much as I did". Mahtab, mentioned some of the main abilities her students had developed as a result of the new knowledge and information she acquired and applied in her classes: "they know why they are in an English class and how they can benefit from the course they are taking", "they have learned how to interact better with their peers and share their knowledge", "they have

learned that learning English does not finish in the class by closing the books and do out of class activities like the online activities", and "they have learned to monitor their own learning. I can observe their attempts and struggle when they are trying to correct their own mistake by asking their peers or referring to the book or dictionary".

## 4.5 Discussion of Findings # RQ 2

Having described the data collected through the questionnaires and interviews in detail, through adding the accounts recorded on the blog by the participating teachers, the next step is to find out if and how the offered online PD initiative worked to foster professional development of the participants, with respect to the focal themes of the study, i.e., learner autonomy and learner-centeredness. To this end, as proposed by Evan (2014), individual micro-level episodes were taken into consideration and scrutinized to develop an understanding of the bigger picture of the professional development journey of each single participant as a self-directed adult learner. In the following part the findings related to each participant are reported one by one under the sub-titles of a) behavioral development, b) attitudinal development, c) intellectual development, and d) succession of change dimensions. It should be noted that every quoted account is labeled as an example followed by a number and the initial of the participant's name. The source of the excerpt is also mentioned. The figures show the successions of change and each dimension is ascribed to its pertaining developmental component.

### 4.5.1 Case 1# Anahita

#### 4.5.1.1 Behavioral Development

As the result of Anahita being exposed to a variety of worked-out examples of class performance as well as expert recommendations delivered through short articles (all

of which cohered around the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness), several instances were observed on Anahita's behavioral development, as far as processual, procedural, productive, and competential dimensions are concerned. For example, after watching a video depicting a class discussion task, Anahita commented that:

> Actually, class discussion is what I always do. But after watching this video I changed my approach. I chose the topic of technology and made two sub-topics: a) Computers and the Internet, b) Cell phones and mobile applications. I made two groups of 5 and asked every individual of each group to write about the assigned topic covering the functionality, advantages, disadvantages, etc. The next session, they discussed what they had written in their own group and noted the similar and different points they had touched in their writings. Each group appointed two people as the spokesmen. They came to the board and wrote the points they had come up with. I asked them to sit in front of the class and run the discussion. They proposed their ideas and the rest of the class expressed their agreement, disagreement, or extra information. It was really a hot discussion. I sat among the students and joined the discussion. I know many teachers do this activity but the feedback I got was valuable. They had searched the Internet, had found and printed charts and graphs showing the statistics about what they were discussing. They defended themselves providing evidence. Though I had not asked them to do so! (Example 1.A/ Blog)

In this example, evidence of processual, procedural, productive, and competential changes in facilitating a class discussion activity can be traced back to a worked-out example in a video. Anahita clearly stated that class discussion is a common activity in her classes, but according to the new technique introduced to her, she changed her approach or the *process*. To simulate the activity, she chose steps or *procedures* different from what she used to do; that is a) choosing the topic, b) grouping the students, c) assigning a writing task to cover different aspects of the topic as an out-of-class activity, d) in-class and within-group discussion, e) appointing spokesmen, and finally, f) running the class discussion by the spokesmen. As regards the *productive* change, Anahita mentioned that she got significant positive feedback from her students. Despite not being asked, the students had prepared printed charts

and graphs as well as relevant statistics to deliver to the class, which can be interpreted as a sign of increased learners' motivation. It is also assumed that she went through *competential* changes as she felt she could develop her skills in running a learner-oriented class discussion.

In another case, after watching a video showing different techniques of doing pair/group work in the class, Anahita's comment revealed a degree of change in her performance in terms of the output produced by replicating a suggested activity. She stated that:

> The second example was really brilliant! I imitated it and got great reactions from my students. They were encouraged to exchange ideas with each other and correct their peers in their own groups. Then, as a whole class they corrected the sentences with my guidance. I'm going to do this again because I checked the same points we had practiced the next session and found that most of them did not make any mistakes, so I concluded that they had learned. (Example 2.A/ Blog)

The positive feedback she received from her students and their outstanding learning outcome can be taken as an achievement which is a *productive* change for the participating teacher. Although Anahita admitted in the first interview that she was not good at using technology, being influenced by the blog as the PD environment as well as a number of blog postings encouraging the use of technology, she appears to have made *competential* change as far as the use of technology is concerned. She said that:

> The videos I watched on the blog were a reminder that it is the time of technology and the new generation of students is very good at it. For me, watching and reading on this blog was easy and interesting. I think it's the same for my students. So I decided to create a blog for one of my classes. (Example 3.A/ Interview 2)

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She also reported that she began assigning her students to use email more frequently for the exchange of writing assignments for peer correction and feedback. By doing so, in addition to *competential* change, it is assumed that she went through *processual* and *procedural* changes as regards out-of-class pair work and peer feedback-giving.

**4.5.1.2 Attitudinal Development**

As a consequence of the exposure to the content of the blog, Anahita reported some attitudinal developments in the comments left on the blog and through her responses to the second interview questions. Comparing this data with her answers to the first interview questions revealed some changes in motivational, evaluative, and perceptual dimensions. Before getting engaged in the PD initiative, Anahita stated that she was not well familiar with the concept of professional development and her random efforts such as "participating in the institute's teachers meetings or compulsory workshops" were merely because of the financial incentives given.

She mentioned the lack of awareness and the lack of training provided by the institutes as well as the lack of time and authentic resources as some of the factors demotivating teachers to develop professionally. However, later she came to believe that PD should be an area of concern for every individual teacher to change teaching from a habit to a passionate pursuit. After participating in the PD initiative she said: "I have started to know myself better as a teacher….seeing other teachers, the way they work, and how motivated they are, motivated me as a teacher". Regarding the change in the way she conceived PD compared to her previous mind-set, she pointed out: " ...contrary to what I assumed at the beginning, doing this activity was not time consuming, and I can tell you that it was not a waste of time…but really beneficial".

Believing in the importance of PD, Anahita further explained "…now I know that I should not wait for the institute administrators to do something for me. I have to be more independent and keep myself updated through different sources". These can be interpreted as *perceptual* and *motivational* changes contributing to attitudinal development of the participating teacher.

Two of the outstanding instances of evaluative change (Examples 4.A & 5.A), in the process of PD for Anahita, were teacher-student interaction, and techniques of informal assessment and feedback-giving. Admitting that her classes were mainly teacher-oriented, Anahita was impressed by the atmosphere of the classes, in terms of teacher-student interactions, depicted in the videos. Consequently, through self-reflection, she (re)evaluated what was going on in other contexts compared to her classes and concluded that she had to change the way she interacted with her students. She stated that:

> I have increased my individual interactions [with the students]. It is very useful because they feel that they are important to me and, for example, if I speak about the performance of a student individually, she/he feels that I know what's going on and I care about her/him. I think this makes them feel more responsible and motivated to improve. (Example 4.A/ Interview 2)

In the first interview, Anahita articulated that assessment was a challenge for her because she, as a teacher, was never involved in preparing tests (which are the main types of formal assessments done in every institute). She also underestimated the significance of informal in-class assessment and feedback-giving because their results were not reflected in the final scores of the students. However, in the second interview, Anahita said:

> After comparing, reflecting on, and evaluating what experts recommended and teachers did in other contexts, I learned how to assess the performance of my students particularly in speaking and writing skills….I decided to teach

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and ask my students to monitor themselves and give feedback to their peers. I believe this is something they have to do to improve and are able to do if I give them some guidelines. (Example 5.A/Interview 2)

Not having a clear perception towards the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness along with the belief that developing them is not "the main goal of any English institute" in her context, Anahita asserted that "we as teachers cannot develop learner autonomy on our own because we have to follow the lesson plans and syllabi given to us. In addition, our students are brought up in a school system which is teacher-centered and does not train autonomous learners". However, during her involvement with the offered PD initiative and by getting more familiar with the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness, she said: "I want to adopt and practice some more techniques [of learner-centeredness and developing learner autonomy] because I can see good results in my students" (Example 6.A/ Interview 2). In another comment, she clarified that:

> In the previous interview, I told you that I didn't have a clear perception of learner autonomy. Although now I know that some of the practices I have always done in the class help to develop learner autonomy, I didn't know the purpose or how they would contribute. Now I practice them consciously. I know what the purpose is, and also I know how to do them better. (Example 6-1.A/ Interview 2)

These comments can be interpreted as signs of a shift in Anahita's perception towards the concepts of learner-centeredness and learner autonomy, and her increased motivation as she found practicing the principles and techniques of learner-centeredness quite feasible.

### 4.5.1.3 Intellectual Development

Intellectual development encompasses epistemological, rationalistic, comprehensive, and analytical change dimensions, some of which were traceable in the accounts

already given. Yet, a number of extracts from the collected data illustrate various dimensions of intellectual development in the participating teacher. In response to a question about learner autonomy in the second interview, Anahita expressed that:

> Now, I know what learner autonomy is and how to develop it to a large extent but I need more practice. I mentioned before that this blog was an eye opener. I learned that I can make a change perhaps not in all of my students; but I'm sure I can help them to become autonomous. It's good for me too because it shifts some of the responsibilities from me, as the teacher, to the students themselves. (Example 7.A/ Interview 2)

She further maintained that "…there are many things I still need to learn, but what I learned through this activity was really effective because they covered my everyday needs. I already knew some of the materials theoretically, but I learned how to put them into practice more systematically" (Example 8.A/Interview 2). The above quotations can be interpreted as an *epistemological* change in terms of knowledge enhancement as regards the concepts of learner-centeredness and learner autonomy, in theory and practice, which were the core themes of the blog content. Another outstanding instance of *epistemological* change was modification of the knowledge structure of the participating teacher concerning different learning and teaching styles which she described as "challenging issues that are usually ignored because of the teachers' lack of awareness". After being provided with a couple of short articles about learner differences, it seems that she went through both *epistemological* and *comprehensive* changes. She stated:

> I vaguely remember I had read about these issues at university. At that time, I was not teaching, so I couldn't practice them. But now that I am a teacher, I can see the different learning styles in my students…. It is necessary to understand these differences and help your students accordingly. Now I am able to notice and distinguish their differences better and pick a better teaching style. (Example 9.A/ Interview 2)

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In the examples below, instances of rationalistic and analytical changes can be traced. After watching a video about peer feedback-giving and practicing some of the recommended techniques, Anahita commented that she didn't like oral in-class peer feedback much, especially in speaking tasks, with the *rationale* that it causes a degree of embarrassment for the speaker who has been corrected for a mistake/error or received feedback. It is noteworthy that as Anahita did not perceive this as a *better way*, but quite unsatisfactory, it cannot be interpreted as a *rationalistic* change at this stage. However, following her own rationale, she thought of a *better way* of implementing peer feedback-giving. She commented that "peer feedback works better in group or pair works where I cannot monitor the performance of all of them at the same time" (Example 10.A/ Blog). Anahita further articulated that "it would be a good idea to ask the students to record their performance, exchange it with a peer and get feedback" (Example 10-1.A/ Interview 2). Then she went through the analysis of the novel implementation of certain techniques and developed an ameliorative *rationalistic* change which encouraged her to use them persistently.

**4.5.1.4 Succession of Change Dimensions**

In Evans' (2014) professional development model, change in one dimension under a certain developmental component is followed or preceded by change dimension(s) in other developmental components. In other words, there are interactions between and among change dimensions in single micro-level episodes, which shape the PD of an individual. Therefore, tracing and linking successions of discrete change dimensions is important in understanding an individual's PD and learning journey. The examples below demonstrate such successions that could be identified as regards Anahita's professional development:

> The videos I watched on the blog were a reminder that it is the time of technology and the new generation of students is very good at it. For me,

watching and reading on this blog was easy and interesting. I think it's the same for my students. So I decided to create a blog for one of my classes. (Example 3.A/ Interview 2)

Influenced by the blog content, Anahita's perception towards the use of technology changed (*perceptual* change/ attitudinal development) as she acknowledged the need and significance of technology integration into in- and out-of-class activities contributing to learner autonomy. She developed motivation (*motivational* change/ attitudinal development) to practice and competency (*competential* change/ behavioral development) in the use of technology. On the other hand, the more she developed the competency in the use of technology, the more motivated she became (as she reported) to use it (motivational change/ attitudinal development).
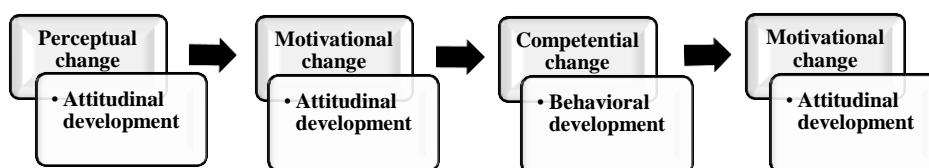


Figure 4.1: Successions of change (Example 3.A/ Interview 2)

In another excerpt from the second interview, Anahita articulated that:

> After comparing, reflecting on, and evaluating what experts recommended and teachers did in other contexts, I learned how to assess the performance of my students particularly in speaking and writing skills….I decided to teach and ask my students to monitor themselves and give feedback to their peers. I believe this is something they have to do to improve and are able to do if I give them some guidelines. (Example 5.A/ Interview 2)

In example 5.A, reflection and evaluation (evaluative change/ attitudinal development) were at play which led to a change in her perception (perceptual change/ attitudinal development) towards informal assessment, and consequently

boosted her competency (competential change/ behavioral change) in assessment and feedback-giving especially in speaking and writing skills.
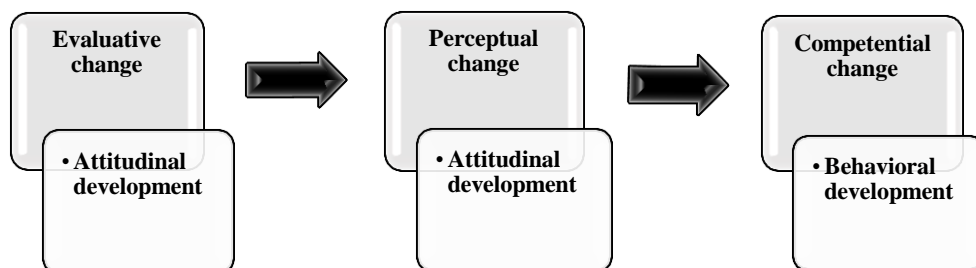


Figure 4.2: Successions of change (Example 5.A/ Interview 2)

Referring to examples 6 and 6-1, by raising awareness and gaining a new understanding (comprehensive change/ intellectual development), Anahita seems to have developed a new perception (perceptual change/ attitudinal development) towards the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness. Then, as she reported, she started (re)evaluating the techniques shown in the videos, compared to her own class practices (*evaluative* change/ attitudinal development).

> In the previous interview, I told you that I didn't have a clear perception of learner autonomy. Although now I know that some of the practices I have always done in the class help to develop learner autonomy, I didn't know the purpose or how they would contribute. Now I practice them consciously. I know what the purpose is, and also I know how to do them better. (Example 6-1/ Interview 2)

> I want to adopt and practice some more techniques [of learner-centeredness and developing learner autonomy] because I can see good results in my students (Example 6/ Interview 2).

It is noteworthy that after implementation of new procedures and observing the positive outcomes in learners (productive change/ behavioral development), Anahita

was motivated (motivational change/ attitudinal development) to adopt more new techniques to put into practice in the class.
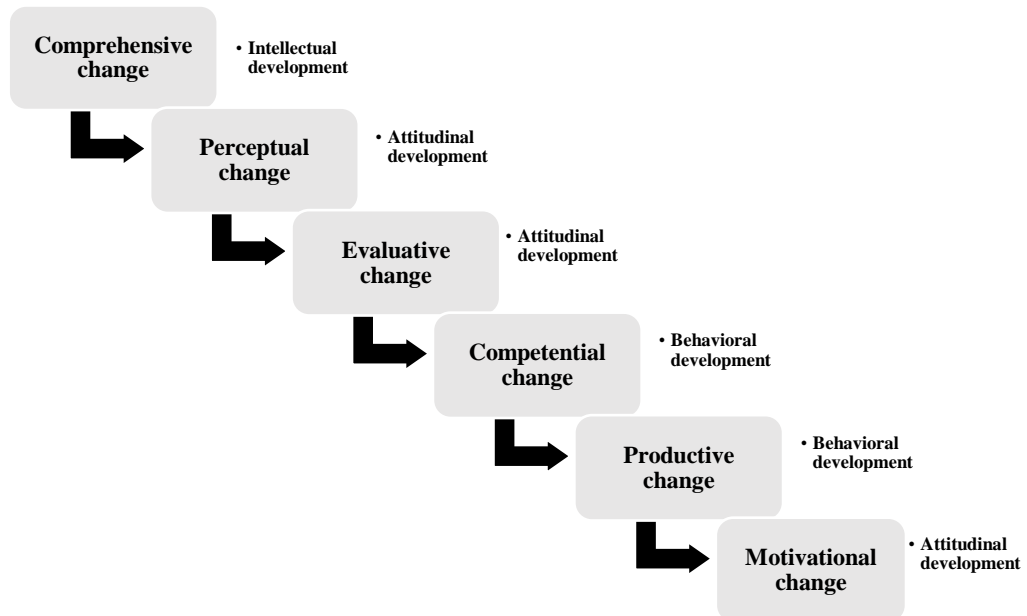


Figure 4.3: Successions of change (Examples 6.A & 6-1.A/ Interview 2)

As another succession of change, example 9.A shows that epistemological and comprehensive changes (intellectual development), in terms of acquiring knowledge about and developing understanding of the different learning styles in practice, resulted in the competency (behavioral development) of the participating teacher in pinpointing differences of her students' learning styles.

