

## **Professional Space and Agency: The Case of In-Service Language Teachers**

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### **Abstract**

The present small-scale study aimed to investigate teacher agency from the perspective of in-service language teachers in relation to their perceived professional space. It specifically aimed to have an understanding of factors contributing to teacher agency positively and negatively. To this end, eight Turkish EFL teachers working at private and state schools and various education levels were asked to reflect on their own perceived and exploited professional space in semi-structured interviews and storylines. The in-depth analysis of the data revealed three types of trajectories in agency: contested agency, gradual growth of agency and failure in achievement of agency. In these trajectories, it was found out that teachers' own motivation, material adaptation, cooperation of colleagues and technological equipment promote teacher agency, whereas some factors such as pressure from administration and parents, centralized curriculum and exams, workload and crowded classes serve as obstacles in the process. In line with the results, some implications for the development of teacher agency and also insights for teacher education programs were provided.

**Key Words:** Teacher agency, professional space, in-service teachers, teacher education

### **Introduction**

There has been great emphasis on standardization of teaching in educational contexts in an attempt to achieve a certain level of student performance across different teaching environments within the same context. The attempt has mainly centered around testing (e.g. Buchanan, 2015), associated with a standardized curriculum. Putting stress on both students and teachers, this process inevitably has resulted in the decrease of teachers' professional autonomy.

As one of those educational contexts, Turkey has also adopted a centralized approach in provision of countrywide education. Centralized practices consist of curricula, education materials and textbooks determined by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) (Gür, 2014). Teachers feel the need to comply with the principles of this centralization, as reflected in the comments of many teachers emphasizing that they were expected to be committed to the pre-determined educational approach and to follow guidelines for measurement and evaluation purposes (Taneri, 2011).

Teachers also reported that their classroom practices were restricted due to the interference of MoNE with the curriculum (Gür, 2014), which serves as a threat to teachers' agency and their use of professional space.

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Given the picture of educational practices and its outcomes, it becomes necessary to dwell on the factors shaping teachers' agency, because uncovering factors that promote and hinder teachers' autonomy in the classroom have potential implications for teacher education programs. To this end, the present study focuses on this issue from the perspective of language teachers in the Turkish context, with a special focus on their perceived professional space.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Oolbekkink-Marchand, Hadar, Smith, Helleve and Ulvik (2016) defined a new framework to understand teacher professionalism. According to this perspective, teachers are positioned at the center of the educational process, against the common prescribed practices of teachers. It is believed that teachers who make sense out of their workplace could rely on their pedagogical knowledge and thus become autonomous in their practices. Teachers' use of their professional space is attached great emphasis as a component of teacher leadership, and it is reported to promote teacher agency (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011). Therefore, the framework developed to gain insights into teacher professionalism and focuses on the relationship between teachers' intentional use of their professional space and their agency, which provided a sound basis of the present study.

#### ***Teachers' professional space***

Teachers' professional space is described as the extent of teachers' judgment and manipulation in their own teaching practice (Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2016). Kostogriz and Peeler (2007) state that "space" is a broad term including not only the teaching, learning and professional environment but also any factor that could be related to those environments and thus lead to change. The researchers explained teachers' professional space in that sense:

"The production of teacher workplaces embodies a close association with how professional space is perceived as a set of appropriate practices and professional attributes; how the representations of professional knowledge and professionalism are constructed and standardized by educational authorities and bureaucrats; how this space is lived in the daily reality of local, routine and situated events of the classroom and how the local is informed by the life of teachers outside the classrooms and staffrooms—i.e., by practices in other social spaces that have been networked to the professional space of teachers" (p.108).

In its basic sense, teachers' professional space is formed by workplace –school–internal and societal boundaries. Teachers are obliged to follow a certain number of

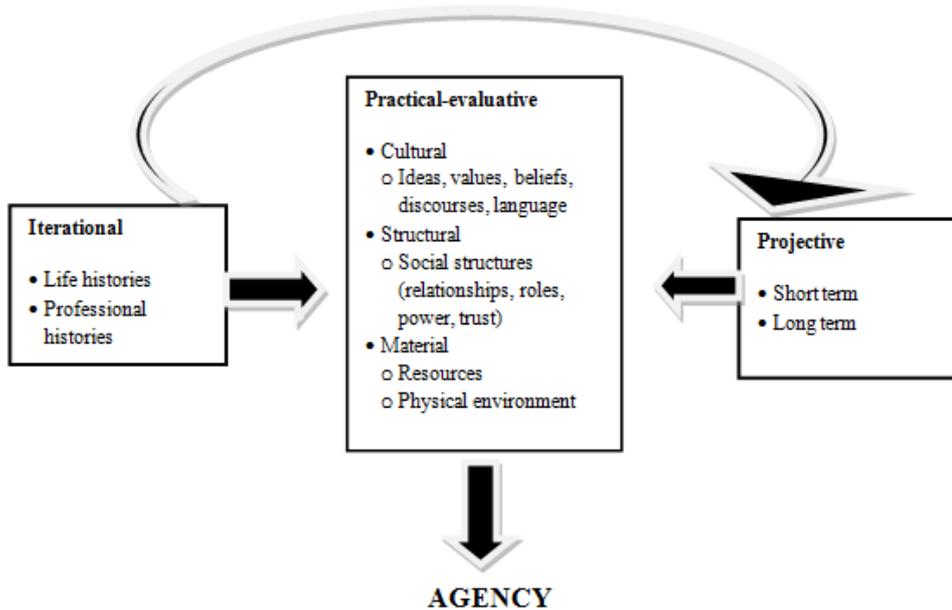
rules prescribed in policy documents and regulations, and their professional space comes into power in the interpretation and performance of those rules, which interacts with many variables such as professional knowledge or curriculum. Among those variables, regulations and rules are considered as objective characteristics of teachers' workplace (Imants et al., 2013).

