

To Be Autonomous or Not to Be: Teachers' Battle with Curricula*

Engin YILDIRIM, Kerim GÜNDOĞDU

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to elucidate the characteristics of curriculum autonomy among primary and middle school teachers, the meanings ascribed to this autonomy, and the lived experiences of teachers regarding curricular independence. Employing a qualitative research methodology, the study sought to provide an in-depth exploration of teachers' perceptions and experiences concerning curriculum autonomy. The phenomenological approach, a type of qualitative research design, was adopted for this investigation. The participants comprised five primary school teachers and twelve middle school teachers, selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and content analysis was conducted to interpret the obtained data, with the findings presented in relation to emergent themes. As a result of the study, findings were obtained under the themes of "curriculum development and evaluation process", "teacher-curriculum interaction", "meaning attributed to autonomy and fidelity", "autonomy status", "impact on curriculum implementation", "sources of curriculum autonomy", "effects of curriculum autonomy" and "recommendations on curriculum autonomy". A strong desire among teachers to participate in the curriculum development process, suggesting the need for initiatives to foster opportunities for autonomy, developing curriculum literacy skills and enhance teacher motivation. Furthermore, while teachers exhibit a strong fidelity to the achievements and outcomes delineated in the curriculum, they demonstrate a significant degree of autonomy in terms of content selection, instructional methods, and assessment practices.

Keywords: Curriculum Autonomy, Curriculum Fidelity, Teacher Curriculum Involvement

INTRODUCTION

Teachers, as one of the cornerstones of the education system, are important actors who contribute to the development of students by going beyond a role that merely conveys information. Teachers' freedom to organise and implement their professional activities has become one of the central issues in educational policies. In this context, especially in the period when curriculum drafts based on skill-based principles are being discussed, teachers' thoughts on curriculum autonomy and the effects of this autonomy on education are of interest.

The ability of the individual to use his/her own will in decision-making and implementation processes and to be original points to the concept of autonomy. The concept of autonomy, which can be traced back to the Athenians (Irwin, 2011), has evolved from being independent by breaking away from the family in which the individual was born to being autonomous by preserving family ties (Özdemir & Çok, 2011). The concept of autonomy (Archbald & Porter, 1994; Holec, 1979; Gremmo & Riley, 1995), which has started to take place more and more frequently in educational debates, is a term that is expressed by authors in many disciplines such as constructivism, critical theory, psychological theory, phenomenology, feminist theory, but is generally accepted as it is without being defined (Castle, 2004). Castle (2004) states that in the field of education, autonomy is considered in many different senses such as individuality, self-activity, self-liberation, self-liberation, ego-liberation, mental reorganisation, self-control ability and professional decisions.

In the field of educational sciences, it is observed that the concept of autonomy is handled under titles such as teacher autonomy (Kılınç et al., 2018; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005), learner autonomy (Cotterall, 2000; Genç, 2021; Little, 2007), supporting learner autonomy (Black & Deci, 2000; Ergin, 2016; Gündoğdu, 2006; Murphy, 2008; Oğuz, 2013; Stefanou et al., 2010) and curriculum autonomy (Erss et al., 2016; Fleming, 1998). Among these titles, it is seen that the concept of curriculum autonomy has been considered as a type of autonomy in the field of education since long ago in foreign literature, while in Turkey it is mostly considered as a sub-dimension of teacher autonomy (Bayraktar, 2019; Çolak et al., 2017; Şentürken & Oğuz, 2020).

Considered as a type of autonomy, curriculum autonomy, as a more characteristic dimension of teacher autonomy (Yolcu & Akar Vural, 2020), falls within the scope of curriculum development, curriculum design and curriculum testing activities (Friedman, 1999). It is related to teacher actions in the process of

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¹Ministry of Education, enginyildirim1802@gmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0002-0355-3546

² Aydın Adnan Menderes University, kerim.gundogdu@adu.edu.tr, orcid.org/ 0000-0003-4809-3405

curriculum execution by teachers. Curriculum autonomy, which is generally defined as teachers' having the right to make decisions in activities such as the selection of activities and equipment related to the curriculum and the creation of the teaching plan (Pearson & Moomaw; 2005), refers to a way of being rather than a state of being that needs to be considered in terms of prerequisite conditions such as teacher competence and personal pedagogical agenda, physical and social resources and freedom of control (Erss, et al., 2016).

When the related literature is analyzed, it may be said that there are quite a number of studies in which curriculum autonomy is considered independently of teacher autonomy (de Almeida & Viana, 2022; Erss, et al., 2016; Fleming, 1998; Hong & Youngs, 2014; Hunter Doniger, 2020; Kadhim & Abbas, 2024; Morgado & Sousa, 2010; Oliveira & Ferreira, 2023). On the other hand, in the national literature, curriculum autonomy is generally considered as a sub-dimension of the concept of teacher autonomy (Bayraktar, 2019; Çolak et al., 2017; Erbiyik & Köybaşı Şemin, 2024; Öztürk-Dursun, 2024; Şentürken & Oğuz, 2020). In the studies of Yolcu (2019), Işık (2022) Kuloğlu (2023) and Dikmen (2023), curriculum autonomy was handled as an independent concept and a scale to measure science teachers' curriculum autonomy was developed by Yolcu and Akar Vural (2020) within the scope of Yolcu's (2019) study. In addition, in the thesis studies conducted by Kuloğlu (2023), Işık (2022) and Dikmen (2023), curriculum autonomy was addressed together with the variables of curriculum literacy, curriculum fidelity, pedagogical knowledge and skill level, self-efficacy perceptions and referral behaviour to special education.

It is thought that teachers' having curriculum autonomy or their level of having curriculum autonomy, especially in terms of the decisions taken regarding the curriculum of any course, is of great importance in terms of the quality of the teaching and learning process. It is stated that autonomy does not exist in a centralised system, while schools may have more autonomy in a decentralised education system (Oliveria & Ferreira, 2023). Osgood (2006) states that centralised regulations in the field of education lead to an external control, and accordingly, teachers are forced to compromise professionalism while performing their profession. Curriculum autonomy exhibits a contextual structure that differs globally according to the administrative paradigms of education systems. While schools in European countries generally adapt to outcome-oriented educational regimes, different school contexts exhibit both different and overlapping characteristics of curriculum control and teacher autonomy (Dieudé & Prøitz, 2024). In decentralized Canada, autonomy is an individual domain specific to the teacher, while in centralized systems such as Portugal, it remains a limited and collective school authority not exercised by teachers (Oliveria & Ferreira, 2023). While schools in New Zealand can make curriculum decisions based on local needs (Zhao, 2025, p. 2), reforms in South Korea and Indonesia aim to grant teachers flexibility, but in practice, obstacles such as inadequate professional training, technological inequality, and excessive administrative demands exist (So et al., 2024; Mustofa et al., 2023; Kumayas et al., 2025). In South Africa, teachers are reportedly excluded from the process (Bessong, 2025). On the other hand, in Australia, autonomy is addressed within the context of schools and implemented more as a delegation of administrative and financial authority, but this can both restrict the scope of teachers' work and lead to inequalities in the financing of the education system (Gavin & Stacey, 2022; MacDonald et al., 2021). In Scandinavian countries, control mechanisms vary depending on the type of school (Dieudé & Prøitz, 2024). In Turkey, education curricula are developed by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) with the decisions taken by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). This situation constitutes an obstacle to the professionalisation of teachers, who are the implementers of these curricula (Bümen, 2020).

Since teachers' experiences and opinions have a critical role in the effectiveness of the education system and the success of students, it is important to encourage further research and discussion on curriculum autonomy. Considering the fact that teachers are not included in the development process as the implementers of the curricula in order to achieve the objectives of the curricula, it becomes a necessity to reveal the current situation regarding teachers' curriculum autonomy in terms of curriculum development and curriculum implementation. In this context, the main purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions of curriculum autonomy in depth, to understand their experiences and practices in this regard, and to understand the effects of this autonomy on student achievement and learning processes. Within the framework of this main purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. How do teachers evaluate curriculum development and evaluation processes in Turkey?
2. What is the nature of teachers' interactions with the curriculum?
3. How do teachers define curriculum autonomy and curriculum fidelity?
4. How do teachers experience curriculum autonomy?

