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## **TEACHER AUTONOMY FROM A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE: A REPERTORY GRID STUDY FOR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

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Dr. Eren's research mainly focuses on second language acquisition in L1 and L2, and extends to learner autonomy and technology in ELT.

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### **Abstract**

Living in a competitive world requires teachers to be aware of their potentials and reflect them on their daily practices. Autonomous teachers can think and act on their own rather than sticking to the established patterns. Current studies mostly deal with perceptions about learner autonomy and focus on local environment. However, what teachers understand from autonomy and their classroom practices are very important. Therefore, this study aims to investigate teachers' autonomy perceptions from cross-cultural perspective. The data was collected by using (1) Repertory Grid Technique with three teachers, (2) semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers and (3) classroom observations of 24 lessons for data triangulation to validate each other. Findings suggest that teachers from various cultural backgrounds interpret autonomy with different constructs, yet these differences complete each other in classroom practises. This is also corroborated with semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.

*Keywords:* Teacher autonomy, repertory grid, teacher cognition, cross-cultural perspective

### **1. Introduction**

The concept of autonomy for people has been an important issue in western philosophy and served a central point for deterministic accounts of human deeds (Benson, 2006). We act for reasons and we are capable of reflecting upon our actions. Thus, individual freedom becomes an important part of our lives. An autonomous person leads an autonomous life. He/she can see the available options and makes something out his/her life by deciding what is valuable and important. He/she does not follow the crowds but chooses his/her own path. However, people may not be aware of determining their actions or it is quite possible, especially in eastern conservative societies, that they have not had necessary education from their families. Autonomy contributes to the self-esteem and individual independence (Camilleri, 1997). For that reason, autonomy is a tool for strengthening teachers' power in both their social and professional life and it becomes crucial for teachers to create environment classrooms that will lead learners to be autonomous individuals.

The concept of teacher autonomy is generally connected with learner autonomy. Scholars have different definitions but they mostly agree on the term as the freedom and the power of the teachers in their classroom practices (Street & Licata, 1989; Friedman, 1999; Öztürk, 2012). In order to guide learners to take more responsibility for their learning, teachers need to be autonomous. De Vries and Kahlberg (1987) define autonomous teacher as constructivist person knows not only what to do, but also the reason behind it. Autonomous teachers think over the ways to promote constructivist culture among them. Those teachers are critical of the curriculum that is given by curriculum specialists. They might agree or disagree with some points and take responsibility for children's education.

### 1.1. Repertory grids to elicit perspectives

It plays an important role to elicit teachers' perspectives in order to know how they understand autonomy. The more we get opinions from a broader view, the easier it will be to focus on common framework. Current studies are mostly carried on local level, which inevitably yields us a limited point of view towards our subject (İlin, 2003; Öztürk, 2012; Xu, 2015). A multinational perspective, including teachers from different educational backgrounds may provide more solid information on the topic.

However, various factors inhibit teachers to voice their opinions on the given topic. Teachers might not be able to articulate their views during some research processes. For example a questionnaire, prepared with pre-supposed constructs might be familiar. Thus, the answers are likely to be formulaic or insincere and will probably produce inaccurate results (Donaghue, 2003). Interviews, on the other hand, might not also provide expected outcomes. The participants may want to please you. For that reason they are akin to tell what is logical, appropriate and sound (Björklund, 2008). Thus, we will need another tool that will help us reach teachers' mind without forcing them.

George Kelly (1955) developed Personal Construct Psychology, in which he tried to explain why people have different attitudes towards the world around them. Kelly believed that humans try to make sense of the universe by making their own hypothesis. He claimed that people use personal criteria, the constructs to interpret the world. This personal construct theory mirrors reflective practices based on their experiences (Donaghue, 2003). Kelly created the Repertory Grid Technique (RGT) as a tool to elicit participants' beliefs on a given topic. The grids can be accepted as reflective devise to raise self-awareness. The constructs are affirmed by their bipolar nature, e.g. patient-impatient, good-evil. (Kelly, 1955) This enables researcher to elicit the expected outcome from participants' cognition through their own conceptions (İlin, 2003).

