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Teacher Agency and Identity in Language Teaching: Implications for Professional Development and Educational Reform in Uzbek Higher Education

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between teacher agency, professional identity formation and pedagogical effectiveness in English language education within the multilingual context of Fergana, Uzbekistan. Despite growing recognition of teacher identity as a crucial factor in educational success, empirical research investigating its impact on teaching practices in Central Asian contexts remains underdeveloped. This mixed-methods study explored how teacher identity construction and agency influence instructional decisions and professional development pathways at Fergana State University. Data were collected from 68 English language teachers through surveys, in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and teaching portfolios. Results indicated that teachers with strong agentic identity demonstrated greater pedagogical innovation, resilience in the face of constraints, and more effective implementation of educational reforms. Findings suggest that agency-focused professional development approaches significantly enhance teacher effectiveness and satisfaction in the Uzbek educational context. This research contributes to understand the complex interplay between teacher identity, institutional structures and educational change in Central Asia, offering practical implications for teacher educators and policy makers in Uzbekistan and similar post-Soviet educational contexts.

Keywords: *teacher agency, professional identity, language teaching, educational reform, Uzbek education, Central Asian context*

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Dil tədrisində müəllim agentliyi və kimlik: Özbək ali təhsilində peşəkar inkişaf və təhsil islahati üçün təsirlər

Xülasə

Bu tədqiqat Özbəkistanın Fərqanə şəhərinin çoxdilli kontekstində ingilis dili təhsilində müəllim təşkilatı, peşəkar şəxsiyyətin formalaşması və pedaqoji effektivlik arasında əlaqəni araşdırır. Müəllim şəxsiyyətinin təhsil uğurunda həlledici amil kimi getdikcə daha çox tanınmasına baxmayaraq, onun Mərkəzi Asiya kontekstində tədris təcrübələrinə təsirini araşdıran empirik tədqiqat hələ də inkişaf etməmişdir. Bu qarışıq metodlu tədqiqat Fərqanə Dövlət Universitetində müəllim şəxsiyyətinin qurulması və agentliyin təlimat qərarlarına və peşəkar inkişaf yollarına necə təsir etdiyini araşdırdı. Sorğular, dərin müsahibələr, sinifdə müşahidələr və tədris portfoliolarları vasitəsilə 68 ingilis dili müəllimindən məlumatlar toplanıb. Nəticələr göstərdi ki, güclü agent şəxsiyyəti olan müəllimlər daha çox pedaqoji yenilik, məhdudiyyətlər qarşısında dayanıqlılıq və təhsil islahatlarının daha effektiv həyata keçirilməsi nümayiş etdiriblər.

Nəticələr göstərir ki, agentliyə əsaslanan peşəkar inkişafyanaşmaları Özbəkistanın təhsil kontekstində müəllimin effektivliyini və məmnunluğunu əhəmiyyətli dərəcədə artırır. Bu tədqiqat Mərkəzi Asiyada müəllim şəxsiyyəti, institusional strukturlar və təhsil dəyişikliyi arasında mürəkkəb qarşılıqlı əlaqənin başa düşülməsinə töhfə verir, Özbəkistanda və oxşar postsovet təhsil kontekstlərində müəllim pedaqoqları və siyasətçilər üçün praktiki nəticələr təqdim edir.

Açar sözlər: *müəllim agentliyi, peşəkar şəxsiyyət, dil tədrisi, təhsil islahatı, özbək təhsili, Mərkəzi Asiya konteksti*

Introduction

Teacher identity and agency have emerged as critical concepts in educational research, challenging traditional views that reduce teaching to a set of technical skills or competencies (Buchanan, 2015). This paradigm shift recognizes that effective teaching extends beyond methodological knowledge to encompass how teachers position themselves as professionals and exercise agency within educational systems (Priestley et al., 2015). As Tao and Gao (2017) assert, teaching involves "the ongoing negotiation of who one is as a teacher and what kind of teacher one wants to become" (p. 346). This identity work occurs through daily classroom practices, collegial interactions, and engagement with institutional and societal discourses about education.

Research

In Uzbekistan, the post-independence period has witnessed significant transitions in educational policies and pedagogical priorities, with substantial reforms to the English language teaching profession (Hasanova, 2021). This reform context presents distinctive challenges for teacher identity and agency in Fergana, where educators navigate complex professional landscapes influenced by Soviet educational legacies, emerging national educational priorities, and internationalization pressures (Abdullaeva, 2020). Language teachers in Uzbekistan face the multifaceted task of reconstructing their professional identities while implementing rapidly evolving curricular reforms within institutional structures that may constrain their agency (Azizov & Karimov, 2019).