5. What are the effects of teachers' curriculum autonomy on the functioning of curriculum elements?
6. What are the educational factors that determine teachers' curriculum autonomy?
7. What are the general effects (gains and negative outcomes) of curriculum autonomy according to teachers?
8. What are teachers' suggestions regarding curriculum autonomy?

METHOD

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

Using qualitative research method, this study examines the characteristics of primary and secondary school teachers' curriculum autonomy, the meanings attributed to curriculum autonomy and how teachers' experiences of curriculum autonomy are limited to teachers' views. In the study, qualitative research method was used since the focus was on in-depth explanation of teachers' experiences of curriculum autonomy. The research was conducted based on the phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research designs. Phenomenology is a qualitative research model that aims to investigate phenomena that we frequently encounter in daily life in the form of events, experiences, perceptions, orientations, etc. but whose full meaning we cannot grasp (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). The phenomenon taken as a basis in this study is 'curriculum autonomy experiences'.

PARTICIPANTS and SAMPLING

This study examined teachers working in public elementary and middle schools in the districts of Merkezefendi and Pamukkale in the province of Denizli. In the research plan, it was aimed to determine the participants to be included in the study using maximum diversity sampling. However, due to some participants subsequently withdrawing from participation, it was decided to determine the participants included in the study using convenience sampling. This sampling is the researcher's selection of a situation that is close and easy to access (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 123). The determination of the study group from Denizli is due to the fact that the researcher also works in this province and it is easier to reach this group in obtaining experiences related to the phenomenon to be studied. In addition, another reason for choosing this sampling strategy is the financial and time advantages it offers (Stratton, 2021). In this regard, the aim was to reach approximately twenty participants who were expected to provide sufficient data for the research; however, a total of five primary school and twelve secondary school teachers were included in the study. The information about the gender, age range, branch, professional seniority range, the settlement unit where the institution is located and the seniority year range of the teachers, all of whom work in the district centre, are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Information on the Participants

Code	Gender	Age Range	Branch	Seniority (Year)	Seniority at current school (Year)
T1	Male	31-40	English	6-10	4-5
T2	Female	31-40	Class Teacher	11-15	10 +
T3	Female	41-50	Class Teacher	16-20	3-4
T4	Male	41-50	Science	21 years +	10 +
T5	Female	41-50	Class Teacher	21 years +	10 +
T6	Female	31-40	Elementary Mathematics	11-15	8-9
T7	Male	41-50	Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge	21 years +	10 +
T8	Male	51 +	Social Studies	21 years +	10 +
T9	Male	31-40	Physical Education	11-15	3-4
T10	Male	31-40	Music	16-20	4-5
T11	Male	41-50	Information Technologies	16-20	10 +
T12	Female	41-50	Turkish	21 years +	10 +
T13	Female	41-50	Technology and Design	21 years +	6-7
T14	Male	41-50	Turkish	21 years +	10 +
T15	Female	41-50	Visual Arts	11-15	10 +
T16	Female	31-40	Class Teacher	16-20	6-7
T17	Female	31-40	Class Teacher	16-20	1-2

When Table 1 is analysed, it is seen that nine of the participants are female and eight of them are male; seven participants are between 31-40 years old, nine participants are between 41-50 years old and one participant is 51 and over; one teacher's professional seniority is between 6-10 years, four teachers between 11-15 years, five teachers between 16-20 years, seven teachers between 21 years and above; one teacher's seniority in the institution where he/she works is between 1-2 years, two teachers between 3-4 years, two teachers between 4-5 years, two teachers between 6-7 years, one teacher between 8-9 years and nine teachers between 10 years and above.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

The 'Interview Form' developed by the researcher was used as a data collection tool in the study. It is aimed to compare what is stated/recommended in the curriculum (curriculum adherence) and what is implemented in practice (curriculum autonomy). Within the scope of the research, two separate parallel semi-structured interview forms were prepared for primary and secondary school teachers. The interviews with the participants were conducted in semi-structured interview forms. Semi-structured interview is a type of interview in which specific information is collected from each participant and consists of flexible and open questions (Merriam, 2018a, p. 87).

The interview forms were prepared by the researchers in the first stage by writing the questions to be addressed to the participants and taking the opinions of curriculum development experts and Turkish language educators. After that, two of the teachers with similar characteristics to the target group were interviewed for the interview form and minor adjustments were made on the form. The interviews lasted between 30-50 minutes.

Before starting the interview, the participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the interview process. For the reliability of the data, voice recordings were taken for the interviews with the knowledge and permission of the participant teachers. In order not to disclose the information of the teachers, various personal information was obtained by giving code names during the interview process. After the interviews were transcribed, each participant was contacted to read and confirm the interview texts.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Content analysis based on inductive understanding was used to analyse the data to be obtained in the study. Content analysis is a data analysis technique that enables reaching the concepts and relationships that will explain the data obtained, conceptualising the data first and then arranging them logically according to the emerging concepts (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). After it was determined that the data obtained through interviews provided a saturation, they were converted into written texts in digital environment and then subjected to content analysis. The data transformed into written texts were subjected to the coding process with the draft code list prepared based on the literature, and new codes were produced during this process. Then, the codes were organised under categories and themes according to their relevance. To enhance the credibility (internal validity) of the research, the codes, categories, and themes that emerged after the data analysis process was completed were submitted to an expert with experience in qualitative research for review (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 317-318). In line with the opinions, the text was reviewed again in terms of theme and code relationship. After the expert opinion, a second content analysis was carried out and themes, categories and codes related to the research topic were tried to be reached.

ROLE OF THE RESEARCHERS

This research was conducted by the first author within the scope of 'Qualitative Design in Educational Research' and 'Academic Writing' courses by a doctoral student of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, who graduated from the Faculty of Education, had 18 years of teaching experience and 11 years of school administration experience. During the research, it was stated that the researcher was a school administrator in a school in Denizli province. Despite this, it was observed that the participants were quite comfortable during the interviews and expressed their suggestions and criticisms without hesitation. Nevertheless, in order to prevent any potential social desirability bias that the researcher's professional role might create among participants, necessary explanations were provided prior to the interviews regarding the purpose of the research, confidentiality, and anonymity, indirect questioning was conducted to elicit real thoughts about the phenomenon being studied, and participants were asked to explain their views with examples (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). On the other hand, the researcher's perspective on the research topic was

shaped by the theoretical knowledge gained in undergraduate, graduate and doctoral courses, 18 years of teaching and 10 years of school administration experience, and the people he interacted with in the national education system. It is likely that these knowledge and experiences were reflected in the research process and results. Nevertheless, the researcher does not have sharp views on the research subject and the results to be reached.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity and reliability in qualitative research is an important issue and determines the quality of the research. There are a number of measures to ensure validity and reliability in a qualitative research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, pp. 276-283). Some of these are; triangulation, participant verification, appropriate and sufficient participation in data collection processes, explanation of the researcher's stance (reflectivity), expert review, detailed explanation of the path followed in the research process (supervision), purposeful sampling, detailed description (Merriam, 2018b, p. 221; Yıldırım& Şimşek, 2018, pp. 276-283). The measures taken to ensure validity and reliability in this study can be listed as follows:

- Regarding teachers' curriculum autonomy, both primary and secondary school teachers were interviewed and diversification was made in terms of data source.
- After the interviews, the texts obtained from the interview recordings were read by the relevant participant to confirm whether they were understood correctly.
- As mentioned under the title 'Data collection and analysis', the data collection process was terminated after it was determined that the data collected for the concepts and themes determined in general terms during the data collection process provided a saturation. Thus, it was tried to ensure appropriate and sufficient participation in the data collection processes.
- As can be seen under the heading 'Researcher role', the role of the researcher in this research, his/her perspective on the subject and his/her interaction with the participants were expressed in detail.
- Expert opinions were consulted while preparing the interview forms and creating themes during data analysis.
- The path followed during the research process, i.e. the study group, data collection and data analysis, is described in detail under the relevant headings.
- As stated under the heading 'Study group', teachers with different characteristics were tried to be included in the sample to the extent possible.
- In the 'Findings' section, some of the raw data were analysed according to the emerging themes without commenting and by being as faithful as possible to the nature of the data. Thus, detailed descriptions were tried to be made.