It has been claimed that teachers' perceptions of their spaces have more influences on their action than objective school characteristics (e.g. Hoekstra, Korthagen, Brekelmans, Beijaard, & Imants, 2009; Imants et al., 2013). Those perceptions are referred by Oolbekkink-Marchand et al. (2016) as "perceived professional space" (p.38), in which teachers developed their own understandings of the school environment and their own spaces. Teachers' understandings are mainly based their own personal goals that might be different from the institutional goals (Imants et al., 2013). As this (in)consistency would shed light on teachers' professionalism, the focal point of the present study in understanding teachers' agency is the nature of their perceived professional space.

### **Teacher Agency**

Teacher agency is considered as an important dimension of teacher professionalism (Priestley et al., 2012). It is a crucial teacher ability to advance student learning, professional development and school development (Toom et al., 2015). According to Priestley, Biesta, Philippou and Robinson (2015), agency refers to the capacity to perform purposeful action autonomously in freedom. In relation to teachers' professional practice, it is their ability to go out of the frame formed by rules and regulations to achieve their own goals (Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2016). Being a dynamic process, agency is personally built as a result of interactions of many contextual variables (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011), one of them being teachers' perception of their professional space.

The ecological model of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) for agency has been developed and introduced by Priestly et al. (2015), in which individuals', in this case teachers', actions are believed to be shaped by "individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p.137). As these factors are subject to change and interact with agentic capacity and agentic space, agency is perceived as a temporal process.



**Figure 1.** A model for understanding achievement of agency (Priestly et. al., 2015)

In the model, three dimensions of agency are described as shown in Figure 1. The iterational dimension, on the right, consists of life and personal histories, representing the past achievements, understandings, actions and personal values rooted in those histories of individuals. In this dimension, teachers are believed to select one or more of these histories for reactivation. The projective dimension, on the left, stands for teachers' plans for a future that would be different from their past and present experiences. The practical-evaluative dimension, in the middle of previous two dimensions, focuses on the teachers' present agentic behaviors that are affected by the past and future. Cultural, structural and material conditions in this dimension are utilized by the individuals to "make practical and normative judgements among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971). That is, teachers make evaluations of their agentic space based on their agentic capacity to decide upon their agentic behaviors. Oolbekkink-Marchand et al. (2016) refer to this defined evaluation process as teachers' perceived professional space and teachers' achievement of agency as the exploitation of space.

The recent literature on teacher agency includes the studies focusing on the importance and development of teacher agency (e.g. Buchanan, 2015; Priestly et. al., 2015; Van der Heijden, Geldens & Beijaard, 2015). They all indicated that teacher agency has a vital importance in not only their own professional development but also

in students' learning. Therefore, it can be claimed that achieving teacher agency is essential in a healthy school atmosphere. The possible factors that may have a role in the development of agency such as contextual factors (e.g. Soini, Pietarinen, Toom & Pyhalto, 2015) and teacher beliefs (e.g. Biesta, Priestly & Robinson, 2015) have also been under investigation. Oolbakkink-Marchand et al. (2016) have introduced another factor, the perceived professional space, in their study. The researchers found that teachers' professional space changes over time and it is influenced by personal (e.g. pedagogical beliefs) and contextual factors (e.g. trust and support from school administration). The present study also sets its focus as professional space, since it has been proposed as a milestone in the development of teacher agency and the literature lack studies pointing its contribution to agentic behaviors of teachers. Additionally, most of the studies have approached agency issue from the perspective of teachers of different subject areas, leaving out language teachers and to the researchers' best knowledge, there has not been any agency study conducted in Turkey. Thus, this small-scale study aims to fill this gap by focusing on English language teachers' professional space and agency in the Turkish context. The following research questions are formulated:

- What are the factors that promote experienced English teachers' agentic behaviors (professional development activities, deviation from curriculum, manipulation of classroom practices etc.) in the Turkish context?
- What are the factors that hinder experienced English teachers' agentic behaviors (professional development activities, deviation from curriculum, manipulation of classroom practices etc.) in the Turkish context?

## **Methodology**

### ***Participants***

The participants of the study were chosen through convenience sampling. Since the aim of the study requires teachers to reflect on the changes in their perspectives of professional space over the years, years of teaching experience was set as the criterion for choosing teachers among existing contacts. As a result of this process, eight experienced English teachers were invited (see Table 1). One male and seven female teachers took part in the study. Their teaching experiences ranged from five to fourteen years. Three of the participant teachers had BA degrees in English Language Teaching (ELT), whereas five teachers held MA degrees in the same field. Each teacher was working at different levels of private and state schools located in Istanbul, Turkey. Only one teacher (Selim) participated in the study from another city, Mersin.