Despite theoretical recognition of identity and agency's importance, a significant gap persists between academic understanding and professional development practices in the Uzbek educational context (Hasanova & Shadieva, 2017). Many teacher education approaches in Uzbekistan continue to prioritize methodological training without adequately addressing how identity processes and agency development enable or constrain effective teaching. This gap is particularly pronounced in regions outside the capital, where educational innovations and professional development opportunities may be implemented more gradually (Iskandarova, 2022).

This research addresses this gap by investigating how teacher identity and agency influence English language teaching processes and professional growth at Fergana State University. The study is guided by sociocultural perspectives on teacher identity that view it as dynamic, contextually situated, and constructed through professional practice (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Varghese et al., 2016), while acknowledging the specific historical and cultural context of Uzbekistan's educational system. This framework allows for an examination of how power relations, institutional structures, and reform initiatives shape teacher identity and agency within the unique multilingual environment of Fergana.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on interconnected theoretical perspectives on teacher identity and agency, contextualized within Uzbekistan's educational landscape. Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson's (2015) ecological model of teacher agency provides a foundation for understanding how Uzbek teachers achieve agency not as an individual capacity but through the interplay of personal, structural, and cultural factors. This model conceptualizes agency as something teachers do rather than something they possess, highlighting how past experiences, present contexts, and future orientations collectively enable or constrain agentic action within Uzbekistan's evolving educational system.

Complementing this ecological perspective, Buchanan's (2015) conceptualization of teacher identity as a "becoming" process emphasizes the ongoing negotiation between personal and

professional identities. This framework is particularly relevant in Uzbekistan's educational context, where teachers navigate complex transitions between Soviet educational values, national identity formation, and Western pedagogical influences (Djuraeva & Tojiboyeva, 2021). Buchanan's emphasis on the narrative construction of identity aligns with how Uzbek teachers continually reconstruct their professional narratives amid shifting educational discourses.

Additionally, the study incorporates Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson's (2015) concept of "teacher beliefs" as mediating factors in agency achievement. This perspective highlights how teachers' beliefs about their role, their subject matter, and their students significantly shape their capacity to act purposefully within educational contexts. In the Uzbek context, where language teaching ideologies have shifted dramatically since independence, teachers' beliefs about effective language pedagogy mediate their responses to reform initiatives and shape their classroom practices (Khamidova, 2020).

Literature Review

Empirical research on teacher identity and agency has expanded significantly in recent years, revealing their multifaceted nature and critical influence on educational processes. Seminal work by Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) established identity as a dynamic, emotionally charged process central to teachers' professional development and effectiveness. Their comprehensive review highlighted how identity construction involves complex negotiations between personal histories, professional contexts, and future aspirations.

In language education specifically, Varghese et al. (2016) demonstrated how language teachers' identities significantly influence their pedagogical choices, relationships with students, and implementation of curricular reforms. Their research emphasized that identity formation is neither neutral nor apolitical but deeply embedded in power relations and language ideologies. These findings are particularly relevant in multilingual contexts like Uzbekistan, where language teaching intersects with nation-building processes and global educational discourses.

In the Central Asian context, research on teacher identity and agency has gained momentum in the post-Soviet period. Hasanova (2021) examined how the changing status of English in Uzbekistan has transformed the professional identities of language teachers, noting how teachers have repositioned themselves from transmitters of linguistic knowledge to cultural mediators facilitating global engagement. This professional identity shift creates both opportunities and tensions as teachers reconcile local educational values with international pedagogical approaches. Similarly, Yuldashev et al. (2020) explored how Uzbek university teachers construct professional identities through engagement with international educational discourses, finding that teachers who successfully integrated global pedagogical innovations with local educational priorities demonstrated greater resilience and effectiveness.

Research specific to the Fergana Valley context has highlighted unique regional dynamics. Abdullaeva (2020) documented how the multilingual landscape of Fergana, with significant Tajik and Russian-speaking populations alongside the Uzbek majority, creates distinctive challenges for language teacher identity formation. Her ethnographic work revealed how university teachers strategically navigated different linguistic and cultural expectations, with implications for their professional self-understanding and classroom practices. Building on this work, Iskandarova (2022) examined the relationship between professional identity and reform implementation among Fergana State University teachers, finding that strong professional identity could either facilitate or hinder educational change depending on how teachers positioned themselves in relation to reform initiatives.