> I vaguely remember I had read about these issues at university. At that time, I was not teaching, so I couldn't practice them. But now that I am a teacher, I can see the different learning styles in my students…. It is necessary to understand these differences and help your students accordingly. Now I am able to notice and distinguish their differences better and pick a better teaching style. (Example 9.A/ Interview 2)
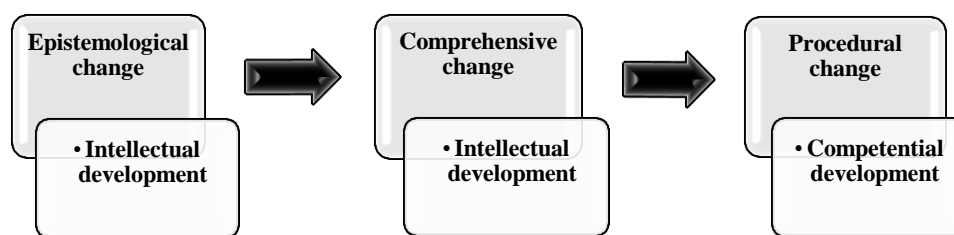
Figure 4.4: Successions of Change (Example 9.A/ Interview 2)

## 4.5.2 Case 2# Sarah

### 4.5.2.1 Behavioral Development

Addressing one of the aspects of learner-centeredness and learner autonomy, a video entitled 'Individual Learner Differences' (Post 36) was uploaded. The video suggested that learner differences such as cognitive ability, proficiency level, learning motivation, personality traits, and learning preferences, weaknesses and strengths are not easy to be identified. Therefore, teachers should be able to facilitate learning for a wide variety of learners by taking care of the language input and content, the medium of delivery, tasks assigned to the learners both in and out of class, appropriate use of group work, etc. Accordingly, some techniques and tasks such as use of songs, setting up self-access areas, and alike were recommended and illustrated in a real context. Having watched this video, Sarah commented that:

> Caring about individual differences requires many factors which are not normally available in our private institutes (at least the ones I work at!). One of the institutes I work at holds its classes in a primary school. The only facilities are a CD player which teachers borrow from each other and one classroom equipped with a TV which is used in turn. Imagine how I can address individual differences of my students in such a class. I love the atmosphere of the classes shown in these videos. They seem to be ideal. Each student has his/her own space. Books, toys, computers, etc. are not extra facilities but the basic requirements. Inspired by the first activity shown in the video (Song), I gave all of them a short animation story in copied CDs and asked them to watch it at home, write down all the words which are new to them and add a simple definition or picture to define the word on a card. This gives them the opportunity to learn at their own pace as recommended by the video. Then in the class, we watched the video together and discussed the new words. I categorized the cards into verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs

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and attached to the board and explained their function. It was an enjoyable experience and I'm quite sure that they learned a lot. (Example 1.S/ Blog)

Considering her in-class limitations in terms of facilities and the overall ambiance as described above, Sarah decided to turn the in-class-activity to an out-of-class task which implies *processual* change. As she reported, in that specific institution, the only multimedia available was a CD player which did not help Sarah to accomplish the task she intended to do in the classroom; therefore, she had to wait till it was her turn to hold her lesson in the class equipped with TV. Thus, she adopted new task instructions that indicate a *procedural* change consistent with an out-of-class task: a) watch the animation individually, b) write down the new words, and c) make a definition card. Then she changed the individual activity to a class activity and a creative approach to teach her students words' parts of speech which was not mentioned in the video on the blog. This gives the impression that Sarah went through *competential* change as she was able to develop a degree of competence in manipulating tasks to serve her teaching purposes and contextual specifications. Finally, she expressed that as the result of this experience, students enjoyed and learned at the same time which is a sign of *productive* change.

It is interesting to notice that the disappointment expressed at the beginning of the above-mentioned example, which had caused Sarah to ignore the issues touched upon in the video, and justify her neglect by finding fault with the lack of facilities, was replaced with creativity and led into an achievement.

In answer to a question in the second interview addressing the effect of blog content about approaches of interaction with learners on the way she interacts with her students, Sarah stated that:

> I do more individual communications with them especially when I give feedback. For example in the past, I used to collect their writings and correct at home and give them back the next session, but now after giving feedback on the paper, I explain the main points to them individually. I think the environment of the class is much friendlier now. (Example 2.S/ Interview 2)

This account reveals some behavioral development as the teacher made changes in the process and procedure of giving feedback to her students' writing assignments (*processual* and *procedural* changes). She also maintained that as a result of expansion of individual interaction with every single student created a friendlier class environment which can be an indicator of *productive* change.

**4.5.2.2 Attitudinal Development**

Comparing two different accounts adopted from the first and second interviews respectively reveals Sarah's attitudinal development concerning the concepts of teacher vs learner autonomy. In the first interview, before undertaking the OPD initiative, Sarah assumed that teacher-centerdness as the prevalent approach in her teaching context cannot be avoided because students are basically trained to be teacher-oriented in state schools which are the main educational settings affecting students' learning habits and styles.

> Students expect us [teachers] to be experts and the source of all knowledge, who are responsible to transfer them [the knowledge] to their brains. They are used to the traditional teacher-centered approaches as practiced at schools… being teacher-centered in our context can't be avoided. (Example 3.S/ Interview 1)

However, in the second interview she clearly admitted that her attitude about some issues, one of which was teacher-centeredness, had changed. The example below

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demonstrates that Sarah went through *perceptual* change and instead of feeling guilty for leaving some excercises undone in the class, she perceived the strategy of 'taking the back seat' as a better way and began to leave some responsibilities to the learners.

> First of all my own attitude towards some issues has changed. You know….before watching the videos and seeing the performance of different teachers, I used to be more or less teacher-oriented myself. I felt guilty if I didn't cover every single part of the book or left an exercise undone. When I saw how those teachers involve students in activities and as said in one of the videos 'take the back seat' I felt relieved and now I try to encourage them to do more without me. I tell them that no matter if you do a true/false question wrong, it is important that you comprehend the whole idea or can discuss the topic. (Example 4.S/ Interview 2)

Before undertaking the OPD initiative, Sarah asserted that "throughout the years I have been teaching, I have not taken my professional development seriously! The reason is that I didn't have enough motivation or I didn't feel the need". She also admitted that professional development is a major concern neither for her nor for most of her colleagues. Being asked about the reason of the lack of enthusiasm in teachers to develop professionally, she mentioned teachers' financial concerns, which means teaching more and more classes leads to the lack of free time to be allocated to developing one professionally. In addition, she believed that most teachers in her context are unaware of the importance of professional development in their career and, as she said, they expect that any steps they take towards this goal should be rewarded financially.

However, being asked to express her overall perception towards the effect(s) of the OPD initiative on her professional development in the second interview, Sarah stated that:

> The thing I liked about it was that everything was purposeful and to the point. I learned a lot and enjoyed the time spent on my learning. Especially when I could practice the same things in my class and see the change or its effect. I have made many changes in my approach, in my strategies. Although this might not affect my position I mean I might not get promotion or being paid more, I have a better feeling towards myself…believe me….Everything had become a routine for me but now I have many new ideas…I got them from the blog and I think besides that I can use my creativity. I can say that I'm more motivated now and don't mind participating in such studies or other professional development programs. (Example 5.S/ Interview 2)
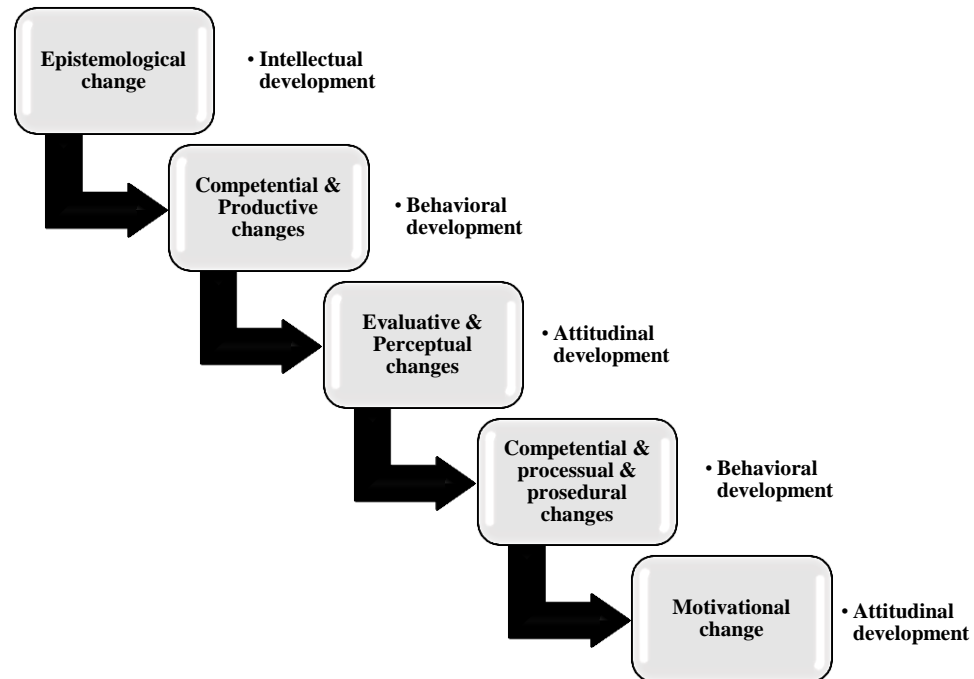
In example 5.S, it is evident that Sarah made a *perceptual* change as she affirmed that she has a better feeling towards herself as a teacher (i.e., self-perception). Moreover, she re-evaluated her values as regards the necessity of financial incentives for PD initiative undertaken by teachers and came to believe that the positive self-perception can be a better reward than job promotion or pay rise. Finally, she expressed her willingness to make furtheur attempts to develop professionally. Referring to her first interview in which she expressed her lack of motivation to take part in PD programs, particularly because of the lack of time and lack of financial compensation, it can be inferred that she underwent through both *evaluative* and *motivational* changes.

**4.5.2.3 Intellectual Development**

With regard to the use of writing assignments as out-of-class tasks recommended in several videos and their benefits analyzed from different perspectives, Sarah faced a challenge:

> Asking students to do writing assignments [at home] is very common to save the class time. Once I asked them to summarize a film that they had recently watched and I noticed that a few of them had copied from the text attached as the CD cover. It was written professionally and not matching their level of proficiency. After noticing this, I asked them to rewrite the text in their own words and bring it the next session. Then I decided to allocate some more time to writing in the class and chose writing topics as homework with more caution. I gave them topics which are more personal like descriptive essays which require them to describe their school, family, a trip they have taken, etc. (Example 6.S/ Blog)

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To tackle the problem she encountered concerning a task which is believed to be significantly contributing to learner autonomy, she analyzed the pros and cons of such out-of-class activities, which prompted a degree of *analytical* change. Consequently, she came up with the conclusion that out-of-class wiring assignments cannot always serve the purpose they are intended to and have their own potential drawbacks. Based on this reasoning implying *rationalistic* change, she altered her approach while practicing this teaching technique.

In the first interview, Sarah mentioned that she is mainly teacher-oriented because she felt obliged to cover all the materials in the books in the class; otherwise, she would feel guilty. However, in the second interview (Example 7.S/ Interview 2), she maintained that, as the result of the new knowledge she acquired from the blog content, she understood that what she used to do was totally against the principles of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness. Thus, it can be inferred that Sarah experienced *comprehensive* changes.

> After watching some of the videos on the blog I felt…I felt guilty for not being creative….I'm not creative and usually try to blame administrators for the lack of facilities. And you know…another reason as I said is that I like to do everything in the class which now I found it is somehow against learner autonomy. (Example 7.S/ Interview 2)

The following two accounts clearly illustrate some *epistemological* changes as regards Sarah's pedagogical knowledge contributing to the development of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness. She explicitly asserted that she acquired some knowledge about different means of informal assessment such as peer feed-back giving as well as approaches to help students monitor their own learning.

> I have learned different ways of giving feedback, using peer feedback strategies, and I have started using them but you know….for assessment…I

mean the one which is recorded as the result of my students performance, I as a teacher don't have…aaa… I'm not involved. (Example 8.S/ Interview 2)

But I learned how to help my students monitor their learning. You know…I have raised their level of sensitivity…I mean they are not indifferent to their own or classmates' mistakes. (Example 9.S/ Interview 2)

### 4.5.2.4 Succession of Change Dimensions

Analyzing and linking micro-level episodes of change yielded several interactions between change dimensions in Sarah's professional development experience which is elaborated below.

Asking students to do writing assignments [at home] is very common to save the class time. Once I asked them to summarize a film that they had recently watched and I noticed that a few of them had copied from the text attached as the CD cover. It was written professionally and not matching their level of proficiency. After noticing this, I asked them to rewrite the text in their own words and bring it the next session. Then I decided to allocate some more time to writing in the class and chose writing topics as homework with more caution. I gave them topics which are more personal like descriptive essays which require them to describe their school, family, a trip they have taken, etc. (Example 6.S/ Blog)

To find a better way to implement writing tasks, Sarah went through *analytical* and *rationalistic* changes (intellectual development) which consequently, led to *processual* and *procedural* changes (behavioral development). As she identified drawbacks having adverse impacts on the basic purpose of writing tasks, which is developing students' writing skill, Sarah decided to consider writing topics that minimize the use of external resources such as the Internet. In other words, according to her newly developed rationale, depending on the situation, she either allocated more time to in-class writing or picked topics which minimized the chance of cheating or copying from external sources.

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| Analytical change | → | Rationalistic change | → | Processual change | → | Procedural change |
| • Intellectual development | | • Intellectual development | | • Behavioral development | | • Behavioral development |
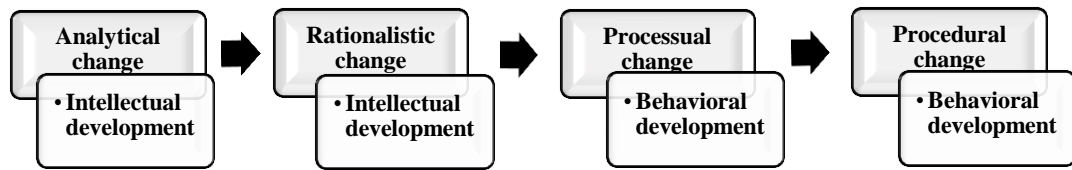
Figure 4.5: Successions of change (Example 6.S/ Blog)

Another instance of successions of change could be traced in the following account in which Sarah described her overall perception about her professional development experience. She maintained that she obtained the opportunity to acquire new knowledge (epistemological change/intellectual development) and develop competence to practice the recommended teaching strategies and techniques (competential change/ behavioral development) as well as observe the subsequent positive effects which imply productive change (behavioral development). Contrary to her previous belief, she acknowledged that financial incentive should not be the only impetus for teachers to make endeavors for developing professionally (evaluative change/ attitudinal development). Sarah further mentioned her positive self-perception change (perceptual change/ attitudinal development) which affected her creativity that implies she developed skills (competential change/ behavioral development) to try novel strategies and techniques in her teaching practice (processual and procedural change/ behavioral development). Finally, as a result of all the constructive changes she experienced through undertaking the offered OPD, she felt more motivated to continue her professional development efforts (motivational change/ attitudinal development).

> The thing I liked about it was that everything was purposeful and to the point. I learned a lot and enjoyed the time spent on my learning. Especially when I could practice the same things in my class and see the change or its effect. I have made many changes in my approach, in my strategies. Although this might not affect my position I mean I might not get promotion or being paid more, I have a better feeling towards myself…believe me….Everything had

become a routine for me but now I have many new ideas…I got them from the blog and I think besides that I can use my creativity. I can say that I'm more motivated now and don't mind participating in such studies or other professional development programs. (Example 5.S/ Interview 2)



Figure 4.6: Successions of change (Example 5.S/ Interview 2)

### 4.5.3 Case 3# Lina

### 4.5.3.1 Behavioral Development

Contrary to the other participating teachers in this study, Lina had the experience of taking part in a number of PD activities through workshops and webinars. Moreover, as both a teacher and the supervisor of an English language institute, as she reported, her professional development had impacts both on her students and the teachers who worked with her.

With regard to the approaches to develop learner autonomy depicted in the videos, Lina expressed that:

> I saw in the videos that the teachers are more easy-going compared to the teachers here. This makes the class more dynamic when there is more participation of the students while the teacher is playing the role of a leader rather than a ruling teacher. As a result of getting this insight I have tried to increase the amount of peer interaction in group works and my own individual interaction with them. For example, I join the groups as a member in turn and they feel that I'm one of them and they communicate with me more and more. (Example 1.L/ Interview 2)

As evident in the above example, inspired by the videos she had watched, she took measures to promote learner autonomy which involved a change in the process she basically managed her class; that is, a shift from ruling students to leading students, which implies a *processual* change. Consequently, Lina had to make some changes in the procedures she practiced in her classroom(s) by maximizing peer interactions as well as individual teacher-learner interactions that can be interpreted as *processual* change.

As another instance contributing to the development of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness, she stated that:

> …the good thing was that I was already practicing some of them and by reading them on the blog I made sure that I have been on the right path. I found that the way I interact with them goes hand in hand with motivating them. As I said I started to create a more personalized environment or by making them more engaged as much as possible. The thing I loved and started doing was encouraging them to set their own short-term goals. This tip was superb. (Example 2.L/ Interview 2)

Indicated in the above account, Lina practiced and developed the skill to respect her students' individuality by creating a 'personalized environment' and making them 'engaged' especially in making decisions whenever possible as well as encouraging her students to 'set their own short-term goals', which are some signals of her *competential* change.

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### 4.5.3.2 Attitudinal Development

To raise awareness towards the importance of teacher autonomy and its inter-relationship with the notions of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness, an article entitled 'Teacher autonomy and learner autonomy' and a video containing short interviews with some teachers talking about their autonomy were added to the blog. The following excerpt illustrates Lina's reflections about the effect(s) of the above-mentioned blog postings:

> If I have a flashback to the very beginning I can say that first of all I got more acquainted with some concepts such as teacher autonomy and started looking at them from a different perspective. For me who has been running a language institute for a couple of years it was like a trigger. Now, I would like to make my teachers familiar with this concept, to help them know themselves and their ability and above all their status better. They should know that they are not performers only; they can and should be involved in making decisions beyond the walls of their classrooms. (Example 3.L/ Interview 2)

Having prior familiarity with the concepts of teacher and learner autonomy, the content of these two particular postings led to a kind of *perceptual* change as she started to notice the different aspects of the addressed concepts. Resulting from this perceptual change, Lina was encouraged to share her knowledge with the teachers working with her and raise their awareness about the concept of teacher autonomy. This *motivational* change could potentially affect self-perception of those teachers.

### 4.5.3.3 Intellectual Development

Expressing her satisfaction about the content of the blog which was cohered around the themes of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness and addressed the significance of learner autonomy and professional development, Lina stated that:

> You know I had read about teacher-centered and learner-centered teaching but I saw their differences in reality through the videos. I have been doing some of the techniques to engage my students in decision making and

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generally in the process of their learning but I have learned many new things to be a better learner-centered teacher and help my students to develop autonomy. (Example 4.L/ Interview 2)

Provided with the opportunity to view previously known theories and principles in practice, Lina undertook *comprehensive* change which consequently made her more competent in practicing the newly acquired knowledge along with what she already knew in theory.