Considering all these factors, the researcher prepared the following research questions in order to get a clearer picture about the topic:

- 1) What are the characteristics of an effective autonomous teacher?
- 2) Why do you think these characteristics are important?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Teacher Autonomy

Teachers' autonomy can also be defined as teachers' independence from the institution in making decisions about the instructions in the classroom (Çakır & Balçıklanlı, 2012). Shaw (2002) describes teachers' autonomy as the capacity to take control of one's own teaching. Teachers' autonomy also refers to the freedom from demands and pressure of other teachers and administrators. Autonomous teachers have the freedom to plan and practise teaching activities. Also, they have an important role in decision making about critical issues in their duties.

Teachers can exercise autonomy in six different aspects of their responsibilities. These can be categorised as curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, student behaviour, classroom environment and professional development (Rudolph, 2006). Additionally, Friedman (1999) includes variables for teacher autonomy in terms of decision making process, work environment, organizational climate and instructor's perspectives. Teacher autonomy is very important for developing professional teachers. If we want to consider teachers as professional individuals

like doctors and lawyers, teachers must have power and freedom in their career (Öztürk, 2012). When we expect teachers to carry out their works effectively, they need to have a degree of freedom from the structural and internal constraints in their school environment. Environmental freedom and internal capacity is also connected with each other. If a teacher is about to grow his/her internal capacity, he/she needs to have some degree of professional freedom. They need to have a voice in their actions (Deci & Ryans, 1991) and have the power to influence, make decisions in their profession (Vahasantanen, 2015).

Many teachers do not consider their job as merely transmitting knowledge, rather they have to interpret the syllabus and arrange the classroom materials. The aim here is that teachers are already applying some degree of autonomy in their classroom whether knowingly or not and they should develop learner autonomy in classrooms. Camilleri (1997) states that teachers need to realize that their duty is no longer being the only source of knowledge. Rather, they need to be a task setter or a counsellor. Teachers need to create learning environment that will foster learner autonomy. In order to do accomplish this, they need to address their own beliefs about teaching. Teachers should help learners develop an awareness on their own learning preference to guide them for the most appropriate learning environment both inside and outside the classroom. This role of counsellor requires monitoring students' learning and helping them overcome any learning difficulties (Camilleri, 1997).

## **2.2. Research on Teacher Autonomy**

Autonomy in a broader sense has been investigated a lot by researchers. However, these studies usually focused on teachers' views about learner autonomy (Holec, 1989; Dickinson, 1993; Little, 1995; Farrel & Jacobs, 2010). There is a considerable literature about teachers' views about their own autonomy as well, and these are usually quantitative works through which the issue in question is investigated from a large scale of sampling. Friedman (1999) developed a psychometrically sound scale Teacher Work-Autonomy (TWA) and measured teacher sense of autonomy. In this scale, Friedman conducted a replicability analysis of the scores on TWA in two studies. The first study aimed to conceptualize the notion of teacher work autonomy. Second study, on the other hand, provided empirical evidence for the validity of scores on a scale retrieved from the results of the first study. He conducted these two studies in elementary schools in Israel. 156 Israeli elementary school teachers participated in the first study. The sampling of the second study consisted of 650 elementary schools teachers. The findings of these studies indicated four important functioning areas for teachers' sense of autonomy at work. The researcher categorised these areas as class teaching, school environment, staff development and curriculum development.

Feryok (2013) carried out a study regarding the role of teachers in developing learner autonomy. The researcher placed her study on sociocultural theory based it on two constructs as zone of proximal development and imitation. The aim was here to observe and explain teachers' role in developing autonomy in Japan. The study implicated that teacher autonomy was the foundation and teacher's cognitions and practices were built on it. One other implication of this study showed that teachers implicitly know more than they can articulate in the classroom. On the other hand, Al Asmari (2013) conducted a similar research in Saudi Arabia and tried to reflect English Language Instructors' point of view at Taif University. This study showed that instructors stated the importance of the learner autonomy but they were reluctant to make any change to guide learners as they thought that without an institutional change, they would feel uncomfortable. Their students are coming from a culture that heavily depends on the authority of the teacher and the institution such initiatives would make learners think that their teacher is not doing his job. Also, instructors state that sharing responsibility

may create a fear of losing control as they have had the control of the classroom for most of their teaching life.