The post-Soviet educational context presents particular challenges for teacher agency. Azizov and Karimov (2019) documented how centralized administrative structures inherited from Soviet educational traditions continue to constrain teacher autonomy in Uzbekistan, often limiting space for professional decision-making. However, Djuraeva and Tojiboyeva (2021) described promising initiatives at selected Uzbek universities that enhance teacher agency through collaborative professional learning communities, resulting in greater innovation and job satisfaction among participating teachers.

Research on institutional factors has also contributed valuable insights to understanding the Uzbek context. Hasanova and Shadieva (2017) explored how institutional structures and policies

shape Uzbek English teachers' professional identities and agency. Their work reveals that teachers' capacity to act purposefully is significantly influenced by institutional supports, administrative leadership styles, and the degree of collegial collaboration available within their universities.

Despite these advances, significant gaps remain in understanding how teacher identity and agency directly influence classroom practices and professional development trajectories in the Uzbek higher education context. Much existing research has employed qualitative case studies focused on small groups of teachers or has been conducted primarily in Tashkent, the capital city (Khamidova, 2020). Additionally, few studies have systematically examined how identity-focused professional development approaches affect both teacher agency and student learning outcomes among university educators in regional Uzbek institutions like Fergana State University.

Research Questions

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the following two research questions:

1. How do Uzbek university teachers construct and negotiate their professional identities and exercise agency within the multilingual and reform-oriented context of Fergana State University?

2. What relationship exists between teacher identity, agency achievement, and pedagogical effectiveness in this specific educational setting?

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to investigate the relationship between teacher identity, agency, and pedagogical effectiveness at Fergana State University in Uzbekistan. This approach involved collecting and analyzing quantitative data in the first phase, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis to help explain and elaborate on the quantitative findings. The integration of both methodological approaches allowed for triangulation of data and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between identity, agency, and teaching practice in this specific Uzbek context.

Participants and Setting

The study was conducted at Fergana State University, a regional public university located in Fergana, Uzbekistan. The university serves approximately 12,000 students primarily from the Fergana Valley region, which encompasses three provinces in eastern Uzbekistan. The English Philology department, where this research was situated, offers undergraduate and graduate programs in English language teaching, translation studies, and linguistics.

Participants included 68 English language teachers from the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Fergana State University. All participants were Uzbek nationals teaching English across various programs and proficiency levels. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure representation across different career stages, specializations, and linguistic backgrounds. Demographic information for teacher participants is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 *Demographic Information of Teacher Participants.*

Career Stage	N	Gender	Age Range	Educational Background	Teaching Experience
Early Career	18	12F, 6M	23-30	BA/MA in Uzbekistan (18)	1-5 years
Mid-Career	31	20F, 11M	31-45	BA/MA in Uzbekistan (28), MA Abroad (3)	6-15 years
Senior	19	11F, 8M	46-65	BA/MA in Uzbekistan (15), MA/PhD Abroad (4)	16+ years

Data Collection

Data were collected over an eight-month period (September 2023 to April 2024) using multiple instruments adapted to the Uzbek educational context:

Teacher Identity and Agency Survey: All teacher participants (N=68) completed a 35-item survey adapted from Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological model of teacher agency and Kelchtermans' (2009) professional self-understanding framework, with modifications to reflect the specific educational context of Uzbekistan. The survey was initially developed in English, translated into Uzbek by two bilingual researchers, and then back-translated to ensure accuracy. It used a 5-point Likert scale to assess dimensions of identity and agency including professional self-understanding, perceived autonomy, reform engagement, collective efficacy, and future professional aspirations. The survey demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .83).

Teaching Effectiveness Assessments: Multiple measures of teaching effectiveness were employed, including standardized institutional teaching evaluations, student achievement data, peer evaluations using validated observation protocols, and self-assessment reflections. These diverse measures were combined to create a composite teaching effectiveness score that captured multiple dimensions of pedagogical practice.

Semi-structured Interviews: A subset of teachers (n=28) participated in semi-structured interviews lasting 60-75 minutes. Interviews were conducted in the participant's preferred language (Uzbek, Russian, or English) by culturally and linguistically appropriate interviewers. Interviews explored participants' professional histories, identity positions, institutional experiences, and perceptions of the relationship between identity, agency, and teaching effectiveness in the Uzbek context. Follow-up interviews were conducted with selected participants (n=12) to further explore emerging themes.