FINDINGS

In line with the data obtained from the interviews with the participants, themes and categories related to teachers' curriculum autonomy were formed as shown in Figure 1. The findings are presented by discussing each theme under headings.

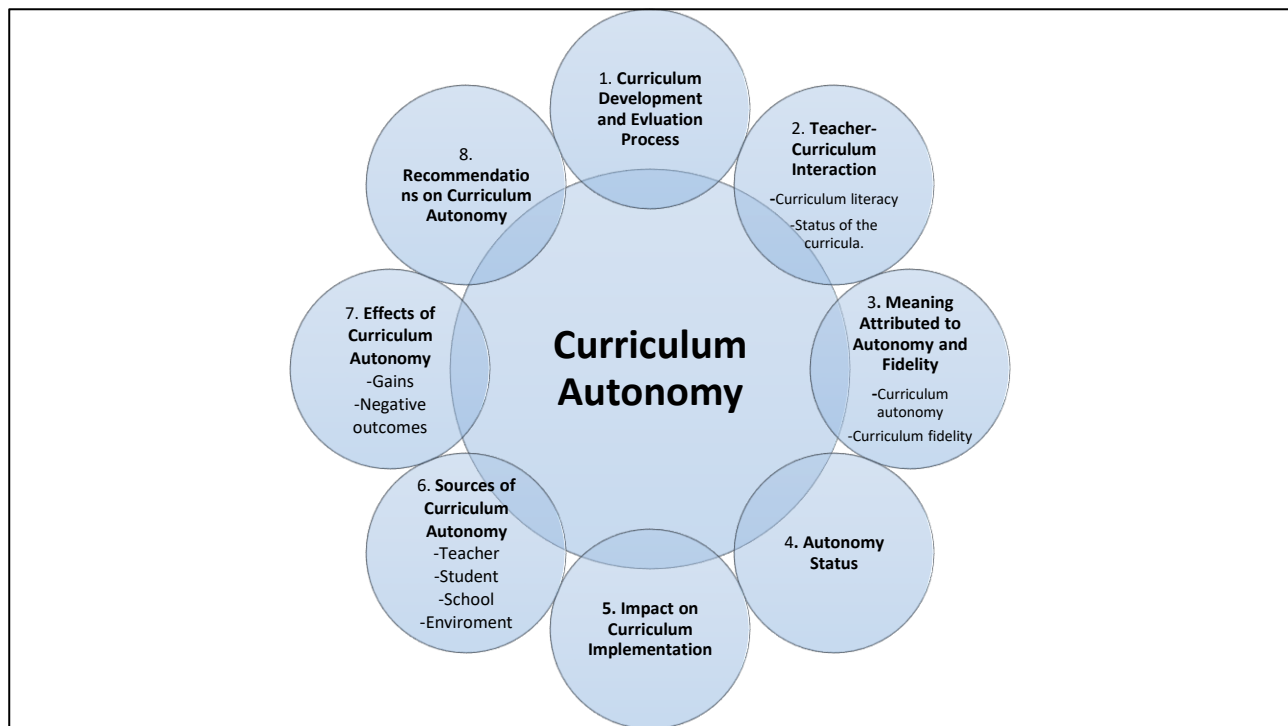


Figure 1. Themes and Categories Related to Teachers' Curriculum Autonomy

The findings reveal that teachers' curriculum autonomy is influenced by development processes, their curriculum interactions, and perceptions of autonomy versus fidelity. It is determined by teacher experience, student needs, school support, and environmental factors. Autonomy enables flexible implementation of curriculum elements, enhancing learning and motivation, but risks deviation from goals. Recommendations emphasize teacher involvement and training to optimize autonomy's benefits while addressing its challenges.

HOW DO TEACHERS EVALUATE THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION PROCESSES?

The codes obtained in line with the views of the teachers participating in the research on the theme of curriculum development and evaluation processes in Turkey and examples of participant views on the codes are shown in Table 1.

Table 2. Codes and Quotations Related to the Theme of Curriculum Development and Evaluation Processes

Code	Quote
Suddenness of decisions	"I think it is not enough at the moment, it happens too much, I mean, should I say without much thought, sudden decisions are made without much planning and changes are made in the curriculum" (T2)
Not taking teachers' opinions into consideration	"Unfortunately, teachers, who are the stakeholders of this issue, cannot be involved too much in this issue. They can't raise their opinions and voices too much" (T7)
Teachers not involved in the process	"But we now agree that it is not taken into consideration because it was enacted in a very short time..." (T12)
Need for regional differences	"... a central school in Ankara and a village school in Hakkari... It seems impossible to apply the same curriculum there..." (T3)
Being unaware of decisions	"Maybe we lack information about what the curriculum is, what the work is about." (T9)
Necessity for teacher involvement	"To what extent can these curricula be fully implemented in our schools? Honestly, it is a question mark..." (T14)

When Table 2 is examined, teachers emphasize that they cannot the perpetrators of the curriculum development and evaluation processes and that this perpetration is necessary. Being unaware of the decisions taken leads to uncertainty and ignorance. There are also demands that these processes should be sensitive to regional differences. The top-down, sudden decision-making process, which often excludes their input and ignores regional diversity, may limits their autonomy and creates a disconnect between the curriculum and their teaching realities. These insights collectively highlight the perceived top-down nature of curriculum development in Türkiye and underscore the critical need to meaningfully incorporate teacher perspectives and contextual realities into curriculum design and evaluation processes.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF TEACHERS' INTERACTIONS WITH THE CURRICULUM?

The categories, codes and excerpts from teachers' views on the theme of Teacher- Curriculum Interactions related to the nature of teachers' interactions with curricula are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Categories, Codes and Quotations Related to the Theme of Teacher-Curriculum Interaction

Category	Code	Quote
Curriculum Literacy	Reading the curriculum	"At the beginning of the year, yes. We read the achievements and the curriculum, yes." (T16)
	Accessing the curriculum	"... of course we can access the curriculum." (T13)
	Using the curriculum for planning	"I mean, I look at it to see which subject, which theme, how much time is allocated, etc., and I look at it to make my general planning." (T5)
	Continuously benefiting from the curriculum	"I constantly benefit from this curriculum because it is available in my file." (T10)
Status of Curricula	Achievements not suitable for the developmental characteristics of the students	"The achievements there are the ones that look like they can be given in one lesson or two lessons, but they are not..." (T5)
	Inadequacy of content	"Well, about the content, when I first started, the content was fuller... but now it is more empty." (T6)
	Content not suitable for student level	"What I remember... there were many complex reading texts that lasted 4-5 pages... they can alienate children from reading..." (T5)
	Need for a guidebook	"I mean, national education did not send any books to follow the curriculum. I have been doing this without a book for the last 2-3 years." (T15)

The findings, stated in Table 3, indicate that teachers are generally competent in accessing and utilizing the curriculum for planning purposes. However, there is significant criticism regarding the appropriateness of the curriculum's content and achievements to students' developmental levels. Inadequate achievement and content, as well as materials inappropriate for student levels, can be seen as the primary obstacles to effective curriculum implementation in the field. Furthermore, the lack of guidance materials to assist teachers in implementing the curriculum is a significant problem. This highlights the need for updates to the curriculum design and content, as well as the development of supporting materials for teachers.

In contrast to these, some of the teachers explained not reading the curriculum and seeing the curriculum as an annual plan as follows: "Although I don't read it, with the information I get from the internet." (T9); "I mean, now, in general, the achievements are determined in the annual plans. In this way, we act according to the achievements in the annual plans." (T1). On the other hand, T2, who is a classroom teacher, stated that seniority provides the comfort of not reading the curriculum as follows: "When you teach the same class continuously, you have more control over the process, flow and so on. There is a comfort that it gives, professional comfort, I have mastered these things, I have mastered these subjects." (T2). In summary,

variability in curriculum literacy—some teachers actively engage with it while others rely on experience or annual plans—further may influences their ability to exercise autonomy.