After watching a video about the changes and evolution of language teaching trends and methods, Lina commented that:

> Thank you for the informative videos of history of language teaching. I believe for every teacher to be able to make pragmatic decisions considering the judicious application of the materials and even the approaches and activities in her class it's quite necessary to have one such knowledge. This could also function as a basis for us to make further progress along the way. (Example 5.L/Blog)

Lina described the video content as 'informative' which implies she acquired some new knowledge and experienced *epistemological* change. She further explained how this knowledge can contribute to her teaching practice.

In another example, reflecting on a post which recommended making posters as an out-of-class activity and elaborating on the processes of planning and presenting posters, Lina commented that:

> Well, I should say I loved the idea! Actually I always love it when the focus is on the "process" rather than only on the product. As mentioned, there are many advantages to one such task called posterizing- nice term! I guess besides everything else mentioned there, a teacher could look at it as a kind of formative assessment. I know in our context one could rightly doubt the practicality of posterizing and there are plenty of good reasons for the doubt: there's the problem with the time, facilities, culture, and even the rules! But I guess we can't dismiss the whole idea. A smart teacher can make the necessary changes and make it fit her class. (Example 6.L/ Blog)

Although she liked the recommended out-of-class activity, she questioned the practicality of the idea in her teaching context based on the rationale that there are many restrictions such as facilities, time, regulations, and cultural background. Therefore, based on her reasoning 'posterizing' cannot be considered a 'better way' through which learner autonomy can be promoted. However, the *rationalistic* change occurs when she states that "we can't dismiss the whole idea. A smart teacher can make the necessary changes and make it fit her class".

The last account is adopted from a comment Lina left after watching a video introducing 'Dictogloss' as an in-class learner-centered activity. Lina stated that:

> I also do love using the dictogloss technique, for, as mentioned in the video, it's a holistic one and helps you use all the skills integratively. This is one golden opportunity for students to carry out tasks – and yes, dictations can be used as tasks- which are more process-oriented. (Example 7.L/ Blog)

Lina acknowledged that dictogloss is a good way to engage students in an in-class task as she analyzed its benefits; that is, being holistic and integrating the four language skills simultaneously. Therefore, it can be inferred that this example illustrates Lina's *analytical* change.

**4.5.3.4 Succession of Change Dimensions**

Looking into the accounts collected from the second interview and blog comments and further comparing them with the preliminary collected data revealed several change successions that Lina underwent as the result of interaction among PD change dimensions defined by Evans (2014).

Referring to an account (Example 1.L/ Interview 2), the interplay of the three developmental components through micro-level change dimensions can be illustrated. Lina expressed that:

> I saw in the videos that the teachers are more easy-going compared to the teachers here. This makes the class more dynamic when there is more participation of the students while the teacher is playing the role of a leader rather than a ruling teacher. As a result of getting this insight I have tried to increase the amount of peer interaction in group works and my own individual interaction with them. For example, I join the groups as a member in turn and they feel that I'm one of them and they communicate with me more and more. (Example 1.L/ Interview 2)

After watching videos depicting interactions between teachers and learners in real contexts, Lina experienced a *rationalistic* change (intellectual development) justifying that to have a dynamic class, the teacher is better to be more easy-going. This reasoning entailed a change in her perception towards the role of the teacher; that is, ruler-teacher versus leader-teacher (perceptual change/ attitudinal development). On the other hand, to minimize learners' passivity and promote class dynamism, the process of class management should make a shift from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness (processual change/ behavioral development). To serve this purpose, Lina decided to increase group work as well as her direct interaction with her students (procedural change/ behavioral development) which consequently led to a closer relationship between Lina and her students and boosted communication (productive change/ behavioral development).



Figure 4.7: Successions of change (Example 1.L/ Interview 2)

Emphasizing the role that technology plays in the contemporary education and its significance in the development of autonomy in learners through some videos on the blog, Lina's perception towards this issue was inquired in the second interview. She stated that:

> Because I'm kind of addicted to technology myself and as I see it is a fad nowadays, It's been a long time that I have been integrating technology to my teaching like asking them to search about the topic we gonna discuss the next session on the Internet. Sometimes I send them some material through email. But I have been doing this in my advanced classes. I suppose I should extend it somehow to the lower levels as well. I think creating a blog similar to what you did would be a good idea. I can control both the content and participation of the students. I might start one soon! (Example 8.L/ Interview 2)

Lina came up with the understanding that integrating technology should not be confined to a certain proficiency level and lower proficiency level students need to be provided with the opportunity to benefit the privileges of the use of technology in the process of language learning (comprehensive change/ intellectual development). Then, based on this new understanding, she decided to make changes in her use of technology as an instructional instrument by creating a blog through which she would be able to manage the instructional content as well as the participation of her students (processual & procedural changes/ behavioral development).
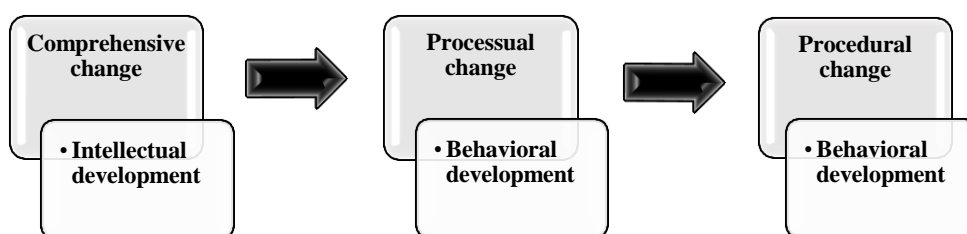


Figure 4.8: Successions of change (Example 8.L/ Interview 2)

The next two examples are Lina's answers to the question how she perceived the effect of the OPD she undertook on her students and their autonomy development

(Example 9.L) as well as her own professional development (Example 10.L). Lina explained that:

> I tried to practice many of the things I saw in the videos in my class which in turn affected my students. In general, I can say that the atmosphere of my classes is changed and is more learner friendly…let's say. The first best thing I did was asking them to define their goals at the beginning of the semester. They are more involved in making class decisions. They have been encouraged to trust each other…I mean their peers more. What else? …they are assigned more out of class activities. Because they are not restricted to the book as they used to be, they find topics for discussion or writing on the Internet voluntarily and suggest in the class then everyone is involved in making the decision. They have learned to give each other feedback and help each other improve. (Example 9.L/ Interview 2)

Lina claimed that following what she saw in the videos, which implies development of pedagogical knowledge (epistemological change/ intellectual development), she practiced many of the teaching techniques recommended contributing to learner autonomy (processual & procedural changes/ behavioral development). She gave examples such as encouraging students to set goals, getting them involved in decision-making, and promoting peer interaction and peer feedback-giving; as the result of which she succeeded to create a more learner-friendly atmosphere in her classrooms (productive change/behavioral development).
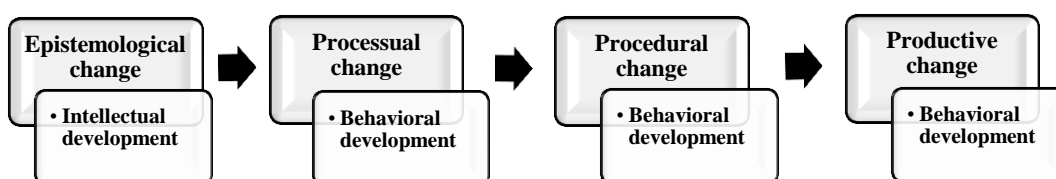


Figure 4.9: Successions of change (Example 9.L/ Interview 2)

Referring to example 10.L, Lina maintained that as a result of improvement in her technological knowledge, that is, getting acquainted with blog as a medium of teaching and learning as well as her overall pedagogical content knowledge from

different perspectives (epistemological change/ intellectual development) , she got

more motivated to take measures to expand her knowledge (motivational change/

attitudinal development) and , as the supervisor of a language institute, shared her

newly developed knowledge with the teachers who worked with her (productive

change/ behavioral development).

> I improved my knowledge in many different aspects both in theory and
> practice. I had the opportunity of getting familiar with a new…a new medium
> of learning and above all I'm more motivated now. I mean I would like to
> expand my knowledge and transfer it to the teachers who work at my
> institute. (Example 10.L/ Interview 2)
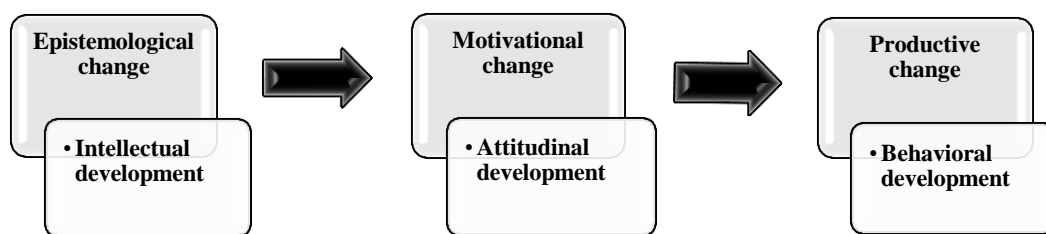


Figure 4.10: Successions of change (Example 10.L/ Interview 2)

### 4.5.4 Case 4# Mahtab

### 4.5.4.1 Behavioral Development

Inspired by a video recommending a variety of techniques for giving feedback and

informal assessment to improve learners' speaking skills, Mahtab commented that:

> I asked my students to record their voice and then they exchange[d] their
> records, it was somehow useful but because it is a kind of peer correction,
> you must be sure that they won't get offended if they become corrected by
> the special peer, by the way, it worked great in my class. But I asked the other
> class of mine to record their voice and in the class I gave them time to listen
> to their own voice and correct themselves, then listen to that again in
> groups….Although it was time consuming but it worked really excellent,
> satisfying for them and me. (Example 1.M/ Blog)

First, Mahtab put the technique of peer-correction into practice which can be

interpreted as a kind of *processual* change which required a *procedural* change as

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well. The students were asked to record their voices and exchange them with each other for giving/receiving feedback to and from their peer. Then in another class, she tried a different recommended technique according to which she changed both the process and procedure of feed-back giving to her students' speaking output (*processual & procedural* change). Similar to the previous technique, each student recorded his/her voice, but then listened to the recording individually and tried to identify their own mistakes and errors, and correct them. After this step, students were divided into groups and listened to the recordings and gave feedback to each other. It seems that Mahtab also experienced a degree of *productive* change as she stated that the activity worked well and described the final result as satisfying both for her and the students.

Another issue Mahtab addressed was the integration of technology into teaching. She said she rarely used technology due to the lack of facilities in her workplace. Becoming aware of the significant role technology plays in students' learning, as she saw in videos on the blog, Mahtab thought of an innovative approach which can be interpreted as both *processual and procedural* changes. Mahtab decided to integrate technology to out-of-class tasks. She stated:

> I asked their parents to cooperate in this task and supervise them [the students] whenever they are doing an assignment which needs [the] use of the Internet and control the time. I mean the amount of time they spend on the net. (Example 2.M/ Blog)

She added that "Nowadays, most parents are educated and the Internet access is available in every home, they [parents] liked the idea and appreciated me because I had informed them". Then she explained how she employed technology as an out-of-

class learning tool to develop learner-centeredness and autonomy (*procedural change*):

> After watching videos on the blog, I got so much interested and found some websites on the Internet which provide lessons, exercises and games for learning English with songs and colorful pictures which I think are great supplement to the book. They [the students] can have fun and learn at the same time. There are online quizzes too, by which they can test themselves. (Example 3.M/Interview 2)

### 4.5.4.2 Attitudinal Development

Although in the first interview Mahtab admitted that she preferred to "be non-autonomous because it connotes less responsibility", a change in her perception could be traced after getting engaged in the professional development initiative, which implies a *perceptual* change. She said: "Now I know that I should be an autonomous teacher although it is difficult in my context, and I should help my students to become autonomous. These were not my concerns before." (Example 4.M/ Interview 2)

She also admitted that after getting familiar with some theories and principles, she perceived English language teaching as a field similar to other scientific ones, which is a sign of *perceptual. Mahtab* also went through *evaluative* change as she mentioned mere proficiency in a language does not mean that one can be an efficient teacher. She maintained that:

> First of all it [blog content] changed my attitude towards my job as an English teacher. Now, I understand that teaching English is not merely proficiency in English and everything a knowledgeable and effective teacher does is backed up by a theory like the theories of Physics which is my field. I got familiar with many new concepts and terms….technical terms which will help me to speak with more confidence in teachers' meetings or other places where I need to communicate with English experts. (Example 5.M/ Interview 2)

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Interpreted as a *motivational* change, Mahtab continued that as a result of participating in the offered professional development initiative "I feel more motivated… I have bought some books about teaching methodologies and second language acquisition. I have become more interested in knowing about English teaching". (Example 6.M/ Interview 2)

### 4.5.4.3 Intellectual Development

It could be predicted that as a participating teacher with a non-English educational background, Mahtab would make intellectual development especially with regard to *epistemological and comprehensive* change dimensions. Fortunately, as expected, she expressed that:

> Many of the strategies, techniques, theories and ideas were new for me because I never had the opportunity to study these things formally or academically. There were many…even many words….I mean terms were new for me. I feel that it was a new beginning for me because I had never looked at my job as a teacher from this perspective. (Example 7.M/ Interview 2)

Appreciating the knowledge she had acquired (*epistemological* change), Mahtab developed the understanding (*comprehensive* change) that "knowing about these theories should be a must for every teacher. I am somehow a proficient English speaker but I think I'm not knowledgeable enough in this regard… I mean, teaching English and its principles..." (Example 8.M/ Interview 2)

### 4.5.4.4 Succession of Change Dimensions

To illustrate the interplay between different change dimensions which could be identified through the analysis of micro-level episodes, a number of change successions are presented below.

With reference to a video entitled 'The history of language teaching' depicting how English language teaching developed in terms of methodology, Mahtab reflected that:

> The video about different teaching methods was very interesting. I saw for the first time the…the evolution of English teaching methods…..methodologies. Now I find it…..I perceive it….I mean English teaching as a science. I believe that knowing about these theories should be a must for every teacher. I am somehow a proficient English speaker but I think I'm not knowledgeable enough ….aaa…in this regard….I mean teaching English and its principles. (Example 9.M/ Interview 2)

Having acquired some novel knowledge about English teaching methodology and its evolution (*epistemological* change), she seems to have undergone a change in her perception towards the essence of English language teaching (*perceptual* change) and consequently, she came up with a new understanding. She concluded that knowing English language-related theories and methodologies is fundamental to teaching English and described it as a 'must to learn' issue (*comprehensive* change).
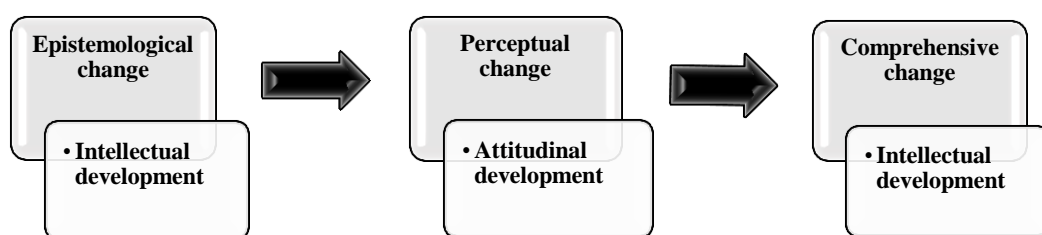


Figure 4.11: Successions of change (Example 9.M/ Interview 2)

One of the concerns Mahtab touched upon in the second interview was the lack of motivation in her students. She expressed that: "this issue has always been a challenge for me. As I said because of the age of my students most of them come to an English class because their parents want them to. So there is a lack of motivation

in all of them more or less". Therefore, she was asked if the articles and videos on the blog helped her to overcome this challenge. In response she stated that:

> I liked those posts because I believe that all of them can be practiced very easily if the teacher has enough knowledge…..like setting goals. This is the main reason of lack of motivation in most of my students. They don't know why they are in the class and perceive it as something imposed by their parents. So I started to ask them to tell me and their peers why they are attending an English class and if the reason is "my parents pushed me" then I try to suggest some encouraging advantages of learning English like being able to communicate with people around the world, or having better job opportunities, or …or being more successful back at school….. it was really helpful and reduced the level of lack of...I mean level of reluctance. Moreover, as recommended in one of the postings I have increased the amount of peer interaction and my own interaction with individual students. I can see…as I said before the feeling of belonging and more…more willingness. (Example 10.M/ Interview 2)

Having learned new techniques of how to motivate learners (*epistemological* change), Mahtab developed some skills to challenge lack of motivation in her students (competential change). However, before exercising any of the newly developed competencies, she had to figure out which one would be more appropriate to implement. Thus, to justify the technique she intended to practice, she attributed the lack of motivation of her students to their lack of goals. Then, she applied this reasoning (rationalistic change) to her practice; that is, encouraging students to define goals to achieve through learning English. All these changes entailed *processual* and *procedural* changes as Mahtab started to raise awareness of her students (processual change) by asking the question 'why are you in the class?' and highlighting the potential prospective achievements (procedural change). Finally, she reported that, as the result of this practice, she could observe that the reluctance to learn English was reduced to some extent (productive change).
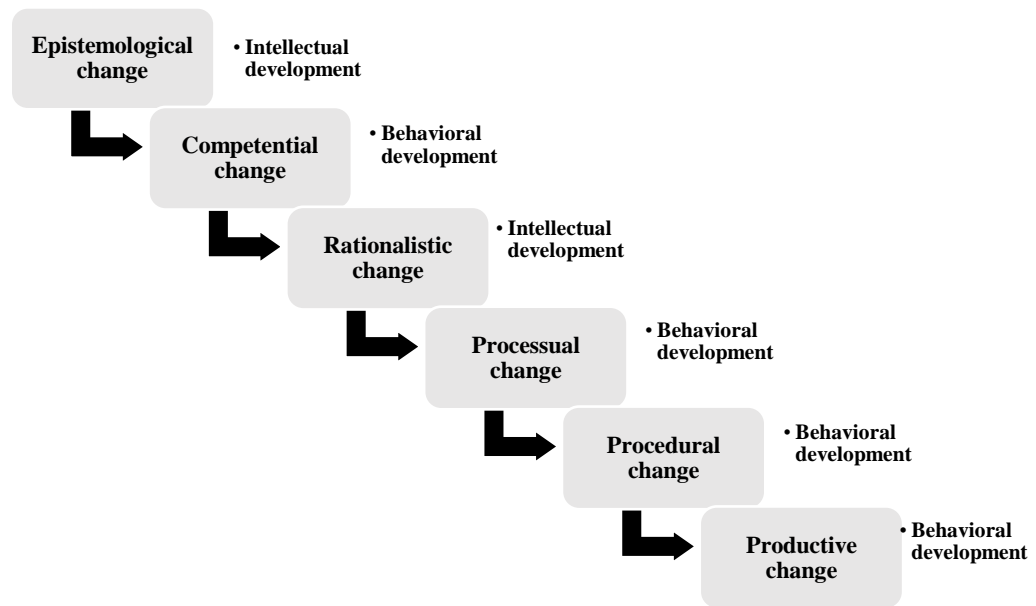
Figure 4.12: Successions of change (Example 10.M/ Interview 2)

## 4.6  Summary of Findings # RQ 2

Similar to the three-component PD model of Evans (2014), Jarvis (2006) observed that learning occurs through cognitive, emotional, and physical changes in an individual, which requires access to one's brain. Therefore, distinguishing certain dimensions of change and their order of occurrence would be a meticulous and an elusive attempt. It should be acknowledged that, in every account summarized above, there are many other potential change dimensions in interaction to contribute to the PD of the participating teacher, which remained unidentified.