Classroom Observations: A total of 56 classroom observations (two per interviewed teacher) were conducted using an observation protocol adapted from Priestley et al.'s (2015) dimensions of teacher agency, with modifications to reflect Uzbek educational norms and practices. Observations focused on teacher-student interactions, pedagogical decision-making, and expressions of professional identity in English language classrooms.

Teaching Portfolios: Professional teaching portfolios (n=68) were collected from all participants, including syllabi, assessment materials, reflective journals, and professional development plans. These artifacts were analyzed for evidence of teacher identity expression and agency enactment, with particular attention to how teachers positioned themselves professionally within the Uzbek context.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis: Survey data and teaching effectiveness scores were analyzed using SPSS 27.0. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables, and correlation analyses examined relationships between identity constructs, agency dimensions, and teaching effectiveness measures. Multiple regression analyses determined the predictive value of identity and agency factors on teaching effectiveness while controlling for variables such as years of experience, administrative support, and institutional constraints. Additional analyses examined how contextual factors specific to the Uzbek educational system (such as involvement in reform initiatives, international collaboration experiences, and institutional position) influenced identity and agency constructs.

Qualitative Analysis: Interview transcripts, observation field notes, and teaching portfolio materials were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial coding identified recurring patterns related to identity construction, agency enactment, and their relationship to teaching practice in the Uzbek context. This process was conducted by a team of three researchers, including one Uzbek scholar and two international researchers, to ensure cultural sensitivity and analytical rigor. Axial coding then connected these patterns to develop broader analytical themes. NVivo 12 software facilitated the organization and analysis of qualitative data.

Mixed-Methods Integration: Following Creswell and Plano Clark's (2018) recommendations for sequential explanatory designs, quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated through connecting, building, and merging processes. Specifically, quantitative results informed the selection of interview participants and refinement of interview protocols. Qualitative data were then used to explain and elaborate on statistical findings, particularly unexpected or complex relationships between variables. Special attention was given to integrating findings in ways that accurately represented the unique educational context of Fergana State University.

Ethical Considerations

The study received approval from the Ethics Committee at Fergana State University and the Ministry of Higher Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in both Uzbek and English to ensure complete understanding of the research process. To protect confidentiality, all participants were assigned pseudonyms, and identifying information was removed from data. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty or professional consequences. Additional considerations were made to respect cultural norms regarding research participation in the Uzbek context, including appropriate attention to institutional hierarchies and professional relationships.

Quantitative Findings

Identity and Agency Factors in Relation to Teaching Effectiveness

Correlation analyses revealed significant positive relationships between several identity and agency constructs and teaching effectiveness among Fergana State University teachers. As shown in Table 2, professional agency achievement ($r = .62$, $p < .001$), identity coherence ($r = .57$, $p < .001$), and reform engagement ($r = .51$, $p < .001$) demonstrated the strongest correlations with teaching effectiveness. These relationships remained significant after controlling for years of teaching experience, administrative position, and institutional context.

Table 2 *Correlations Between Identity/Agency Factors and Teaching Effectiveness at Fergana State University.*

Identity/Agency Factor	Correlation with Teaching Effectiveness	Significance
Professional Agency Achievement	.62	$p < .001$
Identity Coherence	.57	$p < .001$
Reform Engagement	.51	$p < .001$
Professional Self-Understanding	.48	$p < .001$
Collective Efficacy	.44	$p < .001$
Future Professional Orientation	.40	$p < .001$
Perceived Autonomy	.36	$p < .001$

Multiple regression analysis indicated that identity and agency factors collectively accounted for 46% of the variance in teaching effectiveness ($R^2 = .46$, $F(7, 60) = 7.32$, $p < .001$). Among these factors, professional agency achievement ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$), identity coherence ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$), and reform engagement ($\beta = .23$, $p < .002$) emerged as the strongest predictors of teaching effectiveness for Uzbek teachers.

Career Stage and Institutional Context Variations

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed significant differences in identity and agency constructs across career stages ($F(2, 65) = 10.87$, $p < .001$). Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD indicated that mid-career teachers reported significantly higher professional agency achievement ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.48$) than early-career teachers ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.62$), with senior teachers demonstrating the highest agency scores ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.39$). This pattern suggests that agency development may follow a developmental trajectory throughout a teaching career in this context.