**Table 1.** Profile of the participants

Participant (Pseudonym)	Gender	Teaching Experience	Education	School Information
Hande	F	5	MA in ELT	Private high school
Kader	F	6	MA in ELT	Private secondary school
Melek	F	5	BA in ELT	State secondary school
Selim	M	14	BA in ELT	State high school
Mine	F	5	MA in ELT	Private high school
Burcu	F	8	MA in ELT	State high school
Melike	F	7	MA in ELT	State primary school
Derya	F	6	BA in ELT	Private high school

### Data Collection Instruments

The data for the study were collected through two different sources, semi-structured interviews and story line method, for the triangulation of the data to strengthen the findings (Merriam, 1998). Semi-structured interview was chosen as one of the data collection instruments, because it allows for in-depth information related to the topic via both verbal and non-verbal cues. The interviews consisted of eight main questions adapted from Oolbekkink-Marchand et al. (2016). The questions were grouped under three main categories: agency moments, motivation to become a teacher and professional identity. All the categories were designed to have an understanding of teachers' decision-making processes, professional history and practices, as described in the dimension of ecological model of agency, on which the present study was based.

The second phase of data collection was the use of storyline method that followed the interviews. The method was adopted from Oolbekkink-Marchand et al. (2016), which enables teachers to reflect upon their perceptions and exploitation of professional space. With its practical and intriguing nature, the method as a creative mode of self-expressions provides insights into how teachers evaluate their own experiences and events (Beijaard, Driel & Verloop, 1999). Using this method, the researchers could quantify the subjective evaluations, and thus make comparisons across different reports. In this method, teachers were asked to draw two storylines on one chart. In the chart, the vertical axis reflected a 1-10 scale of evaluation, while the horizontal axis reflected teachers' professional timeline. Following this, teachers were asked to label low and high points and describe inclines and declines, and also explain how and why these changes occurred.

The interviews and storyline method were conducted in Turkish, which was the preference of all teachers. They were each conducted individually and took 25-30 minutes. They were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants. All the data then were transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985) underline that member checks ensure reliability and accuracy of a qualitative study. Thus, the researcher asked each participant to review and approve the transcripts.

## Data Analysis

The transcribed data coming from two sources were analyzed by the researcher through the framework developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). Based on this model, the transcriptions were examined to classify the comments of participants in both data collection procedures. Since the teachers' agency was examined in relation to professional space, the first step was to pursue trajectories in participants' comments on their perceived and exploited professional spaces. This step enabled the reduction of the data by eliminating irrelevant information and coding of the data into the conceptual categories. Following this, the data were represented in the form of a table to examine the relationships between different codes carefully and place the codes with a similar nature into major categories, as demonstrated in Table 2. As the last step, the validity of the results was ensured through referring to field notes and conclusions were developed.

**Table 2.** Categories, emerging themes and codes

Trajectory	Key feature	Key themes	Sub-themes	Example from data
Contested agency	Factors promoting agency	Teachers' own motivation		I know I can do more. We are the people who can make changes in students' lives.
Gradual growth of agency over time	Factors promoting agency	Material adaptation		I was so excited about preparing my own materials.
		Teachers' own motivation		I have always enjoyed teaching.
		Cooperation of colleagues		We exchange our ideas with colleagues.
		Technological equipment		I can draw attention of students by using technological equipment.
The failure in achievement of agency	Factors hindering agency	System-related	Exams	We teach to test.
			Curriculum	Our schedule is loaded; I can not depart from the curriculum.
		School-related	Workload	Teaching 24 hours is too much.
			Crowded classes	The classes are so crowded that I easily get tired.
			Non-cooperating colleagues	Most teachers try to get through the day somehow and be paid.
		Pressure	Lack of technological equipment	It is very hard to include technology.
			Administrative pressure	Administration is so demanding.
	Parents' pressure	Parents always ask for different activities.		

## Results

The present study investigated agency of a group of Turkish teachers of English with a specific focus on their professional space. To this end, eight English teachers working at private and state schools were asked to reflect on their perceived and exploited professional space through storylines and semi-structured interviews. The data coming from these two instruments were analyzed via coding.

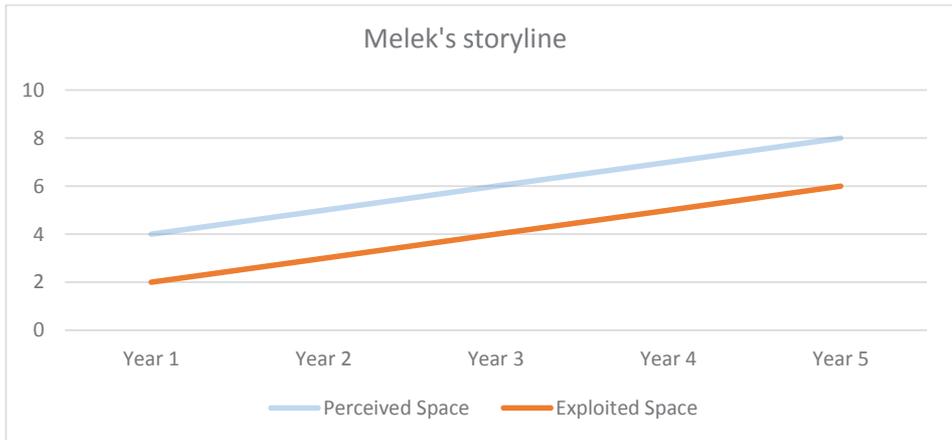
In overall analysis of the data, three typical trajectories were identified. All trajectories reveal how teachers exploit their professional space in relation to the way they perceive the amount of experienced space. The results of study are presented based on these three trajectories, namely contested agency, gradual growth of agency and the failure in achievement of agency, through which the factors that promote and hinder the achievement of agency are explained.