Xu (2015) inquired into the development of teacher autonomy of a group of novice EFL teachers who engaged in different types of collaboration with their colleagues at school in China. This three-year case study of four novice EFL teachers focused on the development of novice teachers' autonomy in collaborative lesson preparation, a traditional school-based activity in China in which teachers who teach different classes of the same grade work together to prepare lessons. Using a longitudinal design, the study examined the impact of teacher collaboration on the development of teacher autonomy, and how such impacts varied over time. Findings revealed that the two types of collaborative lesson preparation, i.e., product-oriented and problem-based collaboration, had different impacts on the development of novice teachers' autonomy which was mediated by the level of teacher anxiety. In terms of collaborative lesson preparation, Eren (2015) conducted an experimental study with undergraduate students who were enrolled for a compulsory language education program. In this study, in order to provide responsibility for students' own learning, the researcher explained the goals of the lesson and asked the treatment group to prepare materials for vocabulary development. Learner-created materials were found useful and the treatment group had significantly higher results compare to the control group.

An interesting and comprehensive study by Vangrieken et al. (2017) revealed the importance of collaboration among peers and its fostering role in teacher autonomy. The researchers created an instrument which measured teacher autonomy in three scales: collaborative attitude, didactical-pedagogical autonomy and curricular autonomy. Findings state that autonomy does not necessarily mean the exclusion of collaboration and act in isolation. Rather, it autonomy can both be combined with a preference for individual work or a desire to collaborate. According to the researchers, the blending autonomy and a high collaborative attitude indicates a more inclusive and intrapersonal definition of autonomy.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This is a qualitative research and the data was collected by triangulation of sources in order to get an in-depth analysis and validation for the data. The Repertory Grids, following semi-structured interviews and on-going classroom observations aimed to create a sound base for the qualitative data by providing a cross-check for the constructs.

#### **3.2. Participants**

For the Repertory Grid analysis, the participants included three teachers from Germany, Syria and Iran. All the teachers are working at public universities in Turkey and they all have more than 10-year experience. The first participant, named as Interviewee 2 (I2), is German and got his bachelor's degree in Germany. He is also a PhD student and has been living in Turkey for more than 10 years. The second participant, named as Interviewee 5 (I5), is from Syria and has a master's degree from an American University in Syria. The third participant, Interviewee 7 (I7), is from Iran and holds a bachelor's degree from an Iranian university.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 12 teachers apart from the above mentioned participants. Overall, 15 teachers working at various schools and from different teaching experiences participated in this study. Demographic information about all participants can be seen in Table 1:

Table 1. *Demographic Information*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>N</b>
Male	2	1-5 years	6	Turkey	10
Female	13	5-10 years	3	Germany	1
		10 years and more	6	Syria	3
				Iran	1

It can be observed that our participants are mostly from Turkey and women constitutes majority of this sampling. Teachers from other countries have teaching experience from their homelands and they all have been teaching actively in Turkey. In addition, majority of these teachers either have 1-5 years teaching experience or 10 years or more.

### 3.3. Procedure

The participants were asked to fill in a repertory grid form by adding bi-polar constructs about the characteristics of effective autonomous teachers. Having completed the constructs, the participants were asked to think about three effective, three typical and three ineffective teachers they have met so far (totally nine teachers). After that, they were asked to grade these teachers on a one to five scale in terms of their closeness to the constructs.