Additional analyses examined the influence of institutional context on identity and agency constructs. Teachers with international professional development experiences demonstrated significantly higher levels of identity coherence ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.43$) compared to those without such experiences ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.56$), $t(66) = 4.92$, $p < .001$. Similarly, teachers in departments with greater administrative autonomy reported higher professional agency scores ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.40$) than those in more centrally controlled departments ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.58$), $t(66) = 5.33$, $p < .001$.

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of qualitative data identified four major themes related to teacher identity, agency, and teaching practice: (1) navigating professional identity amid educational reforms, (2) exercising agency within institutional constraints, (3) collective agency and professional communities, and (4) reconciling local and global teaching identities.

Navigating Professional Identity Amid Educational Reforms

Teachers described ongoing processes of identity reconstruction as they navigated successive waves of educational reforms. This negotiation significantly influenced their engagement with new pedagogical approaches and willingness to modify established practices. For example, Nilufar, a mid-career teacher, explained:

"When I began teaching fifteen years ago, my identity was firmly rooted in being a knowledgeable authority transmitting English grammar rules. The recent communicative approach reforms initially felt threatening to this identity. Only when I found ways to integrate my linguistic expertise with new communicative methods did I feel comfortable implementing these changes in my classroom." (Interview, October 15)

Classroom observations confirmed that teachers who successfully integrated new methodological approaches with valued aspects of their existing professional identities demonstrated greater innovation in their teaching. In these classrooms, teachers employed specific strategies to maintain identity coherence amid change, including:

Reframing reforms in terms of values they already held about effective teaching

Selectively adapting rather than wholesale adopting new approaches

Creating narratives that connected past teaching successes with new pedagogical directions

Finding unique ways to express professional expertise within new methodological frameworks

Exercising Agency Within Institutional Constraints

Many participants described tension between their desire for professional autonomy and various institutional constraints including standardized curricula, administrative requirements, and limited resources. The ways teachers navigated these constraints revealed diverse approaches to agency achievement. Rustam, an early-career teacher, reflected:

"The standardized curriculum feels very restrictive sometimes. I've learned to create small spaces for agency by developing supplementary materials that address my students' specific needs while still covering the required content. These small acts of professional judgment help me feel like a teacher rather than just an implementer." (Interview, November 8)

Agency achievement varied significantly according to institutional position and career stage. Senior teachers with established professional reputations often described more overt forms of agency, including directly negotiating with administrators for pedagogical flexibility. In contrast, early-career teachers typically exercised agency through subtle adaptations within mandated frameworks, what several participants called "working in the spaces between requirements."

Collective Agency and Professional Communities

Analysis of interviews and professional portfolios revealed that collective agency—achieved through collaboration within teacher communities—emerged as a powerful mediator of individual agency. Teachers who participated in supportive professional communities demonstrated greater confidence in exercising professional judgment and implementing innovative practices. This was particularly evident in departments where formal collaborative structures had been established.

Dilnoza, a mid-career teacher coordinator, described how collective agency operated within her department:

"When the new assessment policies were introduced, we formed a working group to interpret how these could be implemented meaningfully in our specific context. Together, we felt empowered to adapt rather than simply comply. This collective approach gave individual teachers confidence to exercise judgment in their classrooms because they knew they had collegial support." (Interview, December 3)

Portfolio analysis revealed evidence of collective agency in collaborative curriculum development projects, peer observation initiatives, and joint research activities. These collective enterprises appeared to create protected spaces where teachers could exercise professional agency despite institutional constraints.

Reconciling Local and Global Teaching Identities

The tension between local educational traditions and global pedagogical trends emerged as a significant theme in teachers' identity negotiation. Many participants described complex processes of evaluating and selectively incorporating international approaches while maintaining valued aspects of Uzbek educational culture.