HOW DO TEACHERS DEFINE CURRICULAR AUTONOMY AND CURRICULAR FIDELITY?

Categories, codes and teachers' opinions on the theme of Meaning Attributed to Autonomy and Fidelity are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Categories, Codes and Quotations Related to The Theme of Meaning Attributed to Autonomy and Fidelity

Category	Code	Quote
Autonomy	Adapting instruction to regional and socio-economic conditions	"In other words, when we say autonomy, the teacher can make additions or deletions to the curriculum depending on the region..." (T8)
	Going outside the curriculum	"It is also important to be able to go beyond the curriculum and to be given this right." (T10)
	Leveraging curriculum flexibility	"Being autonomous does not mean going completely out of the curriculum... it depends on the curriculum, but within it... we naturally have a flexible structure within our course." (T13)
	Art performance behind closed doors	"The biggest autonomy is the moment when the teacher is alone with the student... he actually performs his own role like an artist." (T7)
Fidelity	Robotizing the teacher	"This is a bit robot, I mean, it feels like robotizing people" (T3)
	Implementing the curriculum word-for-word	"Now, I thought that sticking to the process, you know, if it is right for me, I thought to stick completely to the time, the given time and the gains given." (T16)
	Implementing without criticizing	"I mean, to be fully dependent then, it is like doing what they say without looking at it critically..." (T5)

According to Table 4, teachers consider it important to have the right to adapt the curriculum to regional and socio-economic conditions, and even to deviate from it. The ability of teachers to add or remove items from the curriculum based on their region is considered a fundamental element of autonomy. However, it has also been stated that autonomy does not mean completely deviating from the curriculum; on the contrary, it means taking advantage of its flexible structure. Teachers describe this moment, when they are alone with students in the classroom, "performing their role like an artist," as "the greatest autonomy." The Fidelity category refers to the tendency to fully adhere to the curriculum and implement it without criticism. It has been stated that this situation feels like "robotizing" teachers. Furthermore, fidelity has been interpreted as "adhering to the process, remaining completely faithful to the allotted time and the assigned outcomes." Alternatively, it has been interpreted as "doing what is told without critical consideration."

HOW DO TEACHERS EXPERIENCE CURRICULUM AUTONOMY?

The codes and teachers' views on the theme of Autonomy Situations related to how teachers experience curriculum autonomy are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Codes and Quotes Related to the Theme of Autonomy Status

Code	Quotes
Not depending on the curriculum	"Of course, I am not dependent on the curriculum because we do it more based on our own curriculum, as I mentioned earlier, based on experience." (T4)
Partial autonomy	So with a semi-autonomous curriculum, ... I want to move forward. (T17)
Fidelity to achievements	"As I said, I generally want to depend on the curriculum in terms of objectives and achievements, or rather I do. I mean, I don't go beyond the framework there." (T11)
Content autonomy	"As I said, we can make changes in the content during the lesson" (T1)
Learning-teaching process autonomy	"In education, you can never move forward with a single strategy. You need to develop strategies, different strategies, because each student, students' learning situations are different." (T10)
Autonomy in testing situations	"I mean, in the measurement and evaluation part, since I know what and how much I give to the student, I actually find it right to leave this job to me." (T6).

When Table 5 is analyzed, teachers' perceptions of curriculum autonomy reveal that this concept is experienced and practiced in different dimensions. While some teachers stated that they were not completely dependent on the curriculum, they attributed this to their own experiences and the "own curriculum" they created. However, the desire to move forward with a semi-autonomous curriculum was also expressed. T8 expresses his fidelity to the curriculum with the statement, *"We are now trying to implement it as much as we can in accordance with the curriculum."* (T8). Teachers generally preferred to depend on the objectives and achievements of the curriculum and did not deviate from this framework. But, some teachers' statements such as *"The target behavior is a subject or a color that should be acquired. Or I don't know, it is something that should be learned, but I can twist and turn it in my own way..."* (T15) also indicate that some teachers have experienced achievement autonomy. It was also found that they were able to exhibit autonomy in terms of content and make changes to the content during the lesson. It was also emphasized that autonomy is important in the teaching-learning process, that there is no single strategy and that there is a need to develop various strategies due to the differences in students' learning situations. In the measurement and evaluation processes, teachers found it right to act autonomously because they thought that they knew best how much and how much information they gave to the students. Again, according to the research findings, S12 stated the situation of having to be autonomous: *"We try to stick to the curriculum. But for example, we need to give some information to 5th graders. In such a situation, the teacher has to use initiative."* (S12), while S13 expresses using the flexibility in the curriculum as follows: *"There is already that flexibility there. ... Well, what do I do there? I can use that flexibility according to the situation within the framework of the curriculum, teacher."* (S13)

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF TEACHERS' CURRICULUM AUTONOMY ON THE FUNCTIONING OF CURRICULUM ELEMENTS?

The categories, codes and sample teachers' views on the theme of Impacts on Curriculum Practices related to the effects of curriculum autonomy on the implementation of the curriculum are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Categories, Codes and Quotations Related to The Theme of Impact on Curriculum Implementation

Category	Code	Quote
Objectives/ Achievements	Adding achievements	"Actually, it is also an achievement... focusing on an achievement that is not written in the curriculum." (T2)
	Changing achievements	"I do that by changing its place... I did not depend on the achievements of the Turkish lesson about certain days..." (T3)
	Not processing/skipping achievements	"Either you will look for ways to do this... or you will skip that achievement..." (T12)
	Relocating achievements	"I mean, I do that by changing its place, I mean, changing its place., for example, I did not stick to the Turkish lesson outcomes this year." (S3)
Objectives/ Achievements	Prioritizing achievements	"I apply all of them, depending on how many hours I am told to gain which acquisitions in how many hours. But in some I go into too much detail, in some I simplify things that will not stay with the child, will not provide permanent learning or will tire his/her mind." (T17)
Content	Adding content	"We looked, if there was no feedback, if it was not enough, the examples can be multiplied." (T10)
	Change the order of content	"I take my attendance, whatever the children need, I give the subjects that I can give in the classroom environment in September when they cannot do activities outside because it is constantly raining and snowing in winter." (T9)
Teaching Methods	Adding activity	"How do we try to eliminate it now? We try to make up for that deficiency by doing extra activities with our own methods." (T14)
The process	Using the time allocated to other courses	"When the time was not enough, I took it from other weeks, I took it from some courses. Courses that I am comfortable with in terms of subject matter." (T2)
	Autonomy for extra/supportive program	"When there are very essential situations, for example school programs, some special days of the week, ..., you can go out of the achievement. In those cases, out-of-achievement activities can be done." (T10)

In line with the findings in Table 6, when the effects of curriculum autonomy on curriculum implementation are examined, it is understood that teachers include various flexibility practices in terms of outcomes, content and teaching methods. For example, they can make additions by focusing on the objectives that are not written in the curriculum. In addition, strategies such as relocating certain objectives or skipping some objectives are also practiced. It is also seen that teachers prioritize the learning outcomes and simplify them in a way that will enable students to learn permanently or not to tire their minds. Similarly, teachers may add to the content according to the flow of the lesson and the needs of the students. The order of presentation of content can also be changed by teachers; for example, in winter months, when outdoor activities are not possible, topics that could be taught indoors are brought forward. Or teachers may organize additional activities in their own way to fill gaps in the curriculum or to make learning more effective. In addition, in general, when there is a lack of time in the teaching and learning process, time allocated to other subjects is utilized. In addition, in very compulsory situations such as school programs or special days, teachers can use their autonomy to go beyond the curriculum by doing extracurricular activities. In generally, it is understood that teachers use curriculum autonomy to shape the curriculum according to their own classroom and student realities, adapting the outcomes, content, teaching methods and lesson processes according to the situation.

WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL FACTORS THAT DETERMINE TEACHERS' CURRICULUM AUTONOMY?