At the second phase of the study, the researcher observed teachers' autonomy practises in the classroom. Having completed the classroom observations, the researcher carried out semi-structured interviews with 15 participants. In this phase, the participants were asked to explain the characteristics of autonomous teachers based on their classroom experiences. While the participants who also participated in Repertory Grid analyses were asked to explain their motives about the constructs in the grid forms and elaborate on these constructs, interview with the rest of the participants aimed to get a broader picture on this topic. In order to avoid any hesitation, the researcher did not record the interview; rather he took notes and asked the participants to elaborate on when necessary.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Kelly's (1955) Repertory Grid Technique was used to elicit the teachers' opinions. The grids were analysed in repertory grid software by clustering high-relevant constructs together. In the second phase of the study, the researcher carried out interviews with 15 participants and they were asked to elaborate on characteristics of autonomous teachers. Each session lasted around 15 minutes. Their answers were not recorded in order to avoid any kind of hindrance that would result from recording; instead, the researcher took notes during the interview. The researcher analysed the interview data and figured out reoccurring themes during the sessions. Relevant themes were coded and an expert rechecked the whole the whole interview data in order to avoid any missing themes. Classroom observation sessions lasted for three months. Within this period, the researcher observed classes of three teachers. Each observation lasted for 40 minutes (duration of one lesson) and in total 24 lessons were observed by taking notes and using a classroom observation checklist designed for autonomy practices by Onia (2016). The checklist and notes were analysed by clustering relevant themes during the classroom practices.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Analysis of the Repertory Grids

The analysis of the data shows us the relevance or irrelevance between the constructs. The participants not only evaluated nine teachers, but also evaluated themselves whether they are close to the ideal one or not.

The analysis of I2's repertory grid gives us very clear opinions about the characteristics of an effective autonomous teacher. The Figure 1 below shows the results of this analysis:

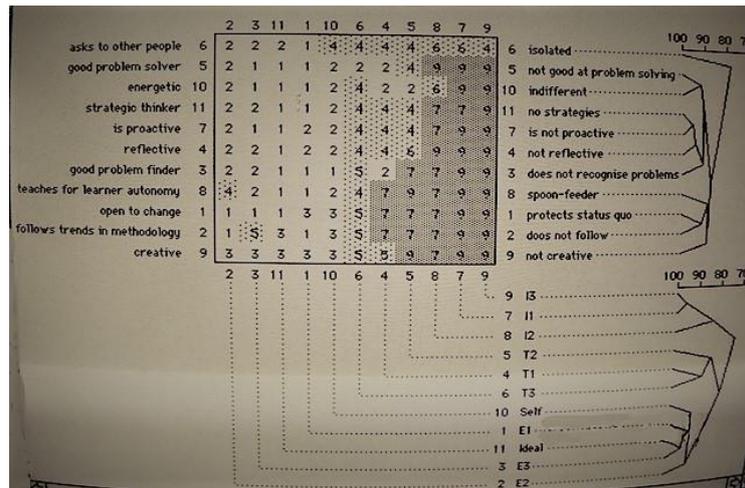


Figure 1: The Focus Analysis of I2's Repertory Grid

The analysis of this grid reveals that I2 has concise ideas towards our subject. The clusters show us the strict relation among the constructs. First of all, the most salient point is that almost all the clusters are linked above 90%. According to I2, an autonomous teacher is both a strategic thinker and a proactive person. Teachers having these qualities are also reflective towards their profession because they are good problem finders. These features have a strong relation with being a good problem solver towards detected problems as these teachers are energetic in their professional lives.

Apart from this compact relation within this group, we can also see another cluster with reflecting autonomous teachers from a different perspective. Autonomous teachers are open to change, which shows that they also follow the trends in methodology. This is a reflection of their creative nature and being aware of the importance of the autonomy for their learners as well. One loose connection about these characteristics is that such teachers do not necessarily ask to other people.

Classroom observations support his views in many ways. First of all, I2 is a quite hardworking teacher and he is strict and punctual during his classes. He applies his lesson plan accordingly and makes revisions when it is necessary. He continuously checks his students' progress and provides feedback. Although he has a strict nature, he is quite welcoming when providing feedback. Since the flow of lesson is relatively predictable, this provides learners an opportunity to have a sense of freedom, which will naturally foster their autonomy in the future. He is also quite energetic and has creative ideas when a subject in question is not understood well among students.