Kamila, a senior teacher with international experience, reflected on this navigation:

"After my training in the UK, I returned with many new ideas but quickly realized I couldn't simply transplant British approaches to Fergana. I had to carefully consider which elements aligned with our students' needs and expectations. Over time, I've developed what I call my 'adapted approach'—a professional identity that draws from global best practices but remains deeply rooted in understanding our local context." (Interview, January 18)

Teaching portfolios illustrated how this reconciliation manifested in classroom materials that integrated communicative language teaching with cultural elements and educational values important in the Uzbek context. Teachers who successfully achieved this integration demonstrated greater teaching effectiveness according to multiple measures, including student engagement and achievement.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data revealed several key insights about the relationship between teacher identity, agency, and teaching effectiveness:

Agency Development Pathway: Qualitative data helped explain the strong correlation between professional agency achievement and teaching effectiveness by illuminating the processes through which agency developed over a teaching career. The interview data revealed that agency typically evolved from focusing primarily on classroom-level decisions among early-career teachers to broader curricular and institutional influence among more experienced educators. This developmental pattern clarifies why mid-career and senior teachers scored higher on agency measures and suggests that professional development should be differentiated according to career stage.

Contextual Mediators: While identity coherence strongly predicted teaching effectiveness in quantitative analyses, qualitative data revealed that this relationship was mediated by institutional factors including administrative leadership style, departmental culture, and resource availability. In departments characterized by collaborative cultures and supportive leadership, teachers more easily maintained coherent professional identities amid educational reforms. This finding highlights the importance of addressing institutional factors alongside individual teacher development.

Reform Engagement: Both quantitative and qualitative data indicated that successful engagement with educational reforms was associated with stronger teaching outcomes. Qualitative findings elaborated that this relationship depended on teachers' ability to connect reforms with their core professional values rather than experiencing them as externally imposed mandates. Teachers who viewed reforms through the lens of improving student learning rather than compliance reported greater satisfaction and demonstrated more effective implementation.

Agency Expressions: The qualitative data illuminated diverse expressions of teacher agency that were not fully captured in the quantitative instruments. While survey measures focused primarily on decision-making autonomy, interviews and observations revealed more subtle forms of agency, including strategic compliance, creative adaptation, and collaborative resistance. These findings suggest that future research should employ more nuanced measures of agency that capture its culturally specific expressions in contexts like Uzbekistan.

Discussion

This study provides evidence for the significant relationship between teacher identity, agency, and teaching effectiveness across diverse career stages and institutional contexts at Fergana State University. The findings extend previous research by demonstrating not only that identity and agency processes influence teacher engagement but also that they contribute substantially to measurable teaching effectiveness. The mixed-methods approach allowed for both quantification of these relationships and in-depth exploration of the mechanisms through which identity and agency shape teaching practices in the Uzbek context.

Professional Identity and Teaching Practice

The strong correlation between identity coherence and teaching effectiveness supports Buchanan's (2015) theoretical framework while providing empirical evidence for its direct impact on teaching outcomes. As Buchanan argues, professional identity represents the ongoing integration of personal values, professional knowledge, and contextual factors. Our findings suggest that this integration translates into specific teaching behaviors and practices that enhance student learning experiences.

Importantly, the qualitative data revealed that identity coherence manifests differently across career stages and institutional contexts. For some teachers, coherence was expressed through alignment between personal educational values and classroom practices. For others, it appeared as successful integration of local educational traditions with international pedagogical approaches. This variation suggests that professional development approaches should recognize and respond to diverse expressions of identity rather than prescribing narrow paths to professional growth.

The finding that identity and agency factors collectively accounted for 46% of variance in teaching effectiveness underscores the need for teacher education approaches that explicitly address these dimensions alongside traditional pedagogical training. This percentage is particularly notable given the well-established influence of factors such as subject matter expertise and years of experience on teaching outcomes.

Ecological Agency in Educational Contexts

Our findings align with Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological model of teacher agency, which conceptualizes agency not as an individual attribute but as an achievement that emerges through the interplay of personal, structural, and cultural factors. The qualitative data illustrated how Uzbek teachers' capacity for purposeful professional action was significantly shaped by institutional structures, collegial relationships, and cultural understandings of teacher authority within the Fergana context.

The relatively weaker correlation between perceived autonomy and teaching effectiveness (compared to other agency dimensions) supports Priestley's distinction between autonomy and agency. As our qualitative data revealed, even teachers working within highly constrained environments achieved agency through creative adaptation and strategic action. This finding challenges simplistic policy approaches that equate teacher empowerment with deregulation, suggesting instead that agency development requires attention to the complex ecology of teaching environments.