The categories, codes and sample teacher opinions on the theme of Sources of Curriculum Autonomy related to the factors determining curriculum autonomy are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Categories, Codes and Quotations Related to The Theme of Sources of Curriculum Autonomy

Category	Code	Quote
Teacher-related Factors	Professional seniority/experience	"Now being autonomous is a bit more related to the teacher, experience, knowledge, experience." (T4)
	Teacher's attitude towards autonomy	"Secondly, the teacher's own characteristic... The teacher's own characteristic is important here." (T11)
Student-related Factors	Students' needs	"But there can be changes depending on my experience, the student's needs and wishes at that time..." (T13)
	Individual differences	"I mean, since we know the target group, we can apply different methods... from student to student." (T1)
	Class size	"I mean, the openness in our education system, there are too many students, you have less chance to apply activities" (T2)
School-related Factors	School facilities	"In practice, materials, inappropriateness of the school environment... everywhere is concrete." (T16)
	Attitude of school administration	"Of course, the administrator and school administration are also important here..." (T7)
Environmental Factors	Socio-economic conditions	"... school's location, environmental needs, the profile of the parents... change..." (T9)
	Support of parents	"Family support is a very big factor" (T6)

When the findings in Table 7 are analyzed, it is seen that, according to the participant teachers, their ability to use curriculum autonomy is largely dependent on professional qualifications. Experience, knowledge, and professional seniority are the main factors that increase their ability to act autonomously. Furthermore, the teacher's personal attitude and characteristics towards autonomy also play a decisive role in this regard. The teacher himself/herself was stated as an important factor affecting the level of autonomy. Furthermore, T3, a classroom teacher, emphasized the branch advantage of autonomy for classroom teachers with the statement, "... I think classroom teachers have an advantage in this regard. I teach six lessons a day, and I can extend that gain from the first lesson in the morning to the last lesson." (T3). Furthermore, T12, a Turkish teacher, said, "Do they master the curriculum? That's the case. I mean, there may be teachers who don't have enough mastery." (S12) stated that curriculum literacy is a source of autonomy, while S11, an Information Technologies teacher, said, "I say the first element here is the curriculum itself... It actually gives us a little more freedom by offering different things..." (S11) stated that the flexibility of the curriculum is a source of autonomy.

Students' needs and desires create situations where the curriculum needs to be flexible and autonomous. Students' individual differences support autonomy by allowing teachers to implement different teaching methods. However, situations such as large class sizes can reduce teachers' opportunities to implement activities and, consequently, to act autonomously. According to the research findings, Turkish teacher T12 added students' academic achievement levels to the list of sources of student autonomy, stating, "As I said, the class's readiness level, academic achievement level, and many other sociological factors are at play. Therefore, not every student is at the same capacity." (T12)

The physical conditions of the school environment and available materials directly impact curriculum autonomy. A lack of materials or an unsuitable school environment can limit the ability to implement the curriculum flexibly. The school administration's attitude and support for teachers' autonomy also play a significant role in these factors. Furthermore, T14, a Turkish teacher, stated, "I feel like we have to do this.

Because we also need to take the LGS exam into consideration. Children take the LGS exam in 8th grade." (T14), pointing to the reality of centralized school exams. External factors such as the socio-economic conditions of the school's location, environmental needs, and parent profiles can trigger autonomy by requiring curriculum adaptation. Furthermore, the presence or absence of parental support was also cited as a significant factor influencing teachers' flexibility in implementing the curriculum.

WHAT ARE THE GENERAL EFFECTS (PROS AND CONES) OF CURRICULUM AUTONOMY ACCORDING TO TEACHERS?

The categories and codes related to the outcomes of curriculum autonomy and sample teacher opinions on the theme of Outcomes of Curriculum Autonomy are given in Table 8.

Table 8. Categories, Codes and Quotations Related to The Theme of Effects of Curriculum Autonomy

Category	Code	Quote
Pros	Increased learning level	"Now, the advantages are of course for the benefit of the students, it would be a great advantage to increase their level of teaching" (T1)
	Facilitation of learning	"Now, as an advantage, I say, they can benefit from the environmental conditions. I mean, they benefit, they provide education more easily." (T8)
	Teaching motivation	"But providing autonomy increases my motivation to do new and different things." (T2)
	Responding to student needs	"I mean, but the advantageous aspect is of course that we have the advantage of being able to organize with our own experiences, field knowledge, suitable for students, suitable for their needs." (T13)
	Professional satisfaction	"We can also call it professional conscience; we can also call it satisfaction." (T6)
	Student motivation	"Then children participate in the study more willingly." (T13)
Cons	Possibility of losing control	"But we should not lose the end of the rope. I mean, that is the disadvantage..." (T11)
	Deviation from goals/achievements	"The disadvantage is that he/she can get too far away... from the real goals..." (T5)

In line with the findings in Table 8, according to teachers, curriculum autonomy offers positive gains such as increasing students' learning levels, facilitating learning and making more effective use of environmental conditions. It increases teacher motivation, encourages new and different practices, provides the opportunity to respond better to student needs and increases professional satisfaction. It also increases student motivation. However, autonomy also has the potential for negative consequences, such as loss of control and the possibility of excessive deviation from set goals or outcomes. Also, T3, a classroom teacher, expressed the possibility of being subject to sanctions as a negative outcome of curriculum autonomy by saying, "I mean, the inspection issue comes to my mind directly. (Laughing) In the case of being autonomous, right? I mean, when there is a disadvantage. Sanctions, from the outside, you know." (T3). The words of S4, a science teacher, emphasize the low central exam success as a negative outcome of autonomy: "The disadvantage is If we talk about the realities of Turkey, there is an LGS exam. Children will take the LGS exam." (T4). These findings draw attention to the fact that curriculum autonomy should be used in a balanced and conscious way without deviating from the main objectives and that the realities in Turkey should be taken into account.

WHAT ARE TEACHERS' SUGGESTIONS REGARDING CURRICULUM AUTONOMY?

The codes and teachers' opinions on the theme of Recommendations on Curriculum Autonomy regarding teachers' suggestions on curriculum autonomy are given in Table 9.

Table 9. Codes and Quotations Related to The Theme of Recommendations on Curriculum Autonomy

Code	Quote
Taking teachers' opinions into consideration	"When these curriculums are being made, as we said, the ideas of teachers should be emphasized from the beginning." (T8)
Taking regional differences into account	"The curriculum that a child in the Aegean will learn and the curriculum that a child in Van... I should start from my own geography..." (T15)
Involving teachers in curriculum development	"It is important to be involved in the process... to go and develop curriculums..." (T5)
Providing autonomy opportunities	"I think flexibility should be provided to the teacher in this regard." (T3)
Providing information trainings	"You know, maybe at the beginning of the year... we can be more involved in the process by giving trainings..." (T17)
Increasing curriculum literacy	"I think it is about being able to apply curriculum types... the more these are known, the faster they can be put into practice..." (T1)

According to Table 9, teachers' suggestions regarding curriculum autonomy clearly reveal the need for a more participatory, flexible and supportive approach in curriculum development and implementation processes. This emphasizes the importance of integrating teachers' experience and knowledge gained in the field with the theoretical structure of the curriculum. There was also a strong suggestion that regional differences should be taken into account and the curriculum should be adaptable to local conditions. This points to the limitations of centralized curricula, especially in countries with a wide geographical and cultural diversity such as Turkey. The need to organize curriculum information trainings and increase teachers' curriculum literacy would help to address existing knowledge gaps and help teachers to better understand the types of curricula. These recommendations can reduce the problems encountered in practice by ensuring that the curriculum is not just a document but is fully understood and owned by teachers. In addition, T11, an Information Technologies teacher, emphasized the necessity of flexible curricula with the statement "I mean, that autonomy should be provided in the curriculum so that it can do something, so that the teacher can feel it." (T11), while T12, a Turkish teacher, emphasized the necessity of providing opportunities for stakeholders to come together about the curriculum with the statement "We should be able to come together. I wish congresses could be organized, where teachers are also included, lecturers are also included, ..." (T12).