### *Trajectory I: Contested agency*

One type of trajectory identified in the data is contested agency, used by Oolbekkink-Marchand et al. (2016) to characterize the trajectory performed by teachers who fight against limitations experienced. That is, contested agency describes teachers who defend their own pedagogical beliefs and values despite the limiting contextual factors. Exemplified by three teachers, contested agency in the present study revealed that teachers' perceived space was more than the exploited space, which enables the persistence in fight for their own values. In the analysis of this trajectory, one key theme, teachers' own motivation, was identified. Teachers' own motivation was found to be both describing teachers' beliefs on the difference between their perceived professional space and exploited professional space and serving as a promoting factor that contribute to teachers' agency. Three teachers' comments that typically exemplifies this trajectory are provided below.

One of the teachers who exemplifies this trajectory, Melek, drew her lines separately and progressively, indicating the superiority of her perceived professional space. She pointed that she lives on her own motivation for teaching and she always believes that she can do more for her students:

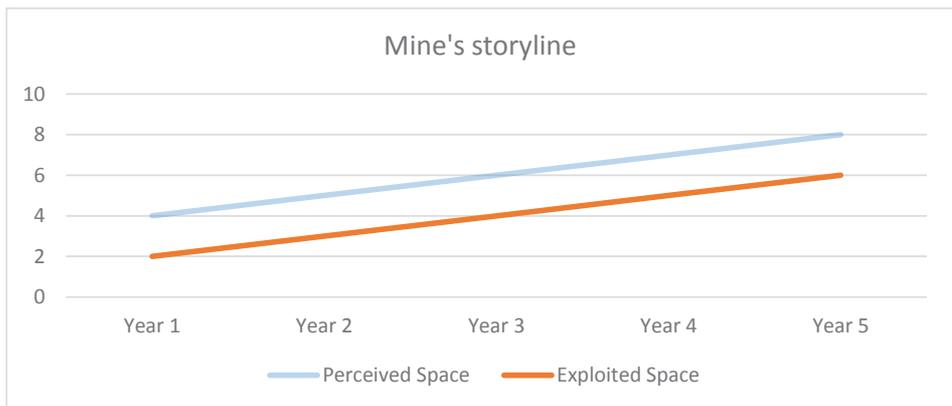
*I have always enjoyed teaching. No matter what I experience with people around me, when I enter the class they are all over and I am there for teaching. Thus as years pass, I feel myself stronger and use more space related to my job. I can always do better. I know this.*



**Figure 2.** Melek's storyline

Another teacher, Mine, drew a similar storyline and explained that teachers have their own power in their teaching which helps them lead changes:

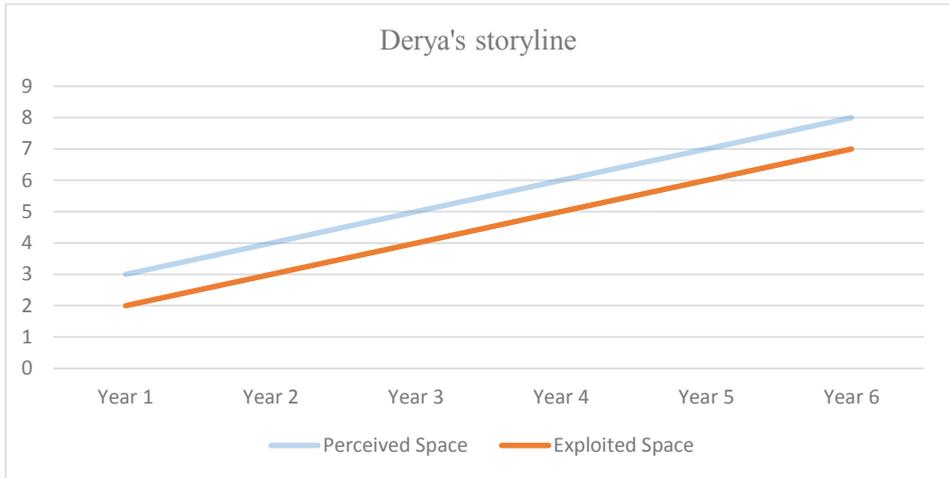
*I have always believed that we are the people who can change everything. As the time passes, I feel myself strong as a teacher so I draw my lines like this.*



**Figure 3.** Mine's storyline

With her closer lines, Derya, believes that she can always do more for her students as she considers their needs:

*I believe everything teaches something to us. I know my load, I know the administration etc. The students are here to learn and I have to do whatever they want. I always manipulate my schedule in relation to students' needs. These instincts pushed me to do M.A. in ELT. I will apply this year.*



**Figure 4.** Derya's storyline

The three teachers whose comments are given above indicates that the professional space is perceived as more than the space exploited. This belief of teachers is promoted by their own motivation, which keeps them dedicated to their jobs and thus serve as a basis of their satisfaction.