The analysis of I5's grid approaches this issue from a different perspective. Figure 2 shows us her opinions:

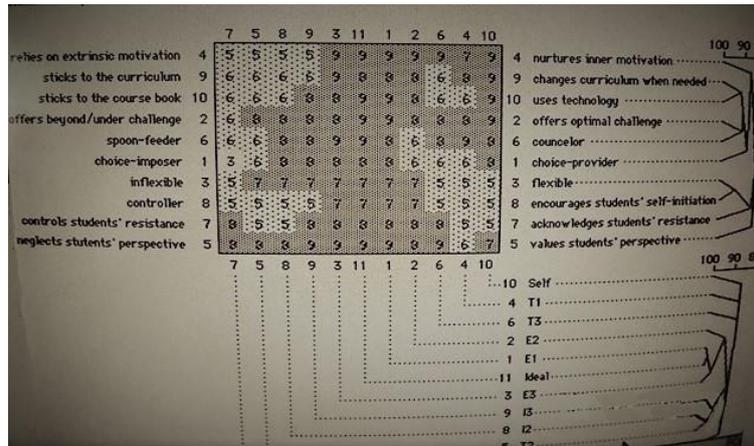


Figure 2: The Focus Analysis of I5's Repertory Grid

The analysis of this grid shows that most of the clusters have a relevance of 90%. According to I5, an autonomous teacher is a counsellor for his/her students. Meanwhile, he/she offers optimal challenge to students. Such teachers also use technology in their classes and do not stick to the curriculum. On the contrary, they change the curriculum according to the students' needs as those teachers are choice-providers in their profession.

Another striking characteristic of autonomous teachers is their flexible nature. They encourage students' self-initiations, which show a strong resemblance to I2's opinion about fostering student autonomy. They are aware of their students' capabilities, so they put attainable objectives for their students. These teachers acknowledge students' resistance and behave accordingly. On the whole, they value students' perspectives and nurture their inner motivation. Although I5 describes these as effective characteristics, she does not consider herself among effective autonomous teachers.

While participant I2 has a quite strict personality, I5 has a calm and rather flexible nature. In her classroom, she continuously encourages her students to take part in activities especially with productive skills. She is aware of her students' emotional behaviours and tries her best to overcome the obstacles that will inhibit their progress both in the classroom and beyond. She continuously blends her instruction with technology and tries to provide social media platforms which could be beneficial for developing skills.

The last participant, I7 expresses these characteristics in more separate clusters with a relevance of 90%. The Figure 3 shows the analysis of his repertory grid:

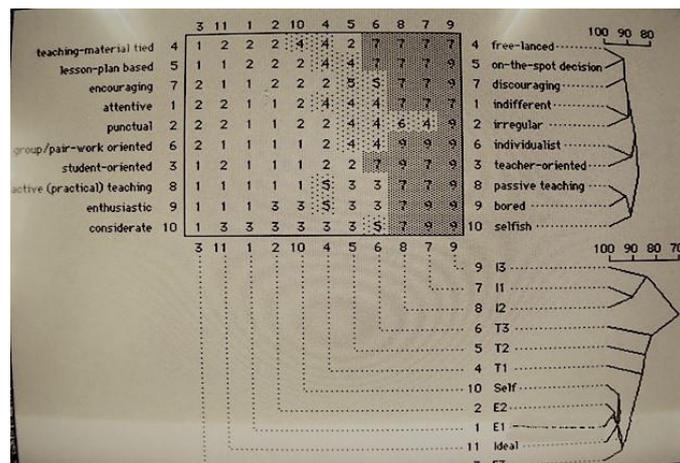


Figure 3: The Focus Analysis of I7's Repertory Grid

According to I7, an autonomous teacher is student-oriented. Such teacher is also group/pair work oriented. Another clusters show that autonomous teachers are enthusiastic ones and those teachers are active (practical) teachers as well. Additionally, they are enthusiastic in their professions. One other point is that autonomous teachers are both attentive and punctual. We can also infer that being free-lanced and being able to make on-the-spot decisions are also noteworthy characteristics of autonomous teachers. Interestingly, being an encouraging teacher does not pair with another characteristic and stands as an independent trait.