However, putting together the different instances of micro-level episodes of professional development obtained from every individual participating teacher would create the opportunity to observe the aims achieved through implementation of the PD initiative. To serve this aim, as proposed by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), a code was assigned to a text chunk, obtained from blog comments and the second interview's transcription, representing a theme pertaining to change dimensions of

Evans' (2014) PD model. It should be noted that the themes which were repeated with a higher frequency were listed and reported in Table 4.2. This approach yields a detailed analysis of some aspects of data, which is mainly driven by the analytic interest of the researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 4.2: Categories of change and the pertaining themes

| Behavioral development | Attitudinal development | Intellectual development |
|---|---|---|
| **The process of :**<br>- informal assessment<br>- pair and group work<br>- in- and out-of-class activities<br>- Learner-oriented teaching | **Perception towards:**<br>- teaching as a career<br>- constructive teacher observation<br>- concepts of professional development, teacher autonomy, learner autonomy, and learner-centered classes | **Epistemology of:**<br>- principles and elements of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness<br>- learner-centered learning and teaching styles/techniques/strategies<br>- techniques of informal assessment and feedback giving |
| **The procedure of:**<br>- peer feedback-giving<br>- teacher feedback-giving<br>- learner's self- monitoring and assessment<br>- in- and out-of- class-activities<br>- pair and group work | **Evaluation of:**<br>- teacher-student interaction<br>- class environment<br>- techniques of informal assessment and feedback giving<br>- advantages of use of technology | **Rational of:**<br>- professional development<br>- practicing learner autonomy and learner-centeredness principles and techniques (e.g. decision making, pair and group work, peer feedback-giving) |
| **The production of:**<br>- learner motivation<br>- learner autonomy<br>- learner-centered vs teacher-centered classes<br>- progress in learner performance<br>- positive learner feedback | **Motivation for:**<br>- professional development<br>- assuming more responsibilities for developing teacher and learner autonomy | **Comprehension of:**<br>- the importance of using technology<br>- the importance of informal assessment by the teacher<br>- the effectiveness of self and peer monitoring<br>- learner types and learning styles<br>- the importance of out-of-class activities |
| **Competency in:**<br>- the use of technology<br>- interactive skills<br>- informal assessment and feedback giving<br>- learner-centered class management | | **Analysis of:**<br>- the atmosphere of the classes<br>- the role of teachers in motivating learners<br>- different ways of developing learner autonomy (e.g. out-of-class activities) |

Overall, it can be inferred that the OPD initiative fostered professional growth of the participating teachers by enacting change over different change dimensions which contribute to the behavioral, attitudinal, and intellectual components of teachers' professional development.

## 4.7 Research Question 3

**RQ 3# How did the perceived professional development of the participating teachers affect their autonomy?**

To be able to answer the third research question and clarify the interdependence of the notions of 'professional development' and 'teacher autonomy', it is necessary to go over the perceptions of the participating teachers towards both concepts before their engagement in the OPD initiative. The accounts and findings provided below are adopted from the data collected through the first interview and 'Teaching Autonomy' questionnaire.

### 4.7.1 Case 1# Anahita

Regarding the first theme addressed in the interview before undertaking the OPD initiative, i.e., professional development, Anahita believed that professional development is not a well-known concept in the context she works at. She stated that the first time she encountered and thought about this concept was in the 'Needs Analysis' questionnaire that she filled as a participant of the present study. She pointed out that most of the teachers she worked with show random efforts contributing to their professional development such as attending meetings or workshops rarely held by the institutes they work at. What is more, professional development is not a concern for most of them. She attributed this issue to the lack of awareness, lack of motivation and financial matters, all of which count as the main problem in her context. She added that teaching has turned into a routine or habit for

her and many of her colleagues. Yet, she believed that awareness raising towards the concept and means of professional development along with training would contribute to creating enthusiasm in teachers to develop themselves professionally.

Continuing with the question about the concept of 'teacher autonomy', Anahita claimed that she did not have any idea and she had not heard about it before. However, after a short time given to her to think about the concept, she came up with the idea that 'teacher autonomy' associates with teachers' independence and leadership. To give her a better insight of the concept, a definition of teacher autonomy proposed by LaCoe (2008) was read to her by the researcher: "although the concept was viewed as a unitary concept in the past, it is recently decomposed into six distinct subcomponents: autonomy over curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, professional development, student discipline, and classroom environment" (cited in Khezerlou, 2013, p. 200).

Overall, Anahita did not consider herself as an autonomous teacher as far as curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and professional development are concerned. She added that even if she was asked to get involved in these areas, she would decline because she was not knowledgeable enough. When asked about the factors hindering teacher autonomy in her context, Anahita stated "above all, we don't have any idea about it. I don't want to be pessimistic but this is the reality".

Anahita had completed the 'Teaching Autonomy' questionnaire containing 18 items addressing different aspects of teacher autonomy. Regarding the items fitting in the category of 'curriculum autonomy', apparently, Anahita cannot be considered

autonomous as she reported little or no say over selection of materials, content and skills taught as well as setting goals and objectives.

Concerning the items which belonged to 'general autonomy' category, it can be inferred that Anahita is somehow autonomous in setting standards of behaviour, and scheduling of use of the time and classroom space. Although she asserted that she was more or less free to be creative in her teaching approach and used alternative procedures in her teaching, the selection of student learning activities, and teaching methods and strategies were not completely under her control and she was not allowed to follow her own guidelines all the time. Anahita reported that assessment and evaluation activities were selected by people other than the teacher. Overall, she believed that her job as an English teacher does not allow for much discretion on her part and she had limited latitude as far as solving major problems is concerned.

### 4.7.2 Case 2# Sarah

As the foci of the study, similar to the previous participating teacher, perception of Sarah towards the concept of 'professional development' was probed. As far as her professional development and familiarity with different means of developing professionally are concerned, Sarah maintained that: "throughout the years I have been teaching, I have not taken my professional development seriously! The reason is that I did not have enough motivation or I didn't feel the need". She further explained:

> I have experienced being among professional communities consisting of my other colleagues, but how does it help when all of us have similar problems and there is no professional expert to help us solve them by offering practical solutions. A worse case is when you share your problem with others and it is considered as your weakness and lack of knowledge. I have never attended any workshops because a one-day workshop is not that much effective and you can rarely find those which are relevant to the issue of your interest or your problem.

As she stated, participating in the professional development initiative in this research was her first attempt "in order to figure out what professional development is essentially and how a teacher can be developed systematically". She admitted that professional development is a major concern neither for her nor for most of her colleagues. Being asked about the reason of the lack of enthusiasm in teachers to develop professionally, she mentioned teachers' financial concerns, which means teaching more and more classes leading into the lack of free time to be allocated to developing oneself professionally. In addition, she believed that most teachers in her context are unaware of the importance of professional development in their career and, as she said, they expect that any steps they take towards this goal should be rewarded financially.

Addressing the other focal theme of the study, Sarah was asked about 'teacher autonomy'. She believed that teacher autonomy is the freedom of teacher in choosing strategies and techniques of teaching. After the issue was more elaborated on by the interviewer (i.e. researcher), Sarah admitted that she is not an autonomous teacher and blamed the educational system for teachers' lack of autonomy. She maintained that "most of the things a teacher does in the classroom are pre-defined by the authorities of the institute or the textbooks. The teacher is obliged to follow the syllabus designed by the authorities". Sarah added that:

> I have no authority in choosing the books and have to cover the content of the book in a limited period of time. As far as methodology is concerned, the main trend is communicative language teaching but I have the freedom to use my own techniques… and there are many people and external factors that affect the decisions a teacher makes in the classroom. Usually teachers are not consulted with or involved when books are chosen, syllabus is designed, or tests are prepared. We are mostly performers.

Overall, based on the responses given to the 'Teaching Autonomy' questionnaire and interview questions, it can be concluded that Sarah is not autonomous as far as curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are concerned. However, she felt a degree of autonomy in terms of the use of classroom space, and setting student discipline standard as well as taking measures for her own professional development.

**4.7.3 Case 3# Lina**

Considering the first theme addressed in the first interview, i.e., professional development, Lina contended that "it might be a fad not a matter of concern because it's something prestigious that institutes do and they attract more students". She continued:

> in the context that I'm teaching I don't see many institutes really caring about the level of their teachers' professional development, not even their general level of English. I suppose there have been only 2 or 3 years since they started having teacher training courses officially.

Lina added that teachers usually do not welcome attending workshops, seminars, conferences etc., because they need to pay for the registeration fees. Lack of time is another issue. She implied that her colleagues are too busy to make their living and rarely get the chance to think about their professional development and many of them are not "willing to take part in meetings or workshops because they aren't paid for it".

As to the next theme of the interview, Lina was asked about the concept of 'teacher autonomy'. She maintained that "there are many teachers who do not have the slightest idea. They even haven't heard the word 'autonomous'. They haven't heard of the concept 'autonomous students', let alone 'autonomous teacher'". Then Lina was asked to give her own definition of the concept of 'teacher autonomy'. Based on

her definition, an autonomous teacher "has developed a good sense of recognition as to when to do what". To clarify, she compared an autonomous teacher with a good cook: "like the cook who knows all the seasonings and picks the ones she wants based on what her family likes better, an autonomous teacher is ready to take that step to risk, so an autonomous teacher is a risk taker. I suppose (it) should be like this".

After she gave her own definition, a scholarly definition by LaCoe (2008) was read to Lina by the interviewer (researcher) and was asked to determine if she is an autonomous teacher according to that definition. Considering the main sub-components of autonomy, that is, autonomy over curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, professional development, student discipline, and classroom environment, Lina believed that she is not an autonomous teacher. Lina said that "whatever comes from beyond the boundaries of my classroom is not under my control. Even the content and the number of units we are supposed to cover are already decided".  She further added that "I'm not sure even if we are qualified to do that. We could have a say but before that, we need to be trained and prepared for that". Moreover, she asserted:

> I suppose even if you give them [teachers] the freedom or the chance to be autonomous, they wouldn't appreciate the idea either because there is something good about not being autonomous that's I suppose less responsibility. So unless they are motivated and they want to put more time, energy and effort into the job they're doing, yes you could introduce them the concept.

Examining the answers Lina had given to the 18 Likert-type items of the 'Teaching Autonomy' questionnaire proved a consistency between the data elicited through the interview and the questionnaire regarding 'teacher autonomy' issue. Lina can be considered a fairly autonomous teacher as far as general teaching autonomy

including scheduling of use of time and setting standards of behaviour, and classroom management. However, in terms of curriculum autonomy which entails control over selection of materials, content, and setting goals and objectives, she cannot be regarded as an autonomous teacher.

### 4.7.4 Case 4# Mahtab

As the first question of the interview, Mahtab was asked about her perception and stance towards the concept of 'professional development'. She said "the first time I encountered the term 'professional development' and its elements was in a questionnaire you gave me (i.e., Needs Analysis Questionnaire). Then I started to think -- do I really do any of these activities to develop myself professionally?" Noting that she had never participated in any workshops, seminars, conferences, or online PD activities like webinars, and that her attempts to develop herself professionally were confined to attending teachers' meetings held from time to time in the institute she worked at, Mahtab emphasized that professional development was not a major concern for her nor for many of her colleagues. She mentioned different reasons such as "lack of time, far distances (of the seminar or conferences venues), and high registration fees" for not taking professional development into consideration. Mahtab added that "many of my colleagues even do not like to attend the teachers' meetings or nag when it comes to class observations". She continued that "many of the teachers just ignore them [observers and their feedback] and continue what they have always been doing". In her opinion, most of the teachers do not care about their professional development because it is not appreciated, especially financially, if they are developed professionally or making efforts to do so. Overall, it can be concluded that professional development had not been an appealing issue for Mahtab though she felt the need.

The next theme addressed was teacher autonomy, which seemed to be a new concept to Mahtab. She said:

> I don't know exactly what it means but if I want to describe it based on the …I mean literally….I think it is freedom in teaching and being able to do what you would like to in the class. You can use the techniques and strategies that you believe is appropriate for your student.

Mahtab had filled out the 'Teaching Autonomy' questionnaire and was asked to elaborate on the answers she had given to the 18 Likert-type items to clarify the concept both for her and the interviewer. Going over the items attributed to 'curriculum autonomy' revealed that she had a very low degree of autonomy as expected and similar to the previous participating cases. Mahtab reported a degree of autonomy as far as 'general teaching autonomy' is concerned, except in evaluation and assessment. She maintained that the major decisions in terms of curriculum, syllabus, materials and the content, as well as the tests to be administered are made by the administrators and she is only free in choosing the activities and tasks she does in the class, teaching strategies she employs, and the use of time and classroom space but to a certain limit.

Mahtab admitted that she prefered to be unautonomous because it connotes less responsibility especially for unmotivated teachers. But above all, she acknowledged that lack of awareness and familiarity with the concept of 'teacher autonomy' makes it unpopular among teachers in her teaching context.

### 4.7.5 Cross-case Analysis of the Preliminary Findings

Comparison and contrast of the data elicited form the four cases indicated that, except for one of the participants (Lina), professional development was not a concern or priority for the participating teachers and the administrative board of the institutes

they work at. As to the reasons of ignoring individual professional development, several factors were involved among which lack of awareness, lack of time, lack of motivation, and financial issues were frequently mentioned. For Anahita, Sarah, and Mahtab, participation in the online professional initiative throughout the present study was the first systematic effort to develop professionally.

One of the focal themes probed in the first research question was the participating teachers' perception of teacher autonomy. Although the participants did not have any clear idea about this concept and its definition, they considered a teacher autonomous as long as s/he was free in choosing teaching strategies and techniques. Being given a widely accepted definition proposed by LaCoe (2008), none of the participants considered themselves an autonomous teacher. There was a consensus among them in that, in their context, teachers cannot be autonomous particularly as far as curriculum and assessment are concerned. Two main reasons were attributed to this lack of autonomy: a) educational system which does not involve teachers in making macro decisions, and b) lack of knowledge on the part of the teachers who are not trained to make decisions concerning curriculum and assessment. In addition, they all agreed that lack of autonomy is associated with less responsibility for teachers, which is appreciated by most of them who are not motivated enough or satisfied with their job.

As mentioned earlier, the participating teachers filled out the 'Teaching Autonomy' questionnaire. The data collected by the questionnaire is tabulated below and described briefly. The participating teachers' perception of their autonomy in two categories of 'general teaching autonomy' (GTA) and 'curriculum autonomy' (CA) was investigated in 18 Likert-type items (see Table 4.3).

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Table 4.3: Items of curriculum autonomy and general teaching autonomy (Pearson & Moomaw, 2006, p. 48)

| Item # | **Curriculum Autonomy** |
|---|---|
| 5 | In my teaching I use my own guidelines and procedures |
| 6 | In my situation I have little say over the content and skills that are selected for teaching |
| 8 | My teaching focuses on those goals and objectives I select myself |
| 12 | What I teach in my class is determined for the most part by myself |
| 14 | The materials I use in my class are chosen for the most part by myself |
| 18 | The content and skills taught in my class are those I select |

| Item # | **General Teaching Autonomy** |
|---|---|
| 1 | I am free to be creative in my teaching approach |
| 2 | The selection of student-learning activities in my class is under my control |
| 3 | Standards of behavior in my classroom are set primarily by myself |
| 4 | My job does not allow for much discretion on my part |
| 7 | The scheduling of use of time in my classroom is under my control |
| 9 | I seldom use alternative procedures in my teaching |
| 10 | I follow my own guidelines on instruction |
| 11 | In my situation I have only limited latitude in how major problems are solved |
| 13 | In my class I have little control over how classroom space is used |
| 15 | The evaluation and assessment activities used in my class are selected by people other than myself |
| 16 | I select the teaching methods and strategies I use with my students |
| 17 | I have little say over the scheduling of use of time in my classroom |

The respondents were required to rate the degree of their autonomy by choosing one of the four Likert-type points offered as: 'Definitely True', 'More or Less True', 'More or Less False', and 'Definitely False' and their responses are shown below.

Table 4.4: Responses to teaching autonomy questionnaire (CA Items)

| Item # | Curriculum Autonomy | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Definitely True # | More or Less True # | More or Less False # | Definitely False # |
| 5 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 6 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| 18 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |

Table 4.5: Responses to teaching autonomy questionnaire (GTA Items)

| Item # | General Teaching Autonomy | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Definitely True # | More or Less True # | More or Less False # | Definitely False # |
| 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 4 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 7 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 9 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| 10 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| 11 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| 13 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| 15 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 16 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 17 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 |

Consistent with the comments in the interview, the answers to the questionnaire indicated that, except in using own guidelines and procedures, the participating teachers had minimal or no autonomy in setting goals and objectives, selecting materials and content, or choosing the skills to be taught, all of which are elements of 'curriculum autonomy'. Data related to the category of 'general teaching autonomy' was more promising, revealing a fair degree of autonomy as far as class management in terms of use of the space, time scheduling, and setting behavior standards, and use of creative teaching approaches as well as instructional guidelines were concerned. However, lack of autonomy in evaluation and assessment, as reported by the participating teachers in the interview, was observed.

## 4.8 Discussion of Findings # RQ 3

Based on the findings of the preliminary data presented in the previous section, it can be inferred that the participating teachers basically lacked awareness of the significance and knowledge of professional development and teacher autonomy. Following the definition of teacher autonomy suggested by LaCoe (2008),

professional development is a major subcomponent of teacher autonomy (as cited in Khezerlou, 2013). Therefore, in order to become an autonomous teacher, taking measures to develop professionally is necessarily required.