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, and SUGGESTIONS

In this study, the phenomenon of teachers' experiences of curriculum autonomy was examined. As a result of the study, findings were obtained under the themes of "curriculum development and evaluation process", "teacher-curriculum interaction", "meaning attributed to autonomy and fidelity", "autonomy status", "impact on curriculum implementation", "sources of curriculum autonomy", "effects of curriculum autonomy" and "recommendations on curriculum autonomy".

In general, teachers mentioned the suddenness of decisions, not taking teachers' opinions into consideration, teachers not being involved in the process, the need to take regional differences into consideration, being unaware of decisions, and the necessity for teachers to be involved in the process regarding the curriculum development and evaluation process. This situation generally shows that changes made during the process or new practices based on the results are brought to the agenda by the Ministry of Education in the form of sudden decisions, without taking the opinions of the teachers who are the implementers of the curriculum in the curriculum development and evaluation process, contrary to the nature of curriculum development and evaluation as a process, and teachers cannot be a part of the curriculum development and evaluation process. In addition, this situation causes the decisions to have an appearance of being accepted without taking regional differences into account. Yüksel (1998) states that teachers are the most important stakeholders of the entire curriculum development process from the school level to the country level and that teachers' professional experiences constitute an important data source for the curriculum development process. However, when we look at the studies conducted so far, it is seen that teachers do not have the right to have a say in terms of participating in decisions and are not supported in educational reform studies in Turkey (Öztürk, 2011), and curriculums are developed without the direct contribution of teachers

(Bümen, 2019). In the process of developing the Türkiye Century Education Model (TCEM), which was put into practice in the 2024-2025 academic year, curriculum development commissions that include both teachers and academics are not sufficiently mentioned (Akpınar et al., 2024). Again, it is an important necessity to consider regional differences in the curriculum development process (Tutkun & Aksoyalp, 2010), and it is seen that the curriculums developed with decisions taken from the center does not respond to regional diversity (Çobanoğlu & Yıldırım, 2021; Özyurt et al., 2016). The results of the studies that regional differences are not taken into account in the curricula being implemented in the literature are important in terms of expressing such a need (Kahramanoğlu, 2017; Kayahan-Yüksel & Geçimli, 2023; Özaydınlı, 2023). In this respect, it can be said that including teachers, who are the implementers of the curriculum, in the curriculum development and evaluation processes in terms of decision-making and taking regional differences into consideration is an important situation in terms of increasing the effectiveness of the curriculums.

It is seen that teachers' views on their interaction with curricula are grouped under two categories: curriculum literacy and the status of curricula. Regarding curriculum literacy, teachers' views emphasize reading the curriculum, accessing the curriculum, using the curriculum for planning and continuously benefiting from the curriculum. Some teachers' views are that they do not read the curriculum and see the curriculum as an annual plan. In line with these findings, it can be said that teachers generally have sufficient curriculum literacy, they can access the curricula, and they benefit from the curricula, mostly for planning. However, there are also teachers who do not make use of curricula or use them only for planning educational activities. Curriculum literacy is related to the process of understanding and analyzing curricula at a high level (Taghipoor et al., 2022). When we consider that curriculum literacy is a teacher competency that includes teachers' branch-specific competencies that significantly affect their curriculum implementation competencies (Erik & Yılmaz, 2024), it is of great importance that curricula are fully comprehended and implemented correctly by teachers in order to be fully realized (Ekici, 2021, p. 275). Similar to this study, according to the findings of Keskin's (2019) study, some teachers benefit from the curriculum, while others rarely use the curriculum. Similarly, according to Turan-Özpolat's (2024) study, some of the teachers were able to define curriculum literacy, while others were able to define it partially or not at all. In the quantitative studies in the literature, it is mostly seen that teachers' curriculum literacy levels are high (Adem, 2023; Aslan & Gürten, 2019; Dilek & Taşgın, 2023; Çelik & Karaorman, 2024; Karaduman, 2024; Karakuyu, 2023a). In terms of curriculum autonomy, teachers' demonstration of curriculum literacy skills points to an important skill in terms of exhibiting fidelity or autonomy to curricula. Teachers' exhibiting curriculum literacy skills such as being aware of the ways to access curricula, being able to access curricula, and making use of curriculum texts while implementing curricula can significantly affect their fidelity to curricula or curriculum autonomy (Çelik & Karaorman, 2024; Karakuyu, 2023a). As a result, it can be said that having curriculum literacy skills in terms of curriculum autonomy is an important competence for teachers to be aware of the curricula, to be able to implement the curricula and to be able to adapt them according to local conditions.

In terms of the status of the curricula, teachers evaluated the curricula in terms of the achievements not being suitable for the developmental characteristics of the students, the inadequacy of the content, the content not being suitable for the level of the students, and also emphasized the need for guidebooks. The Curriculum Evaluation Report published by MoNE in 2020 (MoNE, 2020) includes findings on the evaluation of the curricula updated in 2018 by teachers. The findings in the report show that the majority of teachers think that the objectives in the curricula are appropriate for the level of the students, that the order of the content at the grade level is appropriate, that the content covers the knowledge to be gained in general, and that the content is too dense to keep up. The findings of this study suggest that teachers' views on the achievements and content of the curricula may have changed since 2020. Because it can be said that the report published approximately one year after the implementation of the curriculums updated in 2018 will not fully reflect the opinions of teachers about the curriculums. Considering that the study was conducted in 2023-2024, it is possible that teachers may have made more qualified evaluations in terms of the suitability of the achievements and content elements to the level of the students and the adequacy of the curriculum elements in the context of evaluating the results of the curricula by implementing them for a longer period of time. In addition, teachers' opinions on the status of the curricula also support the findings of the study on curriculum literacy in terms of reflecting the status of their curriculum literacy. The dynamic relationship between the elements of curricula shows that they affect each other (Altıntaş & Gorgen, 2021). Teachers' views on the elements of curriculums can trigger their autonomy in the implementation of the curriculum. Curriculum

changes that may be made due to any element being deemed inadequate or not suitable for the level of the students may have repercussions on other elements. Teachers' emphasis on the need for guidebooks also gives an idea about their relationship with the curriculum. Studies in the literature also support this need (Acele & Ateş, 2021; Erden & Dilekçi, 2022; Epçaçan, 2022; Kıymaz & Doyumğaç, 2020; Sarı, 2018). It can be said that the need for a guidebook may suggest that there are deficiencies in the current curricula regarding the guidance of teachers or that teachers need vocational training to improve their competencies at the point of implementing the curricula.

While the meanings attributed by teachers to curriculum autonomy and curriculum fidelity are shaped as adapting instruction to regional and socio-economic conditions, going outside the curriculum, leveraging curriculum flexibility and art performance behind closed doors; for fidelity, it is seen that it is realized as robotizing the teacher, implementing the curriculum word-for-word and implementing the curriculum without criticizing it. It can be said that teachers associate being autonomous in terms of curriculum with taking actions towards the curriculum in line with the socio-economic conditions in the local context, going beyond the limits set by the curriculum when they act autonomously and having self-awareness, performing their profession in a unique way like an art branch and evaluating the autonomy opportunities available, while they associate fidelity to the curriculum with applying the curriculum unexceptionally like robots without using any initiative on the curriculum. Similar to the findings of this study, Kadhim & Abbas (2024) also found that teachers attributed meanings to the concept of autonomy such as thinking outside the box without limits and fears and having intellectual freedom. Again, in Tanış's (2024) study, teacher autonomy was defined by teachers as planning-methodology-technique-implementation, out-of-school activities, originality, differences and freedoms that do not feel pressure and external factors. In Eves' (2017) study, teacher autonomy in curriculum design was mostly associated with freedom and ownership. In terms of Self-Determination Theory, autonomy is a psychological necessity for developing motivation and it refers to taking action with one's free will, wishes and desires and ensuring the consistency of one's thoughts and behaviors internally (Ülkü, 2023). Curriculum autonomy is an indicator of the appropriateness of the decisions made about the curriculum as a part of teachers' professionalism (Sousa, 2022). When it is considered as an action in which teachers are the perpetrator, it refers to the degree of their authority regarding the decisions they make about what students will learn (Morgado & Sousa, 2010). Curriculum fidelity, in the most general sense, is related to the degree to which the curriculum is implemented in accordance with its original design (Bümen et al., 2014; Lee & Chue, 2013). Teachers' perception of curriculum autonomy as an art performance in which they can go beyond the boundaries of the existing curriculum in the context of the conditions they are in highlights the professionalism in the definitions of curriculum autonomy and the awareness of their perpetration situations regarding decisions. It is not surprising that environmental conditions are one of the sources of the meaning attributed to exhibiting curriculum autonomy, especially considering the differences between regions in Turkey. On the other hand, teachers' identification of curriculum fidelity with behaving like a robot brings to mind the effects of centralized decision-making mechanisms on the implementation of curricula in Turkey, just as in the definitions made. This is because all decision-making powers for the implementation of the curriculum are concentrated in the ministry and teachers are seen as technical staff who mechanically implement the curriculum rather than as experts (Bümen et al., 2014).