Just like the participant I2, I7 is also attentive and punctual in his classroom. Unlike the other participants, he is a bit more lesson plan and material oriented and does not make much revision. This might result from his much more group-work oriented teaching in the classroom. He tries his best to create collaborative activities in which learners will ask each other more. He does not provide the answers immediately, yet allows learners an optimum time to reach to a conclusion with group members.

#### 4.2. Analysis of the Semi-structured Interviews

Analysis of the semi-structured interviews revealed four major codes: Fostering Critical Thinking, Increasing Self-esteem, Autonomy for Life-long Learning and Reflective Practise.

##### 4.2.1. Fostering Critical Thinking:

I2 states that an autonomous teacher needs to be proactive, that is, he/she should not react to event but initiate change. This can be possible only with teachers who are energetic and committed to their profession. A teacher only sticking to textbook is unlikely an autonomous one. According to I2, another very important point to consider is being reflective. He states the importance of this issue as follows:

A second thing, autonomy requires teachers to accept that there are problems, to be equipped with the ability to face and solve problems. Of course, to be able to solve problems, one must be equipped with thinking skills. All these traits are actually based on a reflective stance. A non-reflective teacher cannot be autonomous, I think.

I2 emphasizes the necessity of critical thinking skill. In this way, teacher will be able diagnose the problems and will try to find a solution. Thus we can say that being a reflective teacher is an indispensable element for an autonomous teacher. I2 also states that such teachers

are creative people as they are aware of their working conditions but still they struggle to do their best:

Seeking autonomy also means not to accept the status quo but being open to change. This implies that autonomous teachers look beyond their horizon, and try to find out what research says about being a good teacher.

We can see that those teachers do not give up learning because of the difficulties they come across in their professional lives. All these characteristics are interrelated and contribute to the whole.

#### 4.2.2. Increasing Self-esteem:

I5 puts a special emphasis on the teacher-student interaction. She thinks that autonomous teachers reflect their traits during interaction with the students. Those teachers are well aware of the importance of autonomy for human life and they provide necessary input for their learners:

Autonomous teachers are choice-providers who give their students the self-initiation and the opportunity to take a part in choosing the subjects, activities, topics, etc. they like to learn. When students have the chance to choose their learning materials, they become more autonomous and more capable of taking right decisions. This tool of course should be carefully given to students who are mature enough and aware about their needs and goals.

I5 recalls the importance of comprehensible input for learners (Krashen, 1988) and we can see that given the freedom of choice, learners who are mature enough will be capable of taking right decisions. Of course, this has a strong relation with choice-provider nature of teachers and we can see that autonomous teachers provide choices both for their teaching and their learners.

Another point worth considering is respecting students' views and giving them a voice for their needs. I5 describes this issue as follows:

Autonomous teachers also value the students' perspective and allow them to share their points of view rather than neglecting them; the thing which increase students' self-esteem and independency. Autonomous teachers are never spoon-feeders; they are counsellors and helpers who teach their students how to fish rather than giving them fish.

Autonomous teachers value students' opinions, which contribute to the development of self-esteem and independency among students. Especially living in a competitive world, surrounded with technology makes it a much more valuable. Today's new technology is no longer new to our students. For that reason, they are labelled as "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001). That's why I5 points out the importance of using technology in classes as this will open new doors for students to discover.

Building-up self-esteem among students is not an easy task. Teachers play an important role for increasing learners' problem solving abilities. Interviewee 6 (I6) highlights this issue as:

Teachers have to be good listeners first of all but also need to be able to ask the right questions in order to encourage students to set realistic goals and paths for learning. One of the most difficult parts of encouraging autonomy is the

relinquishing of power, that is, teachers have to stand back and allow students to explore what works and doesn't work for them.