### ***Trajectory II: Gradual growth of agency over time***

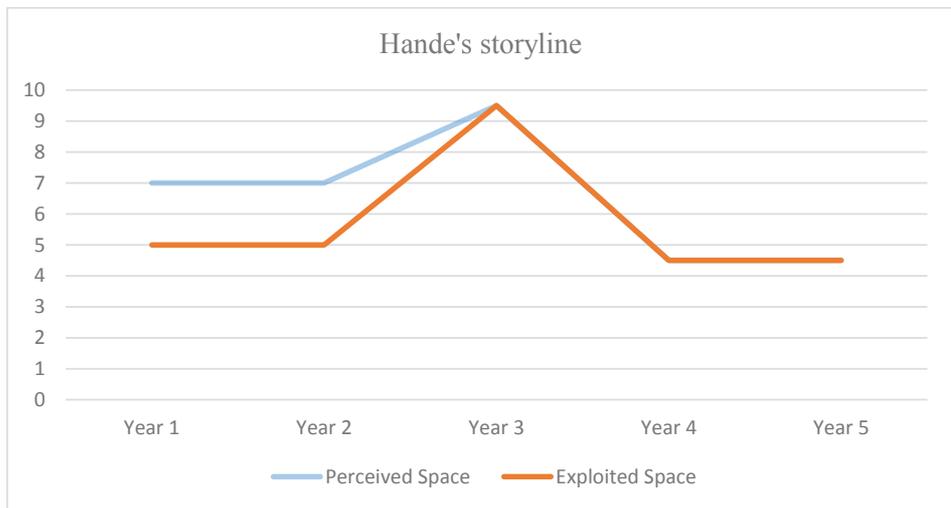
The second type of trajectory identified in the data gathered from teachers through storyline and interviews was the gradual growth of agency over time. All teachers exemplified this trajectory. Although some of the teachers reported that they had some declines or monotony in the exploitation and perception of professional space, their explanations related to the increasing parts in their reports are taken into consideration for the research, considering that these parts have the potential of providing insight into the factors that have an influential role in teachers' agency. As a result of analyzing this trajectory in this way, four key themes were identified as the contributing factors: material adaptation, teachers' own motivation, cooperation of colleagues and technological equipment.

The three teachers whose comments were given the first section, Melek, Mine and Derya, were also the ones who exemplified the gradual growth of agency over time and specifically the key theme, teachers' own motivation. In addition, the interviews conducted with Melek and Mine revealed another key theme, material adaptation. It was found that material adaptation has an important place in teachers' use of professional space and strong relationship with teachers' agency achieved over time. For example, Mine stated: *"I can now more easily adapt my materials according to my students' needs, in the way that we will not fall behind our schedule. The first time I started*

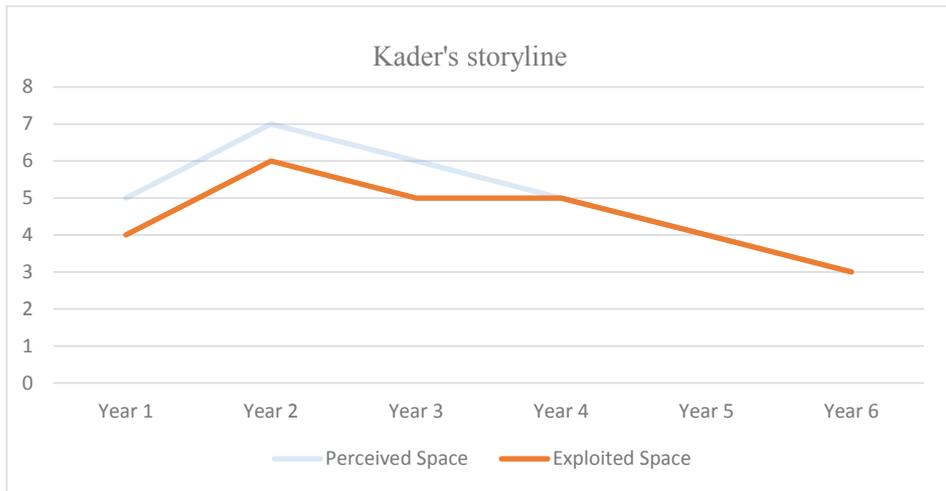
teaching, doing this was very hard for me but now it is easier.” Melek also reported that she usually adapts the materials she has: “Before coming to class I go over the textbook. The activities are very limited so I find another one for each type. Based on the subject presented in the textbook, I bring other activities for students. If I only use the ones in the book, they easily get bored”, because what she finds as important in her classes is “students’ interest and motivation” and thus she can “happily do” her job.

Furthermore, Hande and Kader, among the other teachers who had increasing parts in their storyline reports as well as decreases, also attributed the increases in their lines to material adaptation as an important contributor to their profession. Hande stated:

*In my third year, I started working in another institution, where I was a coordinator. I had the chance to decide on the curriculum and goals and prepare any materials I like and believe would work in class to help learners use the language in an interactive manner. Besides, since I was the one preparing all the materials, I enjoyed teaching more.*



**Figure 5.** Hande’s storyline.



**Figure 6.** Kader's storyline.

Kader also mentioned her excitement about material adaptation in the first years of her teaching, which triggered the increase in her profession timeline and its absence somehow caused negative changes. She said:

*In the first two years of my career, I was so excited about teaching, prepared materials etc. Then I realized that they are all in vain because I had to be in the same line with the teachers, who only try to get through the day and go home.*

Cooperation of colleagues, another emergent key theme, was observed in the comments of five teachers in total: Selim, Melek, Mine, Melike and Derya. For example, since cooperation of colleagues promoted her motivation, Derya said: *"We understand and help each other. Otherwise, it would be very hard to be motivated"*. Melike also stated: *"My colleagues are helpful. We share primary level classes with two teacher and help each other. We are all young and have energy to do that."* From another perspective, Selim mentioned that their cooperation is especially important for their aims, he said: *"As high school is one step before the university, we especially help each other about the exams to help the students together"*.