Teachers state the autonomy situations related to their experience of curriculum autonomy as not depending on the curriculum, partially autonomy, fidelity to achievements, content autonomy, autonomy in the learning-teaching process and autonomy in exam situations. Some teachers, on the other hand, express their autonomy as being dependent on curriculum, achievement autonomy and content fidelity. In addition, one teacher stated that they had to be autonomous, while another teacher stated that they have curriculum curriculum autonomy as using the flexibility in the curriculum. In general, it can be said that teachers exhibit autonomous behaviors in relation to content, educational situations and testing situations other than the achievements among the elements of the curriculum, and that they rarely behave autonomously in relation to the achievements, while they are bound to the content. However, there are also teachers who experience curriculum autonomy as an obligation or who consider flexibility in curricula as an opportunity for autonomy. It can be said that teachers' fidelity especially to the achievement element may stem from the fact that they see the curriculum as a plan, as stated in the curriculum literacy theme of this study, and that they have a perception that their duties are only to complete this plan. This finding also coincides with the results of the

study conducted by Coşkun and Gelbal (2024) that teachers are committed to the curriculum in terms of achievements. Apart from this, the fact that they exhibit autonomy in terms of other elements of the curriculum can also be associated with the necessity to act according to regional conditions and socio-economic conditions, as in the meanings attributed to curriculum autonomy. While some teachers exhibit autonomy in terms of outcomes, their adherence to the content may be related to the necessity of acting according to regional and socio-economic conditions and the habit of teaching the lesson mostly through textbooks. In addition, teachers may interpret the curriculum in line with their own teaching style the fact that their lack of knowledge of the curriculum texts, their professional seniority and they always work at the same grade level; and do not need to apply to the curricula. The finding that a teacher felt obliged to exhibit autonomy is a finding that supports the need to act according to environmental conditions. Erss et al. (2016) found that teachers in Finland and Germany were able to maintain their curriculum autonomy despite neoliberal pressures, but content autonomy was limited. Studies on curriculum autonomy in Turkey using quantitative methodology show that teachers have high levels of curriculum autonomy (Alemdar & Aytaç, 2022; Işık, 2022; Kuloğlu, 2023; Yıldırım, 2022; Yıldız et al., 2021). However, in some studies in the domestic literature, teachers' fidelity to the curriculum is also high (Aşçı & Yıldırım, 2020; Aynas, 2023; Karakuyu, 2023a; Karakuyu & Oğuz, 2021; Korucu, 2024). On the other hand, there is no study conducted with qualitative methodology that examines curriculum autonomy as a stand-alone phenomenon. On the other hand, the findings of the study conducted by Çeliker Ercan & Çubukçu (2023) reveal that English teachers exhibit three different approaches while implementing the curriculum: curriculum fidelity, adaptation to the curriculum, and curriculum design. When evaluated with the findings of the study, it can be said that some teachers exhibit curriculum autonomy while others do not. Apart from this, the finding that teachers have a high level of perception in different quantitative studies in which both curriculum autonomy and curriculum fidelity phenomena are discussed seems to be a contradictory situation, while it can be stated that there is a need for qualitative and quantitative studies in which the theoretical framework of these phenomena and the relationships between them are discussed in more depth.

In the study, the effects of teachers' curriculum autonomy on curriculum implementation were shaped in four categories: objectives/achievements, content, teaching methods and the process. In this context, teachers expressed practices such as adding achievements, changing achievements, not processing/skipping achievements, relocating achievements and prioritizing achievements in relation to objectives/achievements; adding content and changing the order of content in relation to the content category; adding activities in terms of teaching methods; and using the time allocated for another lesson and being autonomous for extra/supportive curriculum in relation to the process category. In the study, although the teachers emphasized fidelity to the achievements regarding the autonomy status for the curriculum autonomy theme, the fact that they took actions such as adding, changing, skipping, changing the order, prioritizing among the achievements related to autonomy practices can be explained by the fact that they interpreted autonomy only as carrying out education and training activities in a completely different way from the curriculum, and for this reason, they did not define the changes they made in the achievements of the current curriculum as autonomy. In this respect, Erss et al. (2022) state that teachers who adopt curriculum goals have the perception that they exhibit more curriculum autonomy. Considering that there is a finding in the study that teachers see the curriculum as an annual plan, it can be said that it is easier and more functional for teachers to make changes in the elements of content, educational situations and testing situations independently of the curriculum in line with the needs while following the achievements in the annual plans. This is because the decision taken by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) to implement a common exam starting from the 2023-2024 academic year leads some branch teachers, especially in middle schools, to worry about the curriculum (Sevim & Yılmaz, 2024; Bakırcı et al., 2024) and to depend on achievements. On the other hand, teachers' autonomy practices regarding the curriculum can be considered within the context of curriculum adaptation. Teachers may resort to curriculum adaptation when it is not compatible with their own beliefs and in order to meet the individual needs of students (Meidl & Meidl, 2011). Curriculum adaptation can be defined as teachers' purposeful efforts to make significant and creative changes in curricula by adding, removing, reordering, simplifying, or transforming existing materials (Debarger et al., 2017; Mc Donough et al., 2013; Sherin & Drake, 2009). In the studies conducted, it is seen that teachers generally make curriculum adaptations such as "expanding, skipping, reorganizing, (Çelik & Şahin, 2024; İlhan & Bümen, 2023; Karakuyu, 2023b; Ünal, 2023); changing the content, using it in a different way than its purpose in the curriculum, reshaping,

changing the order, expanding (Bernard, 2017); changing, modifying, editing, skipping, adding and creating (Li & Harfitt, 2017). In these studies, it is understood that teachers' interventions in curricula are mostly handled in the form of adaptation patterns, and adaptation is not defined in terms of the elements of the curriculum. However, as in the findings of the study, it can be said that teachers generally make adaptations such as adding, changing, correcting, changing the order of the curriculum in the whole or its elements as autonomy practices.