In order to examine whether the OPD initiative offered in this study contributed to the autonomy development of the participating teachers, the results of the findings presented in section 4.6 along with the scale used as 'Teaching Autonomy' questionnaire are used. Hereby, it should be confessed that considering the top-down policies exercised over the components of curriculum autonomy in the context of this study, the OPD initiative offered was not expected to develop the participating teachers' autonomy in terms of the content and skills to be taught, goals and objectives to be achieved as well as the selection of material(s). Therefore, development of teacher autonomy addressing these issues remained at the level of awareness raising by exerting changes in epistemological and comprehensive dimensions of professional development.

However, regarding the notion of general teaching autonomy which, according to Vangrieken et al. (2017), is more pedagogy-oriented, the findings evidenced a fair degree of teacher autonomy development in the participating teachers as a consequence of their professional growth. As pedagogy mainly implies the practice of teaching embodied through behavioral development of teachers backed-up by intellectual and attitudinal developments, it is attempted to examine the potential development of autonomy of the participating teachers regarding the items pertaining to general teaching autonomy presented in 'Teaching Autonomy' questionnaire as a scale with reference to Table 4.2. It should be noted that the items which were of no concern to the participating teachers as reported in response to the first research

question and neither included in 'the objectives to be achieved' list in section 3.5.2.4, such as classroom space management and time scheduling, are excluded.

To elaborate the above-mentioned issue, the domains relating to general teaching autonomy (GTA) are categorized and further linked with the themes representing behavioral development of the participating teachers in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: GTA domains and behavioral development areas

| # | General Teaching Autonomy Domains | Behavioral Development Areas |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Teaching methods and strategies | <ul><li>Learner-oriented teaching principles</li><li>Learner-oriented teaching strategies</li><li>Informal assessment techniques</li></ul> |
| 2 | Student learning activities | <ul><li>In- & out-of-class tasks encouraging learner autonomy/learner-centeredness</li><li>Integration of technology (esp. out-of-class activities)</li></ul> |
| 3 | Creative approach and alternative procedures | <ul><li>Pair & group work</li><li>Feedback giving</li><li>Technology integration</li></ul> |
| 4 | Evaluation and assessment activities | <ul><li>Peer feedback-giving</li><li>Student self-monitoring</li></ul> |
| 5 | Behavioral standards (Class management) | <ul><li>Learner-centered class management</li><li>Learner(s) decision-making</li><li>Learner motivation</li><li>Teacher-student interaction</li><li>Peer(s) interaction</li></ul> |

Based on these findings, behavioral professional developments in the areas presented in the table contributed to the development of their corresponding domains of autonomy if PD is considered as a sub-component of teacher autonomy. However, bearing in mind that the participating teachers had reported a fair degree of GTA in response to the questionnaire and the first interview, it should be acknowledged that

the findings concerning autonomy of the participating teachers after undertaking the OPD initiative, merely echo development of teacher autonomy with regard to the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness.

## 4.9 Summary

This chapter presented the results and findings obtained from the analysis of the three reserah questions initially posed. The analysis sought to find the answers to the three research questions, which investigated the perception of the participating teachers towards the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness before participating in the OPD initiative, and their professional growth and teacher autonomy after undertaking the offered PD initiative. The following chapter discusses these results and findings, and draws possible conclusions from them.

# Chapter 5

# DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a comprehensive discussion of the findings reported in Chapter 4, with reference to the participating teachers' perceptions on the focal themes of the study, that is, learner autonomy and learner-centeredness, professional development and teacher autonomy, before and after their involvement in an online professional development initiative. It also presents the research conclusions and potential implications of the study. In the last section a number of limitations and delimitations of the study are mentioned along with the suggestions for future studies.

## 5.1 Discussion of the Results of Research Question 1

**RQ 1# Perceptions of the participating teachers towards the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness before and after undertaking the offered online PD initiative**

The findings revealed that although the participating teachers believed in the necessity of leading more learner-centered classes and consequently contributing to the development of learner autonomy, they accepted that it was not a priority neither for them nor for the institutional authorities they worked for. In other words, they were not demanded or expected to practice a learner-centered pedagogy in their teaching, which might be related to the sociocultural realities of the context that they teach in. As reported in Moradi and Alavinia (2020), the commonly accepted and practiced pedagogy in the Iranian context is teacher-centered due to several teacher- and learner-induced as well as contextual factors. The participating teachers also

mentioned some obstacles hindering promotion of learner autonomy such as the lack of teacher/learner awareness, lack of teacher knowledge and training, lack of learner motivation (passivity), lack of institutional facilities as well as learner cultural/educational background, which are similarly shared in studies by Alrabai (2017), Borg and Al Busaidi (2012), Boyadzhieva (2016), Godwin-Jones (2019), Melvina and Suherdi (2018), and Yasmin and Sohail (2018).

Holding the assumption that English language teachers experience various disorienting discipline-related dilemmas in practice (Borg, 2006) as well as discrepancies between what they have to and what they want to teach, may justify neglecting promotion of learner autonomy in real practice. These discrepancies tend to be perceived bolder when extensive cultural, attitudinal, and educational policy differences exist between the local periphery context in which English is taught as a second/foreign language and the context where teaching materials along with their corresponding curriculum, teaching strategies, and techniques are produced; that is, the center representing the hegemonic imperialistic and colonial character of English and English language education, imposing Western methods over local practice (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

The concept of learner autonomy, described by Holec (1988) as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3), has the potential to create such discrepancies. If/when interpreted as independence from a teacher, it is natural that both students and teachers would be puzzled about how to practice learner autonomy in their own historically and culturally teacher-centered educational context.

Therefore, achieving the goal of promoting learner autonomy is mainly contingent upon the teachers' beliefs and practical attempts. As Ahmadianzadeh, Seifoori, and Hadidi Tamjid (2020) put it, teachers can either "pay lip-service to learner autonomy" or "strive to apply the principles of autonomous learning" (p. 98). At this point, the need for PD initiatives arises to inform, guide, and empower teachers by building "teachers' everyday concepts about language, language learning, and language teaching to enable them to understand the scientific concepts about language, second language acquisition, learning, and L2 teaching" (Johnson, 2009, p. 14).

## 5.2 Discussion of the Results of Research Question 2

**RQ 2# Perceptions of the participating teachers towards their professional development before and after undertaking the offered online PD initiative**

The perceptions of the participating teachers towards their professional growth regarding the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness were analyzed by using Evan's (2014) PD model. The findings based on real examples manifested micro-level changes which lead to the increment of the individual's professionalism by means of mental internalization processes. This mental cognitive process incorporated what Illeris (2003) described as a psychological internal process of elaboration and acquisition in which current impulses are linked with preceding learning. These considerations underpin a PD conceptualization which covers learning (intellectual and attitudinal aspects) as well as activities (behavioral aspect) towards an individual's change and development.

Teachers who work in contexts where the institutional support in terms of professional development (PD) is either lacking or limited may seek other

opportunities to develop their professional knowledge and skills. In cases where institutional support is missing or fails to address the needs of individual teachers, self-directed learning (SDL), as a principle of andragogy, comes to teachers' rescue. In a seminal work, Knowles (1975) defined SDL as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes" (p. 18). The participating teachers in this research may be considered self-directed as they volunteered to take measures contributing to the PD through an informally offered initiative.

Nowadays, a commonly used platform for PD is the web-based environments that offer extensive experiences, opportunities, programs, or activities which, if well-managed, may lead to the achievement of objectives targeted by the individual teachers in endeavors for online professional development. Acknowledging that challenges and complexities are inherent in self-directed online learning, individual practitioners/teachers are encouraged to get engaged in self-directed online learning through reflective examination of their own beliefs and actions, seeking "to update and modify their knowledge and work in ways that are consistent with their developing views" (Leung, 2009, p. 53). This insight corroborates the notions of constructive learning and cognitive apprenticeship which were used as the theoretical backbones of this study to offer the PD initiative through a community of practice. Cognitive apprenticeship through modelling, coaching, scaffolding, articulation, reflection, and exploration was practiced by the participating teachers which consequently proved to be effectively contributing to their professional learning and

growth while sharing similarities with the findings of the studies carried out by Austin (2009), Dickey (2008), Doucette, Clark and Singh (2020), Garcı´a-Cabrero et al. (2018), Liu (2005), Rodríguez-Bonces and Ortiz (2016), Spector (2016), Wang and Bonk (2001), and Wiss et al. (2018).

Generally, teachers are considered as agents who generate change in educational practices and shape education innovatively; therefore, in order for the educational innovation to be successful and efficient, teachers' learning should be addressed (Bakkenes et al., 2010). Teachers need to be assisted in their professional learning in a way that enhances their professional autonomy, or to put it differently, contributes to professional development and teacher empowerment. This is in line with King's (2002) view which asserted that by providing teachers with opportunities for investigating a variety of applicable classroom practices through examples, simulations, and immersion (hands-on experiences), an environment can be generated to contribute to considerable adult learning which, as emphasized by Jones and McLean (2012), can be personalized through the use and implementation of technology such as different types of Web.2 tools. These technological tools are claimed to be learner-centered means of learning and teaching, and as Halat (2008) stated, are based on constructivism, critical thinking, situated and cooperative learning theories and concepts. With reference to Can (2009), to learn constructively, learning process needs to be embedded in a relevant and realistic environment which facilitates negotiation, addresses various perspectives of the topic represented through a variety of modes which consequently foster a sense of learning ownership, provide sufficient time for engagement and investigation, and promote self-awareness throughout the process of knowledge construction.

Laying its foundation on the principles of constructive learning, the present study attempted to provide the participating teachers with an opportunity to be exposed to learner autonomy and learner-centeredness related material through an online medium in a community of practice. Moreover, the design of the study advocated for the teacher engagement and critical reflection both on the material and their own practices in its real context. The participating teachers gained the opportunity to revise, modify or make alterations to their prior knowledge and enact the newly developed knowledge into their current classroom practices as evident in the changes made in different dimensions leading to their intellectual, attitudinal, and behavioral development. Therefore, it can be claimed that implementing constructivism principles to the PD initiative offered in this study worked efficiently in keeping with studies such as Duffy et al. (2006), Eun (2008), Powell and Bodur (2019), Ruey (2010), and Whitehouse et al. (2006), all of which highlighted that incorporating constructivist principles is crucial to effective PD initiatives.

As a PD initiative which was member-oriented and whose objectives were set via needs analysis before it was initiated, similar to the studies conducted by Akerson et al., (2009) and Owen (2014), the PD initiative in this study can be claimed to have succeeded to meet the requirements of this type of PD to a large extent. As a result of participating in the offered OPD, the participating teachers were enabled to share their ideas and perspectives, as similarly reported in studies by Nishino (2012), Pella (2011), Wynn et al. (2007), to enhance their knowledge of and through various information resources (D'Ardenne et al., 2013; Parker, 2012), to discuss teaching challenges they experience in practice (Graham, 2007), to exchange teaching techniques and strategies through reflection upon good or unsuccessful practices

(Boone, 2010), to extend their subject matter knowledge (Rahman, 2011), to implement newly acquired knowledge into their teaching practice (Aubusson et al., 2007; Hindin et al., 2007).

It was also observed that having being exposed to theoretical and practical material cohered around the themes of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness as well as being placed in a blog mediated community of practice, the participating teachers reported a fair degree of professional growth. The successions of change illustrated in Chapter 4 documented a number of instances of the journey the participating teachers made towards the goal of professional growth through making changes in various dimensions proposed by Evans' PD model. Accordingly, it can be inferred that the PD initiative undertaken in a community of practice contributed to the promotion of the participating teachers' quality of teaching in practice and made productive changes in terms of their students' performance. This conclusion is supported by Armour et al. (2017), and Sato and Haegele (2017), who asserted that professional development is a vital mechanism which enables teachers to ameliorate their teaching practice and consequently promote learning outcomes of their students.

As mentioned earlier, both cognitive apprenticeship and constructive learning as the theoretical bases of this research could be implemented through the use of technology in a community of practice of teachers. Among all Web.2 tools, 'blog' was selected as the medium for delivering the materials thanks to its ease of use as well as reflective and interactive nature which made establishment and maintenance of the involved online community more convenient (Byingtonm, 2011; Deng & Yuen, 2011). Overall, documented in the findings of research question 2, professional growth of the teachers was instigated through behavioral, attitudinal,

and intellectual developmental components according to Evans' (2014) PD model as the result of taking part in a community of practice facilitated by utilizing blog platform. This finding is supported by similar studies which used blogs through different approaches to promote professional learning and development of teachers (e.g. Murugaiah et al., 2010; Bangou & Fleming, 2010; Saeedan, Ashraf & Motallebzadeh, 2015; Tajeddin & Aghababazadeh, 2018; Yadav, 2011; Yang, 2009; Zandi, Thang & Krish, 2014).

## 5.3 Discussion of the Results of Research Question 3

**RQ 3# Perceptions of the participating teachers towards teacher autonomy before and after undertaking the offered online PD initiative**

As a result of data analysis with respect to research question 3, it was inferred that the participating teachers' perceived PD positively influenced their autonomy and confidence in terms of practicing the principles of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness. Vázquez (2018) argued that to promote learner autonomy, teachers need to experience the privileges of autonomy both in their own education and teaching practice.

On the other hand, reflecting on learner autonomy and learner-centeredness theoretically and in abstract may not persuade teachers to appreciate the value of learner autonomy, and consequently will fail to foster teacher autonomy. Thus, taking these issues into consideration, the PD initiatives offered throughout the present study attempted to provide the participating teachers with opportunities to exercise learner-centered instructions which promote autonomy in practice and in the real context.

It can further be deduced that learner autonomy, teacher autonomy, and teacher professional development are basically intertwined and exert influences on each other. In other words, as teacher autonomy is an influential factor on motivation, burnout or stress, job satisfaction, empowerment, and professionalism of teachers (Blase & Kirby, 2000; Brunetti, 2001; Davis & Wilson, 2000; Derakhshan et al., 2020; Dikilitas & Mumford, 2019; Dymoke & Harrison, 2006; Helgøy & Homme, 2007; Kengatharan, 2020; Stockwell & Reinders, 2019), the degree of perceived autonomy by teachers can be interpreted as an indication of their positive or negative reaction to the profession of teaching (Pearson & Hall, 1993) which directly affects learning outcomes of the students.

Given that English language teachers generally experience dilemmas and discrepancies especially in the context of this study, it can be inferred that though participating in the offered OPD, the participating teachers took a substantial step towards developing their general teaching autonomy. As a reaction to the conflict between their real classroom teaching practices on the one hand and their mandatory dependence on the top-down institutional system that exerts power in terms of curriculum-related matters, the participating teachers proved to have developed autonomy to some extent, a similar finding reported in Wermke and Höstfält (2014), as well. In addition, in keeping with Vähäsantanen's (2015) proposition, this PD initiative gave the participating teachers the opportunity to reflect, make choices and decisions, enact upon their reflections, and most importantly, take stances with regard to their work and identity; all of which contribute to the promotion of teacher autonomy. In other words, aligning with Mausethagen and Mølstad (2014), the participating teachers were privileged to apply their autonomous decisions and

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choices into their practice informed by their newly revised, modified, or generally developed knowledge base as a result of going through behavioral, attitudinal, and intellectual professional development.

This study can be claimed to have worked efficiently adhering to the conception of teacher autonomy as the ability and willingness to address the comprehension of student's needs as regards their learning as well as to support students towards development of autonomy, which is an outcome similar to the findings of Reinders and Balcikanli (2011).

## 5.4 Conclusion and Implications

To boost pedagogical transformation in English language teaching, teacher development initiatives are required to address both learner and teacher autonomy. Acknowledging that there is no 'best' approach to develop teachers professionally, each initiative is recommended to be adjusted to the context-specific educational needs of teachers and learners.

In a larger scope, the findings of this study would contribute to the awareness raising of policy makers, curriculum developers, and syllabus designers in the field of English language teacher education both in private and public sectors in the context of this study. Initially, teacher training programs or courses should assume the responsibility of nurturing autonomy in prospective teachers more seriously through introducing autonomy-oriented practicum which gives teacher learners the opportunity to experience autonomy as learners and further implement it into their practice as teachers. Teacher educators/trainers should also cultivate positive attitudes about self-directed and continuous professional development in student

teachers as professional development enables teachers to become reflective practitioners while they become more aware and conscious of their own teaching practice (Desimone, 2009; Guskey 2000). Most importantly, teachers' professional development experience allows them to keep up with the changes taking place in the education system and as a result ensures that their teaching practice remains relevant to their students' needs.

It is noteworthy that this research did not intend to explore the effect of the particular online platform used on the professional growth of the participating teachers. However, as an additionally emerged conclusion, it can be inferred that the medium utilized in the present study, i.e. blog, can be efficiently used along with other means and approaches of PD such as email discussions (DeWert, Babinski & Jones, 2003; Whipp, 2003), virtual workshops (Fisher, Schumaker, Culbertson & Deshler, 2010), online workshops (Fishman et al., 2013), video annotation tools (Rich & Hannafin, 2009), video-based online tasks (Major & Watson, 2018; Santagata,2009), and online forums (Prestridge, 2010), web-based portfolios (Oner & Adadan, 2011), video clubs (Sherin & Van Es, 2009), online video demonstration (Lee, Kinzie & Whittaker, 2012) and social media such as Twitter, Facebook, WeChat, etc. (Ganapathy, Kabilan & Meenakshisundram, 2020; Goodyear, Parker & Casey, 2019; Rosell-Aguilar, 2018; Qi & Wang, 2018).

All in all, relying on the findings of the present study, PD facilitators and teacher educators may be advised to group teachers of similar interests, needs, and challenges, and set up online support initiatives to empower them to face and overcome the existing and potential upcoming challenges in their teaching practice. It would not be wrong to claim that online teaching/learning should not only be

considered as an alternative to traditional teaching/learning but also a potential prospective substitute. In other words, online teaching/learning becomes the only available educational platform in some cases such as the outbreak of a pandemic which confines the accesss of the teachers and students to traditional means of education. In such circumstances, it is on policy makers and teacher educators to answer this question: Are the teachers and students ready for an emergency transition?

## 5.5 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Due to the qualitative nature of the data analysis approach of this study, generalization of the findings and results should be done conservatively. The focus of this study was narrowed to the individual experiences of four in-service EFL teachers working at different language institutions in Iran. Therefore, findings obtained from these participants cannot be generalized to other in-service EFL teachers working in similar contexts. However, the qualitative design of the study and its data analysis approach made investigation of PD perception of each single participating teacher possible, which in turn, yielded a rich descriptive data. Considering that each individual participating teacher's professional growth could be probed through the successions of changes they made in different dimensions as proposed by Evans (2014), it could be inferred that the offered OPD initiative worked effectively even on an individual basis.