Derya and Mine drew attention to the availability of technological equipment for use as a promoting factor for their both professional space and agency. Derya said: *"As the years pass, I am doing this manipulation (material adaptation) on purpose and more consciously since we have now a variety of resources available. I can easily use technology for this"*. Mine also underlined her use of technology as a classroom practice: *"We have required technological equipment to do that. I try to include technological equipment as much as I can because you can only draw attention of students"*

*in this way”.*

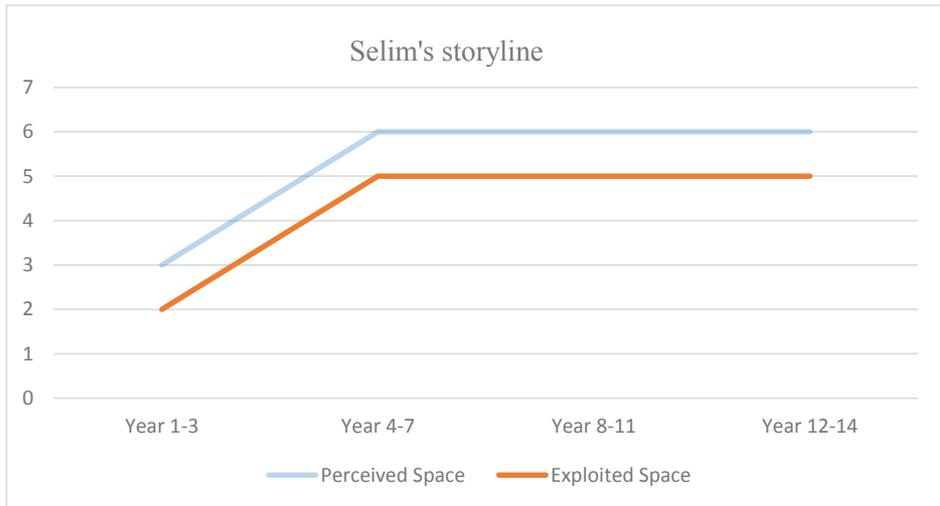
The gradual growth of agency over time trajectory overall revealed that the increase in the exploitation and perception of professional space by teachers are affected by some contributing factors. Teachers’ own motivation, material adaptation, cooperation of colleagues and technological equipment all promote teachers’ agency because these factors enable them to have more autonomy and freedom in their teaching.

### ***Trajectory III: Failure in the achievement of agency***

The third type of trajectory observed in the teachers’ comments was the failure in the achievement of agency, which involves drawbacks and monotony in the perception and exploitation of professional space. In other words, this trajectory defines teachers who experienced a breaking point in their career after which they lose their motivation to make an effort to exploit more professional space. Five teachers exemplified this trajectory in total and a considerable number of factors that described these moments in teachers’ agency were identified. Those factors were grouped under three main categories: system-related, school-related and pressure, which are all explained below with examples and sub-themes.

One main category, system-related factors, involved the exams and curriculum. They were found as the typical sub-themes that lead to declines and stability in the storylines. The hindering effect of centralized exams on their agency was mentioned by Hande and Selim. For example, Hande reported that she finds herself focusing on exams. She said: *“Another thing I struggle with is that we teach to test. As a result, as a teacher you end up doing mechanical exercises which you now will not have much contribution to your students’ use of language”*. Selim also mentioned that his perception of professional space and accordingly his agency was shaped by the Foreign Language Exam (Yabancı Dil Sınavı-YDS). Although he was enthusiastic about different classroom activities and practices at the beginning of his career, his teaching started to become monotonous since he felt the need to focus on the exam as a teacher teaching to foreign language students. As the Figure 7 illustrates below, he experienced a breaking point around fourth year of his career and then had a stable perceived and exploited professional space. He stated:

*At first, I always thought about my responsibilities. As I get to know my environment, school and the students, I realized that I could do more and I started to organize different activities for the class etc. Then I started teaching in foreign language students which all have concerns related to YDS. We are always talking about it.*