According to teachers' views, the sources behind teachers' demonstration of curriculum autonomy were identified as professional seniority/experience and the teacher's attitude towards autonomy in relation to teachers; students' needs, students' individual differences and class size in relation to students; school facilities and the attitude of the school administration in relation to the school; and socio-economic environmental conditions and parental support in relation to the environment. In addition, subject advantage, curriculum literacy and flexibility of the curriculum, students' academic achievement levels, and the reality of central examination in middle schools were also mentioned as sources of autonomy by fewer participating teachers. Li & Harfitt (2017) state that teachers' use of the curriculum is influenced by personal resources (beliefs about teaching, curriculum management approaches, knowledge of students' competencies, and curricular and pedagogical goals), contextual factors (local cultural elements and exam-oriented context), curriculum features (content characteristics, design of activities, and support of curriculum for teachers), and student problems (students' interests, performance in the course, achievement status, and individual differences). McDonough, Shaw, and Masuhara (2012) also attribute teachers' various adaptation approaches to their personality, personal beliefs, experience, professional competence, and available resources. Similarly, Eves (2017) found that the ability to undertake autonomy collectively in the contextual conditions of the school (collaboration opportunities), the professional competence of the teacher, and whether there is an environment of trust for risk-taking can be the source of teachers' curriculum autonomy. These results support the findings of the study. The implementation process of curricula affects teachers and the results of this process affect students. Therefore, teachers' autonomous behavior in terms of curriculum is mostly related to teachers as implementers and students as beneficiaries of the curriculums. In quantitative studies in Turkey, it was found that teachers' intervention in curricula differed in terms of variables such as their professional seniority (Karakuyu, 2023b), gender, branch, type of school, weekly course hours, class size, in-service training status, level of education, department they graduated from, participation in curriculum studies, importance they attach to curricula, and frequency of using curricula (Çelik & Şahin, 2024; İlhan & Bümen, 2023; Ünal, 2023). Again, the qualitative findings in İlhan and Bümen's (2023) study show that the curricula were adapted due to inadequate textbooks, preparation for central exams, making the lesson fun, comprehensible and permanent, ensuring readiness, insufficient recommended time, personal competencies and preferences, ensuring integration, student interests and needs, content density of the curricula, content insufficiency and ideological factors. These findings are generally in line with the findings of the study. Although there are very few studies on the sources of teachers' curriculum autonomy, it is seen that the number of projects they have participated in their professional lives, their tendency towards educational philosophies, their general autonomy perceptions, their curriculum literacy, their technological pedagogical content knowledge, their professional seniority, central/national exam pressure, their educational status and the socio-economic status of the school where they work (Alemdar & Aytaç, 2022; Erss et al., 2022; Işık, 2022; Kuloğlu, 2023; Yıldız et al., 2021) are effective. Although it can be said that the sources of both teachers' curriculum autonomy and curriculum adaptation or use are very diverse, it should be stated that there is a need for more research in terms of making sense of the sources of teachers' autonomy actions and revealing deeper relationships, especially since there are very few studies on curriculum autonomy at the local level.

In terms of the effects of curriculum autonomy, it is emphasized that the gains of autonomy in terms of the effects of curriculum autonomy are increasing the level of learning, facilitating learning, motivation to teach, responding to student needs, professional satisfaction and student motivation; and the negative outcomes of autonomy may be the possibility of losing control and deviating from the goals/achievements. Yıldız et al. (2021) found that teachers' curriculum autonomy is related to their motivation. Sousa (2022) also points out that curriculum autonomy offers the opportunity to adapt the curriculum according to the needs of students. Kılınç, Bozkurt, and İlhan (2018), on the other hand, found that teacher autonomy is generally associated with high motivation towards teaching, and that autonomy improves the quality of teaching and increases teacher equipment. Tanış (2024) also concluded that teacher autonomy can have positive effects such

as teacher development, professional reputation and increased productivity, and negative consequences such as teacher incompetence and misuse of autonomy. Similarly, Demir (2023) found that teachers' professional autonomy increased their professional motivation. These results overlap to a great extent with the results of the study on the gains of curriculum autonomy. Teachers' curriculum autonomy has an effect on increasing their professional motivation. Accordingly, the quality of teaching increases, student needs can be met, and different achievements can be developed for students by going beyond the achievement limits in the curricula. On the other hand, teachers' concerns about curriculum autonomy, such as losing control and deviating from the outcomes, indicate that curriculum autonomy requires a certain level of teaching professionalism.

Finally, the participant teachers' suggestions regarding curriculum autonomy include taking teachers' opinions into consideration, taking regional differences into account in curriculum development, involving teachers in the curriculum development/evaluation process, providing teachers with autonomy opportunities, providing information trainings about the curriculum, and increasing curriculum literacy. In terms of the autonomy that teachers will exhibit during the implementation of the curriculums, first of all, taking into account the opinions of teachers, who are the most important actors in all decisions related to the curriculum, and the administrators working in the schools where the curriculums are implemented should be seen as an important requirement in terms of reflecting the results of the implementation in the field to the changes and decisions to be made (Öztürk, 2011; Bümen, 2019). Teachers' adoption and support of curricula is related to their participation in political decisions about the curriculum (Erss et al., 2022). Considering the contribution of this research to curriculum autonomy to teacher and student motivation and meeting student needs, providing teachers with autonomy opportunities is also an important issue that should be thought about by curriculum decision-makers. The recent increase in trends towards curriculum autonomy requires supporting teachers within the framework of new understandings of their professionalism (de Almeida & Viana, 2022; Erss et al., 2022). Considering the continuity of the relationship of teachers, who are the implementers of the curriculums, with the curriculum, it is also important to ensure the continuity of in-service trainings in terms of ensuring their professional development. Although the findings of the research on curriculum literacy refer to the fact that most of the teachers are curriculum literate in terms of this skill, it is also an important requirement to develop this competence (Erik & Yılmaz, 2024; Karakuyu, 2023b; Öner & Cırık, 2023; Marek et al., 2024; Nia, 2024; Steiner et al., 2018; Sunkur & Yılmaz, 2024; Turan-Özpolat, 2024). Based on all these, teachers' involvement in curriculum decision-making processes, providing autonomy opportunities in curriculum use and implementation processes, increasing curriculum literacy skills in terms of curriculum adaptation, and taking local ecological contexts into account can be considered as prerequisites for the development of curriculum autonomy. In contrast, the fact that the disciplinary provisions of the Law on Teaching Profession, which came into force in Turkey in 2024, include penalties for teachers if they deviate from the goals and objectives of the curricula approved by the Ministry of National Education, becomes a risk factor that may negatively affect teachers' curriculum autonomy and tendency towards curriculum adaptation. Especially in European countries and most countries around the world, considering the efforts to decentralize and localize decisions regarding curricula (Mustofa et al., 2023; Oliveria & Ferreira, 2023; Dieudé & Prøitz, 2024; So et al., 2024; Kumayas et al., 2025; Zhao, 2025), it can be argued that the emphasis on centralization through legislation enacted in Turkey signals a departure from global trends in curriculum development and evaluation processes regarding the future of curriculum autonomy in the context of schools and teachers.

As a result, in this study, teachers' curriculum autonomy phenomenon was discussed, and under the main theme of curriculum autonomy, teachers' thoughts on curriculum development and evaluation process, their relations with curricula, their experiences with curriculum autonomy, the meanings they attribute to curriculum autonomy, the sources and results of curriculum autonomy and their suggestions on this issue were tried to be revealed. Based on the study findings, it was concluded there is a demand for teachers to be included in curriculum development and evaluation processes; curriculum literacy competence is considered important in terms of curriculum autonomy; the majority of teachers exhibit autonomy especially for the content, educational situations and test situations elements of the curriculum, while they depend on the achievements; curriculum autonomy is generally exhibited in the form of adaptation patterns such as adding, skipping, subtracting, changing the order, determining the degree of importance; curriculum autonomy is determined by the environmental conditions of the school, teacher and student characteristics, and systemic and administrative conditions in the school; curriculum autonomy can have positive consequences such as

increased motivation and achievement and negative consequences such as loss of control. The findings of the study are limited to the views expressed by the participant teachers as a reflection of their experiences in the contextual conditions in which they work. In different contextual conditions (private schools, high schools, different geographical regions, etc.), teachers' experiences of curriculum autonomy may differ. In this study, the experiences of teachers working in primary and middle schools towards curriculum autonomy were addressed in a holistic manner regardless of branch. In future studies, curriculum autonomy phenomenon can be examined as a case study in schools with different socio-cultural contexts and within the framework of certain branches.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest were disclosed by the author(s) with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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Official ethical approval for the study was received from Aydın Adnan Menderes University Educational Research Ethics Committee.

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The study was approved by the research team's university ethics committee of the Aydın Adnan Menderes University (Decision dated 11.01.2024 and numbered 2024/1). We, as the authors, assure that the following is fulfilled for this manuscript:

- This article is the authors' original work and has not been previously published.
- The article accurately and completely reflects the authors' own research and analyses.
- The results are appropriately placed within the context of previous and existing research.
- All sources used are appropriately acknowledged.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

1st author contributed 50%, 2nd author 50%.

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