I6 points out the importance of attainable goals for fostering self-esteem; a point which could be possible by challenging the traditional role of the teacher in the classroom. Teachers need to create an atmosphere in which learners could figure out the route by themselves. However, this should not be mistaken with leaving the learners on their own and interfering nothing. Rather, teacher, as a counsellor, have to monitor the process by guiding learners when necessary.

#### 4.2.3. Autonomy for Life-long Learning:

I7 does not limit teachers' autonomy to classroom borders. Instead, he believes this is an on-going process and is a vital element for people's life-long learning. He emphasizes this issue by stating that:

Personal experience as both a classroom teacher and an administrator suggests that teachers need a great deal of autonomy if they are going to be life-long learners, and effective in the classroom if they are to be life-long learners, decision makers, leaders, and are to provide effective instruction for all students.

I7 looks at the picture from a greater perspective and considers the leading people as autonomous individuals. Thus, such teachers gain much more importance towards the development of individuals is able to take care of their own responsibilities throughout their lives.

On the other hand, I7 warns us about the potential danger for applying autonomy in the classroom. He says that there is a fine balance between an autonomous teacher and an indifferent teacher:

In allowing autonomy, they must be cautious, constantly monitoring whether their autonomy is for the good of their students, or if they are hiding behind autonomy--using it as a shield from progress. What is intriguing about teacher autonomy is not the belief that it is necessary, but that it is a double-edged sword. In allowing and providing autonomy for teachers, one must be certain those who desire autonomy have good intentions.

I7 takes our attention for the potential towards the misuse of autonomy in classrooms. He warns that it is a necessity to check whether it is fruitful for the learners or not. Actually it is related with teachers' own consciousness towards the subject as it is not possible to foster autonomy if the teacher is not even aware of this issue. He states that it is a delicate issue and the expected outcomes must be defined clearly.

#### 4.2.4. Reflective Practise

The final code that emerged from the interview is the mirroring role of teacher autonomy for reflective practise. An autonomous teacher thinking and acting on his/her own creates an atmosphere through which one can also monitor his/her own activities in the classroom for improving their work. I6 states the importance of this issue as follows:

The autonomous teacher should be methodical. He/ she defines clearly the objective of each lesson and he/ she systematically presents the materials in a way that the learner will follow and will grasp the understanding of the material.

We can see that teachers have to be methodological and present a comprehensible input for their learners. Thus, we can infer that an autonomous teacher is not the one who just leaves learners on their own during the lesson; rather he/she must prepare themselves before the lesson and be active during the schooling as well. This idea is also strengthened by the I14 during the interview:

Learning process is actually labouring for pupils. They always need to step forward and require assessment. And this hard work can be overcome by an autonomous teacher's class management. An autonomous teacher knows what is best for her group of learners. She is always well-prepared and enthusiastic. Being free with her students and sparking ideas, an autonomous teacher is always ready to fulfil pupils' learning requirements.

It can be understood that such teachers prepare suitable materials beforehand, present them in a systematically and continuously reassess their teaching. Such behaviour prepares the way for teachers' professional improvement by providing a reflective attitude for their classroom practices.

## **5. Discussion**

Repertory Grid studies enabled researchers to probe into much deeper dimensions of cognition. This is an opportunity which is not quite possible by simply carrying out interviews with participants since there are many biases that will prevent the participants to reflect their views in a more or less soothing atmosphere. That is, Repertory Grids, by probing into teacher cognition without any interference by the researcher provided an in-depth insight about autonomy perceptions. In this study, the participants created their own constructs regarding their views on teacher autonomy. They thought about characteristics of autonomous teachers and evaluated their previous schooling by comparing their closeness to the constructs. Although these three participants are from different cultures and working at different schools in Turkey, we can see that their opinions unify in terms of traits that are specific to autonomous teachers.