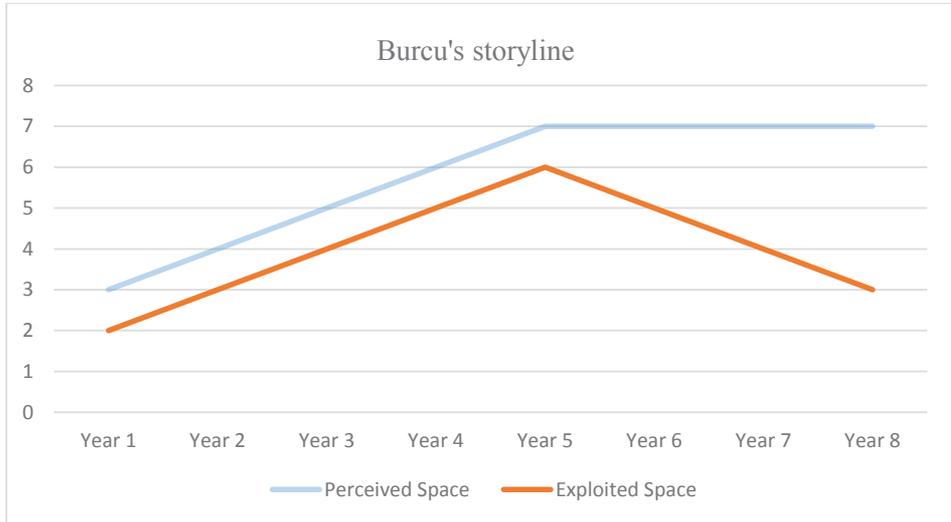


**Figure 7.** Selim's storyline.

Another sub-theme that occurred as a remarkable factor in the development of agency was curriculum. Teachers stated that the standardized curriculum was a barrier for teachers' freedom in their classroom practices. Hande said: *"Standardisation kills creativity and individuality. I am told that I could make any changes I want, but in practice, it is not possible. I have to cover what is given to me and to the students without being able to make any changes. In meetings, we can share our opinion, but we know that nothing will change and the level coordinators and testing members know what is best for everyone"*. Kader also underlined the same factor by saying *"As teachers we are just in a hurry to catch up with the schedule, no time to talk at all"*.

The second main category occurred in the analysis of this trajectory was school-related factors that involved workload, non-cooperating colleagues and lack of technological equipment sub-themes. First of these sub-themes, workload was reported by Hande and Burcu to describe drawbacks they experienced. For example, drawing attention to the number of classes she had, Hande stated: *"For me, I believe teaching 24 hours is too much because I cannot prepare enough for my classes. I would rather prepare my own materials for my specific group of students. In this way, with the materials I believe in, I can have more fruitful lessons. However, quantity more than quality is appreciated as usual"*. Likewise, Burcu drew drops in her lines around fifth year in her teaching and explained that the workload she had was an obstacle for her to exploit her professional space in full and achieve her agency. She said:

*I am not an authoritarian or strict teacher and I oppose the idea of having pressure on students by exams and too much work load. I favor doing things together with my students and care what they think and how they feel about classes. However, I can't allocate any time for it.*

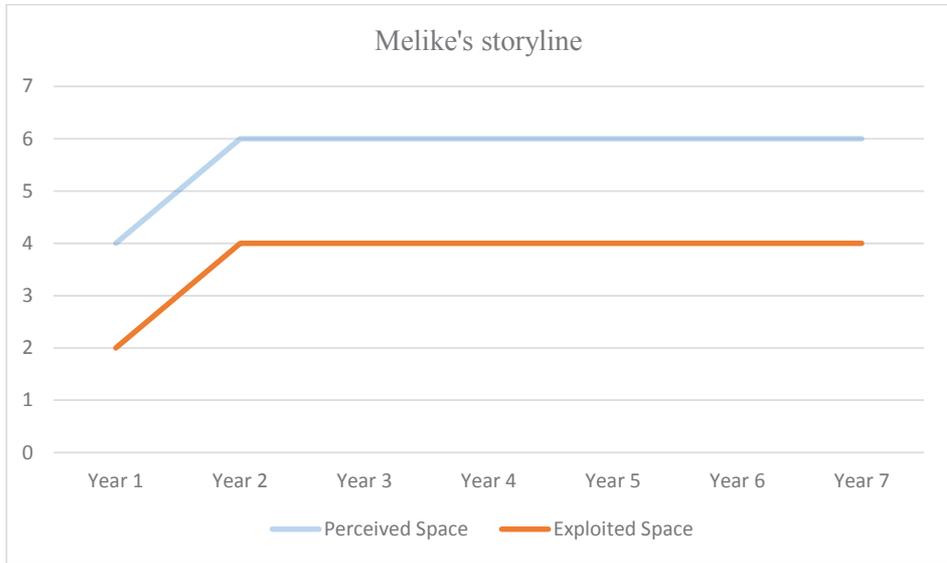


**Figure 8.** Burcu's storyline.

The other sub-theme, non-cooperating colleagues was identified as a typical factor that leads to drawbacks in the achievement of agency for Burcu. She explained her uneasiness about the other teachers in her institution by saying *"I do not feel comfortable about this when I observe my colleagues. I feel as if I work harder, and have nothing back to motivate myself. Cooperation and motivation lack in my institution. I observe that some colleagues are teaching for the sake of teaching and avoid from having any extra training or work. However, some colleagues work really hard and put as much effort as possible to upgrade our teaching standards in the institution. I see myself in between two sides, I neither work too hard, nor ignore what's happening. However, I lack the motivation I used to have"*.

Lack of technological equipment was the third sub-theme that emerged in teachers' comments as an important hindrance for their agency. Among the teachers participating in the study, Melike mentioned that she had hard times in getting students' attention in a crowded class due to the lack of technological equipment, which is the main reason in the change in her storylines. She said:

*I wanted to work at a state school as it is safe. Our textbook is very boring so I always need to do something extra within the borders of the curriculum. I enjoy teaching and the students are very cute but there are many limits in terms of being creative. We do not have many resources, no technology at all. I feel tired.*



**Figure 9.** Melike's storyline.

The last main category in the analysis of failure in achievement of agency was pressure, which includes administrative and parents' pressure. The teachers also emphasized that they feel pressure from administration and parents and this pressure was a threatening factor for their autonomy. For example, Kader said: *"The administration sees us as a machine. They always give extra work, even on weekends. I cannot find time for doing something for my own, my special teaching."* Also, Melike stated: *"Administration loves giving extra duties and they are not supportive of doing MA degrees. Although this is a right of us, they behave like they themselves give this right to us and always remind that if there is an extra work I have to do that because they give me time to go to university for MA classes"*. She also gave a specific example to elaborate how attitudes of the administration had an effect on her agency: *"I have given up. I tried a lot but I even do not have the administration allow me to do an English street in the school. I have collected money from the parents, which was later used by the administration for another silly purpose. I know that I could do more, but this is all I could achieve. I now see working as a teacher as a way to make ends meet"*.

