



Building a Strategy for Better Understanding and Act Towards Supporting Professional Autonomy in Different Stages at NEC

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MASTER'S THESIS
December 2022

Master of Business Administration
Educational Leadership

ABSTRACT

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Master's Degree Programme in Educational Leadership

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Building a strategy for better understanding and act towards supporting professional autonomy in different stages at NEC

Master's thesis 61 pages, appendices 9 pages
December 2022

The purpose of this study is to determine the perception of employees about professional autonomy at NEC, an educational institution and finding solutions for leveling up the knowledge about the philosophy of the institution and working towards a common knowledge. It also follows how autonomy is perceived at different stages within the organization (for example beginner – middle – senior teachers), how employees are experiencing, but also how to better support the needs of staff at different autonomy levels and build a future strategy towards this goal.

The researcher used the form of quantitative method approach, comprised of an online survey that used both qualitative and quantitative data in the form of close-ended and open ended-questions. Sixteen participants completed the survey, all of them employees of the NEC institution.

The analysis revealed that there are differences between autonomy perception and professional autonomy at NEC and also that seniority correlates positively with the perception of autonomy.

Key words: autonomy, professional autonomy, teacher autonomy, self-perceived autonomy, autonomy supportive

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GLOSSARY

SDT	Self-determination Theory
NEC	Educational Institution, abbreviated for confidentiality
TA	Teacher Autonomy
TAS	Teacher Autonomy Scale
PA	Professional Autonomy

1 INTRODUCTION

This research was commissioned by a private kindergarten in Romania. The institution's full name will not be disclosed for confidentiality purposes and is abbreviated NEC.

1.1 Background

Autonomy and professional autonomy related to teachers have been subjects for many researchers and are key aspects of interest within the field of education. There is a large volume of published studies describing the role of autonomy in the workplace and its positive role on one's intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction performance, retention, productivity, or well-being (Chirkov et al, 2011, p. 165-166, Gagné & Deci, 2005, Hackman & Oldham, 1975).

The link of autonomy- supportive benefits in an educational setting can be exemplified and correlated with a top-down relationship, as follows: the principal/manager has an autonomy-supportive approach and motivates intrinsic the teachers, that in their turn catalyzes their students with this feeling (Ryan and Deci, 2000, *apud* Deci, Nezlek, & Sheinman, 1981; Flink, Boggiano, & Barrett, 1990; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986).

For some, an autonomy-supportive environment, enriches their potential, well-being and feeling of appreciation, while for others, an environment that promotes and encourages autonomy can be less desirable when they are not accustomed to this direction, but with a more controlled one. How can one support new employees that are not accustomed to an autonomous environment?

The motivation for this paper came from an identified need from NEC, a private and integrated educational institution based in Romania, that has mixed age groups of children (nursery and kindergarten) and promotes a Nordic approach to learning and an environment based on autonomy and well-being.

In Romania, most educational environments and styles of leadership are patriarchal, with exercising control over the student/employee. When arriving in a different setting with different work principles and values one doesn't know how to act

and this is also the case at NEC. From the management position, there can be observed that at the beginning, new employees, even though they had predictability over the setting, its principles and autonomy expectations; when left alone – autonomous, feel insecure, they don't enjoy the process, they feel judged (even though is not the case) and tend to over-explain things and take feedback more personal. Since 2018 when the institution was opened, almost every summer, but also in some cases in the middle of the school year, the dynamic of the team was different, especially because of different turnover situations (for example: discovering a new path in life, moving in another city, resignations), but also from the poor understanding of the institution's promoted principles. This is the case for almost all private educational institutions where staff retention is lower, especially after the pandemic.

Because it is an institution that promotes Nordic principles, it is one that promotes democracy, flexibility, autonomy, a sense of belonging, care and community. The employees are encouraged to self-manage different situations that depend on their role as teachers, both at a micro level – in the classroom, but also at a macro level – with the whole team.

Sometimes the way the employees had been socialized throughout their life (national and regional level, generation level, educational level) (Kazi apud Hofstede, 2009), can affect the ways the institutions try to build the working culture and values. For example, sometimes autonomy and flexibility can block an employee that was used to being told what to do; also care and collaboration at a high level had to be taught because the staff members weren't accustomed to this at their former workplaces.

Because it is still a young organization (4 years), it doesn't have yet a strong culture, but certainly, it has influence and affects everything even though it is still weak (Kazi apud Deal and Kennedy, 2009). For example, from the management point of view, there is a tendency to take decisions with well-being in mind, flexibility and autonomy; this can be physically seen in the institution, from the procedures to the curriculum.

In terms of the dominant culture, as stated by Trompenaars (2010), NEC promotes The Incubator – fulfilment-oriented culture, where the purpose is to grow its members, to help their self-expression and fulfillment, as seen in the Nordic

countries. In terms of combination, NEC is