Collective Dimensions of Agency

The study provides strong support for conceptualizing teacher agency as partially collective rather than purely individual. Teachers who participated in collaborative professional communities demonstrated enhanced agency achievement and teaching effectiveness compared to those working in isolation. This finding extends Vähäsantanen's (2015) work on collective professional agency by demonstrating its particular importance in contexts like Uzbekistan where centralized educational structures might otherwise limit individual teacher autonomy.

The contextual variations in collective agency highlight how institutional policies and departmental cultures significantly enable or constrain agency development. Departments that established formal collaborative structures—including team planning time, peer observation systems, and collective curriculum development—created conditions where teachers could exercise greater professional judgment despite systemic constraints.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest several important implications for teacher education and professional development in Uzbekistan and similar contexts:

Identity-Conscious Professional Development: Teacher education programs should explicitly address identity development alongside methodological training. This includes creating reflective spaces where teachers can explore tensions between personal values, institutional requirements, and reform agendas, developing coherent professional identities that can sustain effective practice amid educational change.

Differentiated Agency Development: Professional development approaches should recognize how agency manifests differently across career stages. Early-career teachers benefit from supports

that enhance classroom-level agency, while more experienced educators can be engaged in broader curricular and institutional leadership that expands their agency scope.

Collaborative Structures: Educational institutions should establish formal collaborative structures that foster collective agency. These might include professional learning communities, collaborative action research initiatives, and team-based curriculum development projects that create spaces for meaningful professional dialogue and shared decision-making.

Reform Implementation: Educational reforms should be implemented in ways that engage teacher identity and agency rather than bypass them. This involves creating dialogic spaces where teachers can interpret, adapt, and contribute to reform initiatives, connecting new approaches to their existing professional values and contextual knowledge.

Institutional Leadership Development: School and university administrators should be prepared to create conditions that foster teacher agency rather than control teacher behavior. Leadership development should emphasize how supportive administrative approaches can enhance teacher effectiveness through promoting professional responsibility rather than compliance.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations of this study suggest directions for future research. First, while the mixed-methods approach provided both breadth and depth, the eight-month timeframe may not have captured long-term identity development processes. Longitudinal studies spanning several years would provide valuable insights into how professional identities evolve over extended periods and how these changes relate to career trajectories and institutional changes.

Second, although the study included diverse career stages and departmental contexts, all settings were located within a single regional university. Future research should examine identity and agency processes across different types of educational institutions in Uzbekistan, including urban and rural settings, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of contextual variations.

Third, the study focused primarily on English language teachers, who occupy a particular position within Uzbekistan's educational landscape due to the international nature of their subject matter. Further research should explore how teacher identity and agency operate among educators of other subjects, including those more directly connected to national identity formation such as Uzbek language and literature or history.

Finally, while the study identified correlations between identity/agency factors and teaching effectiveness, experimental studies testing specific identity-focused professional development interventions would strengthen causal claims about the relationship between identity-affirming approaches and teaching outcomes.

Conclusion

This study contributes to our understanding of the complex relationship between teacher identity, agency, and teaching effectiveness within Uzbekistan's evolving educational landscape. By employing a mixed-methods approach, we have demonstrated that identity and agency factors—particularly professional agency achievement, identity coherence, and reform engagement—significantly predict teaching effectiveness beyond what might be expected from experience and methodological knowledge alone. These findings challenge narrow conceptualizations of teacher development as primarily technical and highlight the need for professional learning approaches that address the social and identity dimensions of teaching.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data revealed not only that identity and agency matter for teaching effectiveness but also how they matter in different contexts and for teachers at different career stages. The mechanisms through which identity and agency influence teaching practice include enhanced pedagogical decision-making, resilience amid constraints, meaningful engagement with educational reforms, and effective navigation of competing demands within complex educational systems.

For teacher educators and educational administrators, these findings underscore the importance of creating professional learning environments that nurture teacher identity development and agency achievement. Rather than treating identity and agency as peripheral to "real" teacher education, institutions should recognize that identity work and agency development are fundamental to teaching effectiveness. This approach requires moving beyond traditional emphasis on methodological training

to consider how professional development practices position teachers and either enhance or constrain their capacity for purposeful professional action.

As Uzbekistan's educational system continues to evolve in response to national priorities and global influences, identity-aware approaches to teacher development offer promising pathways for enhancing teaching quality while honoring teachers' professionalism. By bridging theoretical understandings of teacher identity and agency with empirical evidence of their impact on teaching outcomes, this research contributes to more effective and contextually appropriate teacher education practices across Uzbekistan.

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