Similar to administration, parents were also seen by teachers as a source of pressure and had an influential role for their agency and professional space. Kader included

parents' pressure in her comments in addition to administrative pressure. She said: *"Parents always ask for more, which is irritating for me. They keep me busy with their desires and questions. They do not let me do my job in the way I know"*. Interestingly, Derya, who explained her full motivation in teaching and gradual growth in her agency, touched upon parental pressure when she was talking about her experiences in her institution. She stated: *"Parents always see their kids having some extra work to be completed at home. They think that their kids should be always on task. Although I explained them that this is not the only way for understanding that the kids learn something, they still insist"*.

The analysis of failure in the achievement of teacher agency overall revealed that some significant factors described declines in teachers' perception and exploitation of professional space and accordingly serving as an obstacle for their agency. These factors emerged as system-related, (exams and curriculum), school-related (workload, non-cooperating teachers and lack of technological equipment) and pressure (administrative pressure and parental pressure).

### ***Discussion and Conclusion***

The present study was conducted to have an understanding of teacher agency in relation to professional space. It specifically investigated the factors that promote and hinder teachers' agency in the classroom from the perspective of a group of language teachers. To serve this aim, semi-structured interviews were carried out with eight in-service Turkish EFL teachers from different schools, in addition to their reflections in the storyline method. The analysis of the data gathered through the two instruments indicated three typical trajectories that explains how teachers exploit their professional space in relation to the way they perceive the amount of space they have: contested agency, gradual growth of agency over time and failure in achievement of agency.

The first trajectory, contested agency, revealed that most of the teachers believe they could do more and they persist on designing their teaching in line with their beliefs and values. That is, they perceive themselves as being ready to achieve more in spite of experienced limitations. Teachers' own motivation was found to shape this trajectory and to be a promoting factor since the teachers showing this trajectory (e.g. Melek, Derya, Mine) explained their positive feelings about teaching, which enables them to ignore problems in their environments and concentrate on their own teaching and students. When their teaching environments are taken into consideration, it is seen that they differ in terms of type of school (private or state) and education level (primary, secondary or high). This underlines the teachers' own commitment to teaching profession rather than the effect of their teaching contexts. As stated by Biesta et al. (2015), teachers' beliefs have a crucial role in the achievement of agency. At this point, their positive beliefs seem to keep teachers on the track, but the difference between their perceived space and exploited space points the other factors that prevent teachers

from fully exploiting their perceived professional space, which leads us to the analysis of other trajectories and factors.

The other trajectories found in the data are the gradual growth and failure in the achievement of agency. The gradual growth performed by the teachers was found to be described by agency-promoting factors such as material adaptation, cooperation of colleagues and technological equipment, whereas dramatic negative changes in the achievement of agency was explained by system-related hindrances like exams and curriculum, school-related hindrances like workload, crowded classes, non-cooperating colleagues, lack of technological equipment in addition to administrative and parents' pressure. These factors overall suggest that agency is directly affected by contextual factors as explained in Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological model. Although teacher beliefs shape the agency (Biesta et al., 2015), without necessary factors that would encourage the enlargement of professional space (Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2016; Soini et al., 2015), exploitation of perceived space seems to be limited. To go beyond those limits, the factors revealed in the present study deserve special attention in terms of creating a healthy environment for teachers that would improve their agentic space, which would accordingly facilitate continuous professional development and increase student learning (Toom et al., 2015). Thus one important step might be underlining the importance of strong pedagogical beliefs by teacher educators in the preparation of future English teachers, as the study showed that teachers' motivation had a profound effect in the achievement of agency. Regarding the teachers' reports in this study, lack of technological equipment seems to serve as an obstacle especially in state schools whereas parents' pressure is experienced mostly in private schools. Based on this observation, another step in facilitating professional development could be improvement of teaching conditions in consultation with teachers. Also, encouraging a professional learning culture in schools through periodical workshops and seminars after which teachers could apply what they have learned might be a useful solution. Since teachers are willing to prepare their own materials as revealed by the present study, such workshops or seminars will both satisfy the needs of teachers and provide new perspectives for them that could be integrated into their teaching. Such professional development activities can also encourage cooperation of teachers by creating a communicative atmosphere among all colleagues in the schools including administration. Additionally parents could be involved in those activities in order to raise their awareness of both their children's progress and details about learning development, which would reduce parents' concerns about their children.

The present study overall provided insights into the factors that may have an influence in teacher agency with a special focus on perception and exploitation of professional space. Nevertheless, it has to be evaluated within a number of limitations. First, the study was carried out with only eight teachers. Although participant teachers in the study are from different type of schools (private and state) and different educa-

tion levels (primary, secondary and high school) and thus it could picture different situations, involving more teachers from more schools and systematic comparison of emerging categories will absolutely be complementary to the present research findings. Also, observing teachers in their classes in further studies will be useful in understanding agentic practices of teachers and visualizing factors contributing to their agency positively or negatively on the spot. Finally, comparison of novice and experienced teachers in terms of their agency might yield important results regarding the use of professional space.

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