It is commonly acknowledged that the nature of qualitative case studies is not context-free and the conclusions can rarely be generalized (Gay et al., 2009). Therefore, it was almost mandatory to adopt a case study approach, which does not seek to generalize as a methodology of inquiry as pointed out by Thomas and

Magilvy (2011), to respond to the research question about the experiences and perceptions of an individual teacher. Nevertheless, we believe that the research process, procedures, and findings of this study have the potential of transferability as the reader may connect and identify with the situation and setting (Gay et al., 2009) depending on the degree of contextual similarities. According to Ragin (2001), each case-oriented research can contribute to the conduct of a series of case studies, that is, each study is building on the previous one.

Evaluating the actual influence of the online professional development initiative on the practices of teachers in the classroom and consequently its impact on the achievement and performance of their learners is not explored systematically through giving tests or class observations. Therefore, relying merely on the stated behavior and perceptions of the participating teachers instead of their actual behavior can be considered another major limitation of the study.

Yet another limitation to be pointed out is that computer literacy of the participating teachers and their access to the Internet was taken for granted. Although they did not receive any formal training on the use of the blog as the online medium employed, they could carry on successfully using the brief guidelines given to them individually by the researcher. However, some cases of inconvenience were reported throughout the use of the online professional development medium in terms of low speed of the Internet, not being able to download or upload certain materials, etc.

The last outstanding limitation which should be admitted is that contrary to the expectations of the researcher, not many threads of discussions were shaped among the participating teachers. There were some signals showing that they generally read

the comments recorded, for example: "I agree with Sarah", "What Lina said is", etc. However, the quality and level of their interaction could not be considered desirable. It is noteworthy that this limitation does not mean to undermine the conclusions regarding the professional growth of the participating teachers because according to Vygotsky (1981, cited in Eun, 2008), "even the most private spheres of human consciousness retain the social nature found in concrete interactions. All mental or internal processes possess social character because even in individually-guided thinking processes, those forms and functions used in social interaction manifest themselves" (p. 143).

## 5.6 Suggestions for Further Studies

First, it is recommended that researchers replicate this study with a larger sample group and incorporate quantitative research design to collect and analyze data with the aim to reach more rigorous and generalizable results. This will also enable the participating teachers to develop a sense of community of practice, and benefit from the dialogues they would be engaged in on topics of inquiry, which was a missing aspect in the present study.

Second, the findings of the present study rely only on self-report measures. Although Yin (2009) considers verbal reports as valid evidence for case studies, in order to achieve more robust conclusions as regards PD of teachers and how their growing PD influences the performance of their students, further research is required to observe the actual behavior of individual teachers, and evaluate their students' achievements through appropriate means and approaches. Moreover, surveying students' perceptions towards their teacher's PD can be recommended for future studies as a way to possibly corroborate the teacher's data. In addition, as another

tool for triangulation of the data, the teachers can be provided with self-assessment checklists to reflect upon and evaluate their own performance formatively while being involved in the process of a certain PD activity.

To end, it can be concluded that as a result of the sudden shift away from the classroom to online platforms due to Covid-19 pandemic, which has severely affected the worldwide education and learning, nothing would remain the same in the post-pandemic era. In this new era, we will observe and also get involved in how teachers' learning and professional development would be shaped and re-shaped, mostly on digital platforms -- not as an alternative but as a necessity. Further studies would definitely look into the new challenges and issues that would emerge out of this.

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**APPENDICES**

# Appendix 1: Interview 1 Questions

A) **General background information**

B) **Professional Development**

1. In your opinion, is professional development a concern for teachers and administrators in your context?

2. Are there any opportunities in the institute you work at for professional development of English language teachers?

3. Do you do anything to develop yourself professionally? If yes, what?

4. What problems and challenges do you face in your attempts to be professionally developed?

5. What resources and tools would be more effective and beneficial to you as means of professional development?

C) **Teacher Autonomy**

1. In your opinion, is teacher autonomy a known concept in your context?

2. What is your definition of teacher autonomy (in its ideal form)?

3. Do you consider yourself autonomous based on your definition? If not, why?

4. What are the factors contributing to autonomy in your teaching context?

5. What are the factors hindering teacher autonomy in your context?

D) **Learner Autonomy**

1. What does learner autonomy mean to you?

2. How do you recognize an autonomous language learner?

3. Do you think your learners have the capacity and willingness to achieve autonomy? Or have they already achieved a level of autonomy based on your definition?

4. The interviewer will use the items proposed in 'Learner Autonomy' questionnaire applied online as prompts to find out why a certain answer has been given to multiple-choice or Likert-scale questions.

# Appendix 2: Interview 2 Questions' Framework

1. **Participants' Reactions**

- Did they like it?

- Was their time well spent?

- Did the material make sense?

- Will it be useful?

- Was the leader knowledgeable and helpful?

2. **Participants' Learning**

- Did participants acquire the intended knowledge and skills?

3. **Organization Support & Change**

- What was the impact on the organization?

- Did it affect the organization's climate and procedures?

4. **Participants' Use of New Knowledge and Skills**

- Did participants effectively apply the new knowledge and skills?

5. **Student Learning Outcomes**

- What was the impact on students?

- Did it affect student performance or achievement?

- Are students more confident as learners?

## Appendix 3: Interview 1 # Sample Transcription

**1: Interviewer**

**2: Interviewee (Anahita)**

1: *Thanks a lot for your time and contribution to this study.*

2: My pleasure!

1: *As the first question, I would like to know a little bit about your educational and professional background.*

2: I am a Master's graduate in ELT. I have been teaching English for 9 years in different private institutes. I have been teaching to students of different levels and ages.

1: *Alright. As you know the study you are participating in is an attempt to develop the participating teachers professionally. In your opinion, is professional development a concern for teachers and administrators in your context?*

2: Well….I think professional development is not very well-known in my context. Most of us might do random efforts like participating in meetings held by the institutes or workshops but I personally didn't know they were ways of professional development. The first time I encountered this concept was in the first questionnaire you sent me. Anyway, professional development is not a concern here. I can claim that the main concern here is money. But, overall, I believe that not all the teachers are only after money. Some of us are just unaware. I think if this concept and the ways of professional development are introduced to us and we are trained we might become more eager to develop ourselves professionally. Now, I think that teaching for me and many of my colleagues has become a habit and routine work.

1: *Ok…I see…So are there any opportunities in the institute you work at for your professional development?*

2: Aaaa…yes and no!

*1: Can you give me some examples?*

2: I mentioned in the previous question that I learned that meeting with colleagues and supervisors is a way of professional development (laughter)! I say YES because they hold meetings one or two times in a semester and say NO because the teachers do not have the feeling that this meeting is for their professional development. The institute pays us for attending these meetings. So it is not obligatory to attend. Whoever is present will be paid. Then there are some teachers who come and sit silently neither listening nor speaking only for getting paid. Yes, only meetings nothing else.

*1: Well, I can conclude that the institute that you are working with at the moment does not pay enough attention to the professional development of its teachers. How about you? Do you do anything to develop yourself professionally?*

2: Not really to be honest. As I said before this concept is new to me.

*1: Have you ever been to a workshop or seminar?*

2: No.

*1: As you might know the Internet as a source of information can be used for professional development through blogs, webinars, social network websites which offer and share teaching and learning information. Do you use the Internet for this purpose?*

2: Well….you know! I do not do anything systematically to develop myself professionally. I use the Internet, yes…but it is limited to finding exercises or information I need to present in the class. I know some pages on Facebook that share

collocations, phrases, or proverbs for example. But I think this is only for my own proficiency or general English though I might use them in the class.

*1: Why don't you care about your professional development?*

2: Because nobody cares about me as a teacher (laughter)! It's not only about financial matters which are important but also a teacher needs attention, needs to be trained, needs to be informed. If someone is not a teaching lover like me and does not do anything for her professional development it is the responsibility of the institute I think.

*1: Yes, you are right to some extent but I believe that as a teacher you are responsible to your learners as regards the knowledge and information you share with them and how you treat them, motivate them, and help them to become efficient autonomous learners. Anyway, although you just said that you are not doing much regarding your professional development what resources and tools do you think would be more effective and beneficial to you as means of professional development?*

2: Aaaaaa…It is difficult to answer this question because I do not have much experience. Let me think……I….think….. Could you please name some of….I lost my concentration (laughter)?

*1: Sure! For example, conferences and seminars, workshops, webinars, online websites, blogs, meetings with colleagues and experts…*

2: Ok, ok….now I think if I want to choose I prefer the online or web-based ones.

*1: Could you please tell me why?*

2: I don't know why but I think seminars are boring (laughter). Meetings with colleagues are good but you know usually nothing valuable is exchanged. In our meetings my colleagues and I talk about lack of facilities, payment raise, scheduling classes and these types of things. It's rarely an exchange of

knowledge….yeah….and….so I suppose online courses or web-based programs would be better for me because I have my privacy. It's only me. I can choose what to search and work at my own pace…and….I…I can preserve my individuality. Although…you know…. I have to add that I'm not that good at technology but I prefer it to the other ways of professional development.

*1: Ok, now….let's change the topic of our interview…..teacher autonomy. Is teacher autonomy a known concept in your context?*

2: Teacher autonomy?? What's that? (laughter). I'm sorry to say that I don't have any idea!

*1: Well…then I'm not sure if we can continue with this topic (laughter). Would you like to think about it a little bit?*

2: Yes…please.

*1: Alright.*

2: Ok, I can say that teacher autonomy means an independent teacher who is a leader herself or himself.

*1: Good, yes…. Can you describe an autonomous teacher in its ideal form?*

2: I really have no idea. I had never heard about it…never thought about it. Sorry!

*1: No, no…it's ok…don't worry. Now, I'm going to read a definition of teacher* autonomy for you. Ok?

2: Ok, good! I'm listening.

*1: "Although the concept was viewed as a unitary concept in the past, it is recently decomposed into six distinct subcomponents: autonomy over curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, professional development, student discipline, and classroom environment". Ok….now…does this definition give you an insight?*

2: Yeah…it's much better now (laughter).

*1: Good…do you consider yourself autonomous based on this definition?*

2: I can say no firmly!

*1: Why?*

2: Aaaaa, if I remember right the first one was curriculum, yes?

*1: Yes, right.*

2: I think in our institutes we do not even know what is the base of what we teach….aaaa…I mean nobody tells us or we don't ask what the purpose of doing this or that, teaching this or that is…you know what I mean?

*1: Yes.*

2: So….how can I be autonomous in that respect?

*1: Ok, how about other elements?*

2: Could you please repeat? Sorry!

*1: Sure! Assessment, professional development, student discipline, and classroom environment.*

2: Ok…I think assessment is similar to curriculum. The exams and quizzes are prepared. They are sent from the center. I have to confess that I was happy because I didn't have to do it myself…you know?....but sometimes I think that some questions do not match with what I have taught in the class or the test does not address the important things or the points that are more challenging for my students. But I think even if they ask me to prepare a test I'm not knowledgeable enough. I have passed a few testing courses at university but they were only theoretical…you know?....I'm not confident to do that. So being autonomous in assessment is both good and bad for someone like me who is not trained.

*1: How about informal assessments? Do you have any criteria for evaluating your students?*

2: Not really. You know why?

*1: Why?*

2: Because the evaluation I do is not reflected in the final results. I do informal assessments as you said but I do not have any criteria or I don't record them anywhere.

*1: How about the other elements? Classroom environment and student discipline?*

2: Well….I think yes. I am autonomous to a large extent.  But our classrooms are so small and we don't have many facilities so there is not much I can do. And about discipline….aaaa….it depends on the age of the students. Sometimes I set some rules and regulations especially for teenagers. So far I have not had any big issues but I have seen my colleagues that refer to the manager for the issues they cannot handle or the students or parents do not count them autonomous enough to decide.

*1: Ok…from what you said I can infer that you are not autonomous as a teacher. Am I right?*

2: Yes.

*1: What are the factors hindering teacher autonomy in your context?*

2: Well….. There are many things. First of all I think we don't know what teacher autonomy is so how can we become autonomous when we don't have any idea about it. I don't want to be pessimistic but it is the reality.

*1: Alright….let's imagine that the teachers in your context know what teacher autonomy is. Do you think they would try to be autonomous? Do they care?*

2: Hmmmm….I don't think so.

*1: Why?*

2: Because the general attitude is that we are not responsible for everything related to our job or education….I mean…for example…most of us feel that we are in the class to present what is in the book. We do not choose or decide on many things.

*1: I see.*

2: Ok, this is the attitude and even if we want to change this attitude and ask the teachers to …..for example…to involve in making decisions about curriculum or preparing tests….most of them are not willing to….

*1: You mean there is lack of motivation?*

2: Yes, exactly. Financial matters are very important. Teachers are not paid very well so they don't want to accept much responsibility. And above all, I think….aaaa…that teachers should be trained to become autonomous. They should be informed. Many of them are like me….I bet they have no idea what teacher autonomy is.

*1: Ok, now…let me see….now we are going to change the topic from teachers to learners. What does learner autonomy mean to you?*

2: Hmmm….learner autonomy means….in my opinion…..the ability of a learner to learn independently and aaaa….knowing what to do to learn better.

*1: Ok, good. Then how do you recognize an autonomous language learner? Can you describe?*

2: Well….an autonomous learner can work independently, can find out his or her weaknesses and strengths.

*1: Alright! Based on your description do you consider your own learners autonomous?*

2: Aaaa….no! Most of them are not…no.

*1: Ok, do you think they don't have the capacity and willingness to achieve autonomy?*

2: No, no! I think they have the capacity….the problem is that they don't know how to become autonomous just like me. We talked about my autonomy as a teacher. I think it's the same. Nobody teaches them or ask them to be autonomous. You know our students are brought up in a school system which is led by teachers.

1: *You mean it is teacher-centered rather than learner-centered.*

2: Yes exactly. The students listen to the teacher and do what the teacher asks them to do.

1: *Is this the case in language institutes as well?*

2: I…think…..not exactly but to some extent yes.

1: *What are the differences?*

2: Here the teachers are more flexible I think and above all a large majority of learners especially adults are in the class willingly. So…I mean….they have a goal and they try to achieve it.

1: *Ok...do you think that age affects autonomy of the learners?*

2: Yes, I think so. Younger learners need more help. They cannot do things on their own.

1: *Ok. What do you do to train autonomous learners?*

2: Well…I have to confess that it has never been a goal for me as a teacher. You know sometimes I feel tired and fed up and ask myself why….why I have to tell them…I mean teach them everything, check everything with them in the class….do the workbook activity in the class…you know? The first time I heard this word was in one of the questionnaires I filled for your project (laughter)! You know it's not my student's fault. It's not my fault either.

1: *Whose fault is it then (laughter)?*

2: The system. First of all the educational system in our public schools, then the teacher trainers and administrators.

1: *Alright! Now what is the solution? What should be done?*

2: You know, first of all the institute's administrators should be updated. For example, in one of the institutes I work at the moment the manager is a graduate of….of….economics or something similar and does not know anything about English and teaching. Recently they have appointed an educational supervisor. I believe it is the administrators' responsibility to update their teachers. Because for example I have taken a short training course 7-8 years ago….you know…many things have changed. Someone should be there to inform us.

1: *Now we can have a flash back to the previous topic teacher autonomy. An autonomous teacher is willing to update herself and finds a way to do so. Am I right?*

2: Yes.

1: *So you are not autonomous in this respect (laughter).*

2: Yes (laughter).

1: *Ok, therefore I can infer that you have not done any systematic effort to teach or help your learners to become autonomous. Let me ask the question another way…..do you ever engage your learners in decision making?*

2: Decision about what?

1: *About the issues like the activity they need to do in the class or at home, …aaaa… about the topics to be discussed or written, their assessment, or for example the arrangement of the class…*

2: Aha, Even I cannot decide about the things you said (laughter).

1: *Really? (Laughter)*

2: No but for example assessment. The final test is sent from the center as I said before. Or for example there is nothing except some chairs in the class to be arranged (Laughter). But about the topics of discussion….yes…aaaa….sometimes yes.

1: *Do you think that out of class activities would help learners to become autonomous?*

2: What kind of activities do you mean?

1: *For example doing a research, watching films, communicating with other classmates through the Internet in English….*

2: Yes, yes, sure!

1: *Ok then, what do you suggest them to do out of class?*

2: I ask them to watch films but it is not an assignment ….aaa…or I ask them to find information on the Internet but you know this is not for young learners.

1: *Ok, I see.*

2: Younger students I can say do nothing out of class…yes…only their workbook.

1: *Alright! Do you do any pair or group work in the class?*

2: Yes, of course!

1: *Do you think they enjoy and learn? Do you think it helps them to develop autonomy?*

2: Hmmm….well…yes.

1: *How do you know?*

2: Because I see that they ask the better ones and they discuss but if they cannot resolve a problem or…..or….when they do not agree with each other they ask me. Is this learner autonomy…aaa ….I mean does it help?

*1: Yes, definitely!*

2: (Laughter) So I'm doing something for them to become autonomous.

*1: Yes (laughter)!Ok….I suppose we are done! Thank you once again for your time.*

2: You are welcome!

# Appendix 4: Interview 2 # Sample Transcription

**1: Interviewer**

**2: Interviewee (Lina)**

*1: Hello and thank you for your participation in this study. You have done one interview, three questionnaires and have left your comments on the blog.*

2: Yes

*1: Now it's time to…aaa… kind of evaluate what has been done throughout this process. As the first question, I would like to ask if you liked the blog as a medium of learning and its content.*

2: Yes, it was a different experience for me. I had participated in many workshops and one webinar before but this blog was different. I don't know if it was intended but I call it a more individualistic activity which could be done any time I decided to. I have mentioned before that I like sharing ideas and experiences.

*1: How about the content?*

2: I can say confidently that I enjoyed reading and watching every single post. Some of them were mind refreshing; some of them were totally new ideas giving me insights. Overall, there was nothing I feel sorry for spending my time.

*1: Glad to hear that. Did you get the chance to go over all the postings?*

2: Yes, I read all the articles though I'm not interested in reading. But I watched all the videos. Sometimes I watched a video at a time then got busy doing something else and forgot to leave a comment but I made some notes for myself while watching to be used later.

*1: Could you please name some of the materials you liked more?*

2: Aaaa…I preferred the ones which focused on new teaching techniques…I mean the ones which were more practical especially in our context.

1: *How useful did you find the materials?*

2: If I have a flash back to the very beginning I can say that first of all I got more acquainted with some concepts such as teacher autonomy and started looking at them from a different perspective. For me who has been running a language institute for a couple of years it was like a trigger. Now, I would like to make my teachers familiar with this concept, to help them know themselves and their ability and above all their status better. They should know that they are not performers only; they can and should be involved in making decisions beyond the walls of their classrooms. But there is a big but here….