More specifically, we can see that autonomous teachers are open to change and follow the trends in methodology as well as being creative. There is a strong connection between being energetic and being good at problem solving. Such teachers are reflective and strategic thinkers. Interestingly, we can see that there is a weak connection between being creative and asking to other people. Autonomous teachers offer optimal challenge for their learners and thus they are more like a counsellor in the classroom rather than being spoon-feeders. They use technology into their course and instead of sticking to the course book, they adapt the curriculum when needed. Additionally, a strong relation could be observed between being punctual and attentive. These teachers encourage their learners and they are student-oriented in their approach.

Semi-structured interviews align with the results of Repertory Grid analysis. The interviews revealed common points among all teachers. First of all, it can be said that teacher autonomy helps improve critical thinking skills. Teachers need to be creative in their approach for the curriculum and decide what could work best for their learners. In this way, they will observe the classroom whether input is comprehensible for learners (Krashen, 1988). Secondly, we could see that autonomous teachers have strong self-esteem, a trait which manifests itself through activities. Naturally, this leads to an increasing self-esteem and independence among learners as well. Next, it is not a big claim to say that teacher autonomy is not limited with classroom. Autonomous teachers apply their habits out of classroom as well and this is an on-going process which inevitably shapes their life-long learning. Finally, autonomous teachers are reflective in

their approach. They prepare materials beforehand, present them systematically considering learner traits and provide a feedback during their teaching.

Classroom observations provided a third eye for practitioners views on autonomy. Their ideals and classroom practise do not show big difference. Although it is a necessity to accept that there is usually a difference between theory and practise, observations did not reveal a contradiction. Teachers tried to apply what they had already planned and learners were not unfamiliar with such applications. Because of the restrictions like exams, administrative procedures, teachers feel that they do not have much control in overall lesson, but still they implemented and when necessary adapted changes to instruction.

Findings of this research align with the studies by Friedman (1999) and Feryok (2013) in terms of professional development. Both studies indicated that teacher autonomy prepares a sound base for improving teachers' expertise. Our findings about the key role of autonomy for reflective practise are also evident in studies by Deci & Ryan (1991) and Vahasantanen (2015) in which researchers highlighted the necessity of having a voice in actions and having the power to influence and take stances in professional life. However, our findings did not reveal a very important aspect that was asserted by Xu (2015) and Vangrieken et al. (2017) in their comprehensive and crucial studies: the role of collaboration for fostering practises in the classroom. This issue was only partly mentioned by Interviewee 7 (I7) by stating the pair-work and group work as necessary characteristics of autonomous teachers.

## 6. Conclusion

We can see that characteristics of effective autonomous teachers are just like the roots of a tree, each of them contributes to the whole picture in one way. The variety in views resulting from teachers with different educational background state that the concept of teacher autonomy is understood similarly regardless of the national barriers. All teachers have some points in common and richness in their views helps us fill the dots for our approach to this issue.

Equipping our learners with appropriate education is essential in a world where individual characteristics constitute an undeniable part of daily life. Autonomous teachers play a vital role as facilitators in this process. Therefore, it won't be wrong claim to say that the more we know the characteristics of autonomous teachers, the easier it will be for us to prepare our learners for their future.

Considering our findings, we have several implications for practitioners: (1) Autonomy does not mean leaving students on their own; rather it is a reciprocal approach through which teachers would contribute to their own development in a great deal. (2) Students will benefit a lot by having a relatively more responsibility for their own learning and this will not only be limited with classroom borders but also help them in their social life. (3) Teacher should not be afraid of autonomy and distance themselves in the classroom.

This qualitative study is limited with teachers' perceptions from a multi-cultural perspective. Also, all teachers are familiar with schooling in Turkey. Therefore, considering cultural differences, it could be an important asset to elicit perspectives from teachers working at various countries. In addition, it would be a significant contribution to carry out future research by reflecting this issue from a more quantitative perspective. We also believe that gender and experience variables would be an important factor and enable to conclude more about the nature of autonomy. Finally, as Xu (2015) and Vangrieken et al. (2017) pointed out, collaboration and teacher autonomy stands out as undervalued and less investigated issues. Therefore, we strongly advise future researchers to investigate autonomy from this perspective as well.

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