1: *What's that?*

2: This might remain at the level of awareness because our teachers are not trained enough for being involved in making decisions about for example curriculum or syllabus.

1: *Yes, right. And as a teacher….did the materials help you in any ways?*

2: Yes, of course!

1: *Could you please give some examples?*

2: Yes….in addition to the things I had never heard about or practiced in the class, most of the videos gave me the opportunity to compare and contrast what they are doing…I mean other teachers in different places of the world with what I do. Finding the similarities was encouraging in that I'm doing the right thing and the differences made me think of new ways and solutions to overcome the existing limitations and deficiencies in my context.

*1: Alright, so far…based on what you said, can I infer that you have developed an awareness of the concepts of teacher and learner autonomy?*

2: Yes, definitely! Both of them especially teacher autonomy which is less …aaaa…less addressed let's say in my context.

*1: How about learner autonomy?*

2: Yes. You know I had read about teacher-centered and learner-centered teaching but I saw their differences in reality through the videos. I have been doing some of the techniques to engage my students in decision making and generally in the process of their learning but I have learned many new things to be a better learner-centered teacher and help my students to develop autonomy.

*1: Can you give me an example?*

2: Aaaaa…for example, the technique of dictogloss or…or different techniques of giving instant feedback.

*1: There were some posts about teaching and learning theories, how did you like them?*

2: Actually I had read them while I was a student but I found them easier to understand because I think I could feel them when they were described or…or depicted by videos.

*1: How about knowing your students' types and learning styles?*

2: It's easy to speak about it in theory. Things are different in reality. You know what I mean? It is an essential and fundamental skill. A teacher should be able to know her students' learning styles and different types of learners but how and what to the next are the questions to be answered.

*1: Do you mean you have not acquired that skill yet?*

2: No, I'm afraid!

*1: As far as I know and as implied in your first interview as well as the comments you have left on the blog, you have a good interaction with your students and do many things to motivate them. Did any of the materials posted help you to improve these abilities?*

2: Yes, I think so.

*1: Could you please explain?*

2: I saw in the videos that the teachers are more easy-going compared to the teachers here. This makes the class more dynamic when there is more participation of the students while the teacher is playing the role of a leader rather than a ruling teacher. As a result of getting this insight I have tried to increase the amount of peer interaction in group works and my own individual interaction with them. For example, I join the groups as a member in turn and they feel that I'm one of them and they communicate with me more and more.

*1: We also had some posts about how to motivate learners. Were any of them practical in your context?*

2: Yes, the good thing was that I was already practicing some of them and by reading them on the blog I made sure that I have been on the right path. I found that the way I interact with them goes hand in hand with motivating them as I said I started to create a more personalized environment or by making them more engaged as much as possible. The thing I loved and started doing was encouraging them to set their own short-term goals. This tip was superb.

*1: Well done! How about integration of technology?*

2: Because I'm kind of addicted to technology myself and as I see it is a fad nowadays, It's been a long time that I have been integrating technology to my teaching like asking them to search about the topic we gonna discuss the next session

on the Internet. Sometimes I send them some material through email. But I have been doing this in my advanced classes. I suppose I should extend it somehow to the lower levels as well. I think creating a blog similar to what you did would be a good idea. I can control both the content and participation of the students. I might start one soon!

*1: The last objective tried to be achieved is developing the ability to utilize means of evaluation and assessment which are contributing to learner autonomy. How do you evaluate your ability now?*

2: Actually because I love the issue of assessment and consider myself as an expert I suppose I need more advanced materials. But as a supervisor I used the materials you posted in one of the meetings I had with some colleagues….less experienced ones.

*1: All right. How about your students? Have you tried to teach them to monitor their learning?*

2: Yes, I have been doing it since a few years ago. I have designed a check list and ask each student to evaluate his or her performance based on those criteria. It is very useful.

*1: The last topic to discuss is the effect of what we have done throughout this study on the performance and achievement of your students. Do you think your learning and the attempt you made to develop yourself professionally have had any impact your students and….and their autonomy?*

2: Yes, of course. I have mentioned some points already. I tried to practice many of the things I saw in the videos in my class which in turn affected my students. In general, I can say that the atmosphere of my classes is changed and is more learner friendly…let's say. The first best thing I did was asking them to define their goals at the beginning of the semester. They are more involved in making class decisions. They have been encouraged to trust each other…I mean their peers more. What else?

Aaa…they are assigned more out of class activities. Because they are not restricted to the book as they used to be, they find topics for discussion or writing on the Internet voluntarily and suggest in the class then everyone is involved in making the decision. They have learned to give each other feedback and help each other improve. Enough?

*1: Yes, Thank you. And the last question. Did this online activity help you to become more autonomous and develop yourself professionally?*

2: It's an easy-peasy yes. I improved my knowledge in many different aspects both in theory and practice. I had the opportunity of getting familiar with a new…a new medium of learning and above all I'm more motivated now. I mean I would like to expand my knowledge and transfer it to the teachers who work at my institute.

# Appendix 5: Needs Analysis Questionnaire

# Needs Analysis Questionnaire

Dear Colleague,

You are kindly invited to complete the following questionnaire which is a component of a research study investigating the effects of an online training/learning program on the professional development of in-service teachers.
It may take 20-30 minutes of your time. Please make sure you have responded all the questions.

Thank you for your cooperation.

\* Required

## A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION
Please choose the appropriate response and/or fill in the blanks below:

1. 1. Sex *

   *Mark only one oval.*

   ⬭ Male

   ⬭ Female

2. 2. Age *

   *Mark only one oval.*

   ⬭ 20-30

   ⬭ 30-40

   ⬭ 40-50

   ⬭ 50s or more

3.    3. Education *

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Associate

◯ Bachelor

◯ Master

◯ PhD.

4.    3.a. Major (please specify) *

_____

5.    4. How many years have you been teaching? *

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ 1-5

◯ 6-10

◯ 11-15

◯ More than 16

6.    5. What level(s) do you currently teach? (beginner, pre-elementary, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, advanced ) *

_____

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7.    6. What English proficiency certificate (if any) do you hold? *

*Mark only one oval.*

⬭ TOEFL

⬭ IELTS

⬭ SAT

⬭ TOEIC

⬭ Other: _____

8.    7. Before starting your profession as a teacher, have you taken any teacher training courses (TTC)? *

*Mark only one oval.*

⬭ Yes

⬭ No

9.    7. a If you answered 'Yes', please explain:

• When was it?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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10.    7. b If you answered 'Yes', please explain:

       • By which institution or organization (e.g. a private institute, ministry of education, British Council, etc.) was it held?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

11.    7. c If you answered 'Yes', please explain:

       • How long did it last?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

12.    7. d If you answered 'Yes', please explain:

       • What was the content of the training course?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

13.    7. e If you answered 'Yes', please explain:

      • How beneficial did you find the course? (Please provide reasons for your response)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

14.    8. Are you currently participating in any professional development programs? *

      *Mark only one oval.*

      ◯ Yes   (Go to 8.a)

      ◯ No    (Go to 8.b)

15.    8. a If you answered "Yes", please explain what type of program it is.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

16.    8. b If you answered "No", are you interested in participating in any professional development programs ?

      *Mark only one oval.*

      ◯ Yes

      ◯ No

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17.    8.b.1 Please indicate your reason(s):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

18.    9. Are you familiar with any of the following professional development programs?

*Mark only one oval per row.*

|  | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| a. Workshops | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| b. Conferences | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| c. Professional learning community with educational supervisors | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| d. Professional learning community with colleaques | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| e. Online courses via Wikis | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| f. Online courses via Moodles | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| g. Online courses via Blogs | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| h. Online courses via Webquests | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| i. Webinars (Web-based Seminars) | ⬭ | ⬭ |

19.   10. Please rate the influence of the following means or tools of professional development if you have experienced or used them.

Note: Please check the 'No experience' box for the items you have not used or experienced.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

|  | No experience | Not influential | Somewhat influential | Very influential |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Personal contact with experts | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| b. Meetings with colleagues | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| c. Participating in special interest groups | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| d. Training workshops | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| e. Attending conferences | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| f. Conducting internet search | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| g. Scientific studies and research in ELT (e.g. MA thesis) | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| h. Online specialty newsletters and periodicals | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| i. Paper specialty newsletters and periodicals | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| j. Web or video conferencing | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| k. Online courses for teachers (Blogs, Wikies, Moodles, WebQuests, etc.) | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| l. Online ELT sources (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Webinars etc) | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |

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20.    11. In general, how often do you use the Internet?
       Please indicate your approximate weekly use.

       _____

21.    12. Do you use the Internet for your own learning and personal professional
       development (e.g. English proficiency, teaching techniques, etc.) *

       *Mark only one oval.*

       ( ) Yes (Go to 12.a)
       ( ) No

22.    12.a When I use the Internet for my own learning and personal professional
       development, I feel that use of the Internet enables me to.....

       _____
       _____
       _____
       _____
       _____

23.    13. When you use the Internet for your own learning or professional development,
       what challenges do you face?

       _____
       _____
       _____
       _____
       _____

       B. NEEDS          Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the statements
       ANALYSIS          below.
                         1. To develop myself professionally, I would like to know/learn the following
                         better:

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24.  a) Teaching theories

*Mark only one oval.*

- ( ) Strongly disagree
- ( ) Disagree
- ( ) Neither agree nor disagree
- ( ) Agree
- ( ) Strongly Agree

25.  b) Teaching practices (methods, techniques, and strategies)

*Mark only one oval.*

- ( ) Strongly disagree
- ( ) Disagree
- ( ) Neither agree nor disagree
- ( ) Agree
- ( ) Strongly Agree

26.  c) Learning theories

*Mark only one oval.*

- ( ) Strongly disagree
- ( ) Disagree
- ( ) Neither agree nor disagree
- ( ) Agree
- ( ) Strongly Agree

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27.      d) Learner types

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Strongly disagree

◯ Disagree

◯ Neither agree nor disagree

◯ Agree

◯ Strongly Agree

28.      e) Learning styles

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Strongly disagree

◯ Disagree

◯ Neither agree nor disagree

◯ Agree

◯ Strongly Agree

29.      f) Language course planning and syllabus design

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Strongly disagree

◯ Disagree

◯ Neither agree nor disagree

◯ Agree

◯ Strongly Agree

30.     g) Learners' needs analysis

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Strongly disagree

◯ Disagree

◯ Neither agree nor disagree

◯ Agree

◯ Strongly Agree

31.     h) Skills to interact with learners effectively

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Strongly disagree

◯ Disagree

◯ Neither agree nor disagree

◯ Agree

◯ Strongly Agree

32.     i) Skills to motivate learners

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Strongly disagree

◯ Disagree

◯ Neither agree nor disagree

◯ Agree

◯ Strongly Agree

33. j) Classroom management strategies

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Strongly disagree

◯ Disagree

◯ Neither agree nor disagree

◯ Agree

◯ Strongly Agree

34. k) Useful teaching materials

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Strongly disagree

◯ Disagree

◯ Neither agree nor disagree

◯ Agree

◯ Strongly Agree

35. l) How to integrate technology into my teaching

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Strongly disagree

◯ Disagree

◯ Neither agree nor disagree

◯ Agree

◯ Strongly Agree

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36. m) Evaluation and assessment issues and approaches

*Mark only one oval.*

- ◯ Strongly disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Neither agree nor disagree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

37. 2. What are some of your difficulties or challenges regarding developing yourself professionally?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

38. 3. What topics would you like to be offered if you are engaged in a professional development program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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# Appendix 6: Teaching Autonomy Questionnaire

## Teaching Autonomy

Dear Colleague,

You are invited to kindly complete the following questionnaire which is a component of a research study investigating the effects of an online medium of professional development on in-service teachers with a focus on learner and teacher autonomy.
It may take 10 minutes of your time. Please make sure you have responded all the questions.

\* Required

### A) Background Information
Please choose the appropriate response and/or fill in the blanks below:

**1. Gender: \***

○ Male

○ Female

**2. Age \***

○ 20-29

○ 30-39

○ 40-49

○ 50s or more

**3. Education** *

○ Associate

○ Bachelor

○ Master

○ PhD

3.a Major (Please specify):

Your answer

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## B) Teaching Autonomy Scale *

| | Definitely true | More or less true | More or less false | Definitely false |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I am free to be creative in my teaching approach. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 2. The selection of student-learning activities in my class is under my control. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 3. Standards of behavior in my classroom are set primarily by myself. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 4. My job allows for much discretion on my part. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 5. In my teaching I use my own guidelines and procedures. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 6. In my situation I have little say over the content and skills that are selected for teaching. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 7. The scheduling of use of time in my classroom is under my control. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

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8. My teaching focuses on those goals and objectives I select myself.

9. I seldom use alternative procedures in my teaching.

○　　　○　　　○　　　○

10. I follow my own guidelines on instruction.

○　　　○　　　○　　　○

11. In my situation I have only limited latitude in how major problems are solved.

○　　　○　　　○　　　○

12. What I teach in my class is determined for the most part by myself.

○　　　○　　　○　　　○

13. In my class I have little control over how classroom space is used.

○　　　○　　　○　　　○

14. The materials I use in my class are chosen for the most part by myself.

○　　　○　　　○　　　○

15. The evaluation and assessment activities used in my class are selected by people other than myself.

○　　　○　　　○　　　○

○　　　○　　　○　　　○

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16. I select the teaching methods and strategies I use with my students.

17. I have little say over the scheduling of use of time in my classroom.
    ○        ○        ○        ○

18. The content and skills taught in my class are those I select.
    ○        ○        ○        ○

Submit

Google Forms

# Appendix 7: Learner Autonomy Questionnaire

## Learner Autonomy Questionnaire

Dear Colleague,

You are invited to kindly complete the following questionnaire which is a component of a research study investigating the effects of an online training/learning program on the professional development of in-service teachers with a focus on learner autonomy.
It may take 30-40 minutes of your time. Please make sure you have responded all the questions.

As the term 'Learner Autonomy' suggests, it is the ability to take charge of one's learning, to have and to hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning (Holec, 1981). Holec lists the specific decisions as follows:
■ determining the objectives for learning
■ defining the contents and progressions
■ selecting methods and techniques to be used
■ monitoring the procedure of acquisition
■ evaluating what has been acquired.

Having this simple definition in mind, I would like you to answer the questions below as regards your own beliefs concerning 'Learner Autonomy'.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Anoosheh Behroozi
PhD Candidate
Department of English Language Teaching
Faculty of Education
Eastern Mediterranean University
Famagusta, North Cyprus
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Tel: (+90) 533 870 54 96

* Required

### Section 1: Learner Autonomy

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Please give your opinion about the statements below by ticking ONE answer for each. The statements are NOT just about your current job and in answering you should consider your experience as a language teacher MORE GENERALLY.

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Language learners of all ages can develop learner autonomy. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 2. Independent study in a self-access center (e.g. library, computer center, etc ) is an activity which develops learner autonomy. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 3. Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete tasks alone. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 4. Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 5. Individuals | | | | | |

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who lack
autonomy are
not likely to be          ○          ○          ○          ○          ○
effective
language
learners.

6.    Autonomy
can develop
most effectively
through learning          ○          ○          ○          ○          ○
outside the
classroom.

7.    Involving
learners in
decisions about
what to learn             ○          ○          ○          ○          ○
promotes
learner
autonomy.

8.  Learner
autonomy
means learning            ○          ○          ○          ○          ○
without a
teacher.

9.    It is harder
to promote
learner
autonomy with
proficient                ○          ○          ○          ○          ○
language
learners than it
is with
beginners.

10.    It is
possible to
promote learner
autonomy with
both young                ○          ○          ○          ○          ○
language
learners and
with adults.

11.    Confident
language

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learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence.

○     ○     ○     ○     ○

12. Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more effectively than they otherwise would.

○     ○     ○     ○     ○

13. Learner autonomy can be achieved by learners of all cultural backgrounds.

○     ○     ○     ○     ○

14. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they do.

○     ○     ○     ○     ○

15. Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centred classrooms.

○     ○     ○     ○     ○

16. Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other.

○     ○     ○     ○     ○

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17. Learner autonomy implies a rejection of traditional teacher-led ways of teaching.

18. Learner autonomy cannot develop without the help of the teacher.

19. Learner autonomy is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together.

20. Learner autonomy is only possible with adult learners.

21. Learner autonomy is promoted by independent work in a self-access centre.

22. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed.

23. Learner autonomy is a concept which is not suited to

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non-Western learners.

24. Learner autonomy requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher.

○      ○      ○      ○      ○

25. Co-operative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy.

○      ○      ○      ○      ○

26. Promoting autonomy is easier with beginning language learners than with more proficient learners.

○      ○      ○      ○      ○

27. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials.

○      ○      ○      ○      ○

28. Learner-centered classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy.

○      ○      ○      ○      ○

29. Learning how to learn is key to

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... developing learner autonomy.

30. Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy.

31. Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy.

32. The ability to monitor one's learning is central to learner autonomy.

33. Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.

34. The proficiency of a language learner does not affect their ability to develop autonomy.

35. The teacher has an important role to play in

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supporting
learner
autonomy.

36.  Learner
autonomy has a
positive effect
on success as a
language
learner.

37.  To become
autonomous,
learners need to
develop the
ability to
evaluate their
own learning.

Section 2: Desirability and Feasibility of Learner Autonomy

Below there is a set of statements. They give examples of decisions LEARNERS might be involved in. For each statement say how DESIRABLE (i.e. ideally) you feel it is if learners are involved in decisions about:

| | Undesirable | Slightly desirable | Quite desirable | Very desirable |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.a. The objectives of a course | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 1.b. The materials used | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 1.c. The kinds of tasks and activities they do | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 1.d. The topics discussed | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 1.e. How learning is assessed | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 1.f. The teaching methods used | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 1.g. Classroom management | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |

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Below there is a set of statements. They give examples of decisions LEARNERS might be involved in. For each statement say how FEASIBLE (i.e. realistically achievable) you think it is for the learners to be involved in decisions about:

|  | Unfeasible | Slightly feasible | Quite feasible | Very feasible |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.h. The objectives of a course | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 1.i. The materials used | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 1.j. The kinds of tasks and activities they do | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 1.k. The topics discussed | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 1.l. How learning is assessed | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 1.m. The teaching methods used | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 1.n. Classroom management | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

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Below there is a set of statements. It lists abilities that LEARNERS might have. For each statement say how DESIRABLE (i.e. ideally) you feel it is if learners have the ability to:

| | Undesirable | Slightly desirable | Quite desirable | Very desirable |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2.a. Identify their own needs | O | O | O | O |
| 2.b. Identify their own strengths | O | O | O | O |
| 2.c. Identify their own weaknesses | O | O | O | O |
| 2.d. Monitor their progress | O | O | O | O |
| 2.e. Evaluate their own learning | O | O | O | O |
| 2.f. Learn co-operatively | O | O | O | O |
| 2.g. Learn independently | O | O | O | O |

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Below there is a set of statements. It lists abilities that learners might have. For each statement say how FEASIBLE (i.e. realistically achievable) you think it is for LEARNERS to have the ability to:

| | Unfeasible | Slightly feasible | Quite feasible | Very feasible |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2.h. Identify their own needs | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 2.i. Identify their own strengths | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 2.j. Identify their own weaknesses | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 2.k. Monitor their progress | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 2.l. Evaluate their own learning | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 2.m. Learn co-operatively | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| 2.n. Learn independently | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |

## Section 3: Your Learners and Your Teaching

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1. To what extent do you agree with the following statement? Choose ONE answer: In general, the students to whom I teach English have a fair degree of learner autonomy.

◯ Strongly disagree

◯ Disagree

◯ Unsure

◯ Agree

◯ Strongly agree

Please comment on why you feel the way you do about your students' general degree of autonomy:

Your answer

2. To what extent do you agree with the following statement? Choose ONE answer: In general, in teaching English, I give my students opportunities to develop learner autonomy.

◯ Strongly disagree

◯ Disagree

◯ Unsure

◯ Agree

◯ Strongly agree

Please comment. You may want to explain why and how you promote autonomy, if you do, or to explain why developing learner autonomy is not an issue you focus on in your work:

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Your answer

## Section 4: About Yourself
Please choose the appropriate response and/or fill in the blanks below:

*

1. Gender:

○ Male

○ Female

*

2. Age

○ 20-30

○ 30-40

○ 40-50

○ 50s or more

*

3. Education

○ Associate

○ Bachelor

○ Master

○ PhD

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3.a Major (Please specify):

Your answer

---

*

4. Years of experience as an English language teacher:

○ 1-5

○ 6-10

○ 11-15

○ 16-20

○ More than 20

---

*

5. What level(s) do you currently teach? (beginner, pre-elementary, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, advanced )

Your answer

---

*

6. What English proficiency certificate(s) (if any) do you hold?

Your answer

\*

7. Please provide your name or a pseudonym to be used throughout the process of data collection and analysis.

Your answer

---

**Thank you for your time and cooperation.**

Reference:

Holec, H. (1981). Autonomy in foreign language learning . Oxford: Pergamon.

---

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## Appendix 8: Blog's Snapshots

**Notes:**     *Postings and comments are chosen randomly.

*Celestine was given another pseudonym as Lina to be easier to type

throughout the dissertation.

*Maryam and Mahtab refer to the same person. She had to change her

name due to some login issues.

**Snapshot 1**

**Snapshot 2**



# 4. Teacher Autonomy and Learner Autonomy

Posted on March 9, 2015

In the comments on the previous posts, some of you have implied the importance of teacher autonomy which is a critical factor affecting the development of learner autonomy. Following you will read a short excerpt from an article (attached), which addresses the relationship between teacher and learner autonomy:

It is of vital importance to understand the dynamic relationship between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy. They are interrelated and interactive. To put it specifically, in order to understand and instruct learners, teachers become involved in various activities, asking questions which are helpful in increasing students' awareness of autonomous learning.

"Teachers also need to constantly reflect on their own role in the classroom, monitoring the extent to which they constrain or scaffold students' thinking and behavior, so as to engage students in autonomous and effective learning". According to different circumstances, teachers' management of autonomy vary respectively.

However, as Little (1991) points out that learner autonomy does not mean "learning without a teacher (at home, with a computer, in a self-access center, etc.), and/or that it does away with the need for a teacher. Instead, learner autonomy concerns a capacity (for taking control of learning) which can be cultivated and explored in a number of ways and situations, especially in the classroom with the help of teacher autonomy. Voller

**Snapshot 3**



# 5. Teacher Autonomy (Finland)

Posted on March 12, 2015

The following video is a short interview with some teachers talking about their autonomy.

Please watch and compare their perceptions and views with yours. Is your classroom your KINGDOM?



This entry was posted in Uncategorized by anooaheh8160. Bookmark the permalink.

3 THOUGHTS ON "5. TEACHER AUTONOMY (FINLAND)"

maryamm2015 on March 12, 2015 at 12:51 pm said:

As you know, every institute has got its own programs, so I am not a king of my classes, but I

**Snapshot 4**



# 8) Best classroom techniques (Part 1)

Posted on April 8, 2015

**Search**

**Recent Posts**

- 57) Classroom management strategies for difficult students
- 56) Classroom management strategies-1
- 55) Mixed-ability teaching
- 54) Online videos
- 53) Blogs

**Recent Comments**

- mahtabb on 43) Motivating Language Learners to Succeed (Sevtap Karaoglu, 2008)
- mahtabb on 52) Integrating technology into the classroom
- Mahtab on 1. Professional Development
- anahita on 51) Strategies for teaching reading- 2
- anahita on 52) Integrating technology into the classroom

**Archives**

- January 2016
- December 2015
- November 2015
- October 2015
- September 2015
- August 2015

In the two video clips in posts 8 & 9, a number of ELT experts and teachers are asked to share their top tips as regards best classroom techniques. Please watch and tell us which one you like the best and what YOUR recommended best technique is.

This entry was posted in Uncategorized by anoosheh8160. Bookmark the permalink.

8 THOUGHTS ON "8) BEST CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES (PART 1)"

Edit

**Welcome!**

Welcome to your brand new blog!

This is a sidebar and can be changed in Widgets in your dashboard.

You can also modify number of sidebars in theme options!

celestine on April 14, 2015 at 6:59 am said:

I love it when teachers share their favorite techniques and I've gotta say I loved all the techniques mentions in the clips. However, I would like to bring a number of them to our attention here. I start with knowing whatever presentation material

---

**Snapshot 5**

**Search**

# 20) Posters

Posted on July 27, 2015

**Recent Posts**

- 57) Classroom management strategies for difficult students
- 56) Classroom management strategies-1
- 55) Mixed-ability teaching
- 54) Online videos
- 53) Blogs

**Recent Comments**

- mahtabb on 43) Motivating Language Learners to Succeed (Sevtap Karaoglu, 2008)
- mahtabb on 52) Integrating technology into the classroom
- Mahtab on 1. Professional Development
- anahita on 51) Strategies for teaching reading- 2
- anahita on 52) Integrating technology into the classroom

**Archives**

- January 2016
- December 2015
- November 2015
- October 2015
- September 2015

If you would like to observe individual performances of your students and you do not have enough time in your class, you can ask each student to prepare a poster individually and record his/her presentation like the following video.



This entry was posted in Uncategorized by anoosheh8160. Bookmark the permalink.

ONE THOUGHT ON "20) POSTERS"

Edit

**Welcome!**

Welcome to your brand new blog!

This is a sidebar and can be changed in Widgets in your dashboard.

You can also modify number of sidebars in theme options!

anahita on August 17, 2015 at 9:07 pm said:

Involving parents and using technology are two good points of this activity. This would work for the learners who are shy and more introvert and do not

**Snapshoot 6**



**Snapshoot 7**

## Snapshot 8: Sarah

**Categories**

- Uncategorized

**Meta**

- Site Admin
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- Entries RSS
- Comments RSS
- Edublogs - free blogs for education

learning and of the complex, shifting interrelationship between teacher and learner roles in the advocating of learner autonomy. As a result, teachers are required to get fully prepared for teacher autonomy.

A Brief Analysis of Teacher Autonomy in Second Language Acquisition

Question:

As an English teacher, how autonomous do you perceive yourself? Is achieving 'teacher autonomy' possible in our context?

This entry was posted in Uncategorized by anoosheh8160. Bookmark the permalink.

5 THOUGHTS ON "4. TEACHER AUTONOMY AND LEARNER AUTONOMY"

sarahp2015 on March 10, 2015 at 9:03 pm said:                 Edit

As I have mentioned before teacher and learner autonomy cannot be achieved without help and cooperation of parents, institutes' authorities, and in general the educational system. Because the system is mainly assessment-based the teacher is obliged to follow the syllabus designed by the authorities. I have no authority in choosing the books and have to cover the content of the book in a limited period. As far as methodology is concerned, the main trend is communicative language teaching but I have the freedom to use my own techniques.

Reply ↓

## Snapshot 9: Mahtab/Anahita

- anahita on 52) Integrating technology into the classroom

**Archives**

**Categories**

- Uncategorized

**Meta**

maryamm2015 on August 6, 2015 at 4:35 pm said:          Edit

The technic was perfect, as the teacher said, it helps students to use all the skills, which is great. I think I am going to that in my class, that would be so different.

Reply ↓

anahita on August 17, 2015 at 9:03 pm said:          Edit

I loved this! I did it in the class. A the beginning the students were somehow stressful. Because they though that they might not be able to recall what they hear. Therefore, first I grouped them into pairs so that they can help each other remember the sentences. The next time they did it individually and it was lots of fun.

Reply ↓

## Snapshot 10: Sarah/Anahita

**Categories**

Uncategorized

**Meta**

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Entries RSS
Comments RSS
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sarahp2015 on April 7, 2015 at 6:58 pm said:     Edit

The answer to this question is a big No. As others have said there are many people and external factors that affect the decisions a teacher makes in the classroom. Usually teachers are not consulted with or involved when books are chosen, syllabus is designed, or tests are prepared. We are mostly performers.

Reply ↓

anahita on May 15, 2015 at 10:18 am said:     Edit

I believe that I can consider my classroom my kingdom only when I have enough authority to make main decisions or at least being consulted regarding the curriculum, syllabus, books to be taught…. The most restricting factor in my opinion is tests. Since tests and quizzes are designed by others and most of the learners and their parents are worried about test results, teachers are not able to manipulate the syllabus or the content of the book. However, I am free in the way i manage the class. I have more freedom in choosing the methodology and techniques of my teaching.

Reply ↓

## Snapshot 11: Anahita

**Categories**

- Uncategorized

**Meta**

- Site Admin
- Log out
- Entries RSS
- Comments RSS
- Edublogs - free blogs for education

ONE THOUGHT ON "42) 10 COMMANDMENTS FOR MOTIVATING LANGUAGE LEARNERS"

anahita on November 15, 2015 at 1:45 pm said:     Edit

Motivating students in the class is one of the skills every teacher should posses. It is somehow difficult especially when I have introvert, shy, or low proficiency students. As I read this text I believe that commandment number 7 can be very effective. Because as I have mentioned before, in some levels or age groups like young teenagers they do not know why they are in an English class. So it is a good idea that we ask them at the beginning of each semester a "why learning English" question. Then it will be easier for the teacher to help them find their ways towards their goals. It can be a topic for a writing task or class discussion too …;)
I think if we know the answer to this question, we can help them more to become more autonomous.

Reply ↓

## Snapshot 12: Sarah

**Reasons for Alternative Assessment**

❖ Real language use for actual purposes.

❖ Learners demonstrate things learned.

❖ Learners take responsibility, self-direct.

❖ Learners' motivation may increase.

00:35    vimeo

This entry was posted in Uncategorized by anoosheh8160. Bookmark the permalink.

ONE THOUGHT ON "35) ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT"

sarahp2015 on October 16, 2015 at 3:08 pm said:    Edit

I think performance assessment is the most common assessment in our context besides peer feedback. The second one creates some challenges for me because they do not trust each other. Therefore, I should be there for confirmation or correction. After watching this video I'm going to increase the practice of peer feedback and encourage them to use resources of information other than me. I have an upper-intermediate class. I will ask them to make portfolios voluntarily. Let's see if anyone does.....!!!

## Snapshot 13: Mahtab

instructors to identify students' purposes and needs and to develop proper motivational strategies. Students should understand why they need to make an effort, how long they must sustain an activity, how hard they should pursue it, and how motivated they feel toward their pursuits.

*In the following posts, you can find some strategies to enhance your learners' motivation.*

This entry was posted in Uncategorized by anoosheh8160. Bookmark the permalink.

ONE THOUGHT ON "43) MOTIVATING LANGUAGE LEARNERS TO SUCCEED (SEVTAP KARAOGLU, 2008)"

mahtabb on January 27, 2018 at 6:23 pm said:    Edit

I read all the material here about motivation and tries to put them into practice as much as I could. I can see the effect of them on my students, not all of them though!They know why they are in an English class and how they can benefit from the course they are taking. They have learned how to interact better with their peers and share their knowledge. They have learned that learning English does not finish in the class by closing the books. They do out of class activities like the online ones; moreover, they have learned to monitor their own learning. I can observe their attempts and struggle when they are trying to correct their own mistake by asking their peers or referring to the book or dictionary.

## Snapshot 14: Anahita

using visual prompts or other sorts of input. There could only be notes based on which students can make up their stories, practice them in groups and give a group summary.

They can put their stories on papers. With kids, you might wanna start with drawing pictures. They draw part of the story and put one single sentence down the page telling part of. the story in words. This could go one for a number of sessions. The final product is a numbers of papers glued to each other with a cover and all; yes! it's a book the author of which is only a kid, your very student!

If you work with kids, you might also wanna know more about "co-narrative" technique of story telling. I believe that's enough for now. I'll be waiting for more ideas 🙂

Reply ↓

anahita
on May 16, 2015 at 7:27 am said:          Edit

Thank you for your comprehensive explanation of your techniques. I do almost most of them.

I found this article interesting as well, you might like to take a look at it
http://www.edutopia.org/blog/storytelling-inspires-children-learn-english-matthew-friday

## Snapshot 15: Sarah/Mahtab

sarahp2015 on June 14, 2015 at 9:24 pm said:          Edit

All the mentioned techniques are good to be tried in an English class. I also read the techniques other participants have recommended. Now I notice that I do not have any specific technique which I can claim is mine! I need to be more creative!!

Reply ↓

maryamm2015 on June 17, 2015 at 6:09 am said:          Edit

It's really hard to choose the best technique for teaching something. But I always try to find a way that I enjoy teaching that subject,so for that I need to find new methods, which usually works. There are lots of techniques,as some of them were mentioned in the video, I think the most eeffective one is the one which all students are involved.for example doing some games....

## Snapshot 16: Lina/ Anahita

**Archives**

**Categories**

- Uncategorized

**Meta**

celestine on July 29, 2015 at 6:34 am said:    Edit

Well, I should say I loved the idea!

Actually I always love it when the focus is on the "process" rather than only on the product.

As mentioned, there are many advantages to one such task called posterizing- nice term! ;). I guess besides everything else mentioned there, a teacher could look at it as a kind of formative assessment. :D-I love assessment! 😉

I know in our context one could rightly doubt the practicality of posterizing and there are plenty of good reasons for the doubt: there's the problem with the time, facilities, culture, and even the rules! But I guess we can't dismiss the whole idea. A smart teacher can make the necessary changes and make it fit her class. Don't you agree?

Reply ↓

anahita
on August 17, 2015 at 9:13 pm said:    Edit

I agree that there are limitations especially regarding the time and attitudes of people particularly administrators! But if the students are obliged to use English while making the poster, and the topic is something covered in the book, it is a good activity to freshen the class.

## Snapshot 17: Anahita/Mahtab

**Archives**

**Categories**

- Uncategorized

**Meta**

anahita on January 4, 2016 at 3:28 pm said:    Edit

Use of technology in my classroom is limited to playing audio and video. In some institutes they do not provide all the classes with the least facilities and equipment. We do not have internet access in classrooms. But for out of class activities I sometimes ask them to use internet as a source of information. Sometimes I communicate with them through email but to be honest, I rarely do so.

Reply ↓

mahtabb on January 27, 2018 at 6:13 pm said:    Edit

Using technology in our classrooms has many problems and challenges because of the facilities we have at institutes and age of my students. Therefore, it is difficult to assign out of class activities which need internet. But I tried a solution for this. I asked their parents to cooperate in this task and supervise them whenever they are doing an assignment which needs use of the Internet and control the time. I mean the amount of time the spend on the net. The good point is that nowadays, most parents are educated and the Internet access is available in every home, they liked the idea and appreciated me because I had informed them.

## Snapshot 18: Anahita/Sarah

anahita on November 15, 2015 at 1:59 pm said:  Edit

*Yes, I agree. The only problem is that, they are still worried about covering the activities given in their work book. Even if the assignment given to them is related to the topics of the books, they prefer to have the correct answers to all the questions in the workbook. But I think I have to increase the out of class activities which use technology. I should think about it more…... :/*

Reply ↓

sarahp2015
on November 17, 2015 at 6:37 pm said:
Edit

*Yes, I agree with you. Unfortunately, most of them are still too much concerned about their workbook exercises and the final exam as the impact of public school policies. But I think we should gradually start changing this trend, though we have many limitations. We cannot substitute out of class activities for workbook activities because this might create stress but we can integrate technology and class activities in a way to serve both purposes.*

## Snapshot 19: Lina/Sarah

celestine
on October 23, 2015 at 5:57 pm said:  Edit

Yes, I agree with you on the reliable source. It's necessary for a teacher to be reflective, but it's also just as much important that there is some source for the teacher to go to and make sure she is on the right track. The source, I believe, could be the formal/ informal meetings where everyone gathers to discuss their reflections, or some blog like this one in which teachers could share their concerns and help each other out.

Reply ↓

sarahp2015 on October 14, 2015 at 8:01 pm said:  Edit

I believe that being reflective and pinpointing the weak points is not enough and it should be followed by an appropriate action. In my case, I identify problems in the content of what I teach, the strategy I use, the way I assess my students but unfortunately most of the times my action is restricted by the rules and regulations I should follow. I think that being reflective and being free as a teacher go hand in hand. Regarding learning of my students, I have more freedom in taking actions after identifying a problem. Above all, I should admit

## Snapshot 20: Lina

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different characters,which i think is good for children.For older ones giving lecture, presentation works well.Also paying attention to the topics and field that individuals like and focusing on what students themselves are looking forward to exuding can pave the way for meaningful language use.

Reply ↓

celestine on October 23, 2015 at 6:28 pm said:          Edit

Well, based on what I saw in this video, I should try to tap into my students' background knowledge by asking them leading questions to trigger what's needed, showing them pictures, asking them to share knowledge/ experience, giving them a short relevant extract to read, etc. Homework should be based on their needs, interests.
I think without contextualization learning and comprehension would become almost impossible. Contextualization is putting the language students are learning in context, and trying to make connections with the language their learning and their life. In both cases we are facilitating the learning process, and not only that: we're also making sure what they learn stays there in their minds for much longer than when they may have a rote learning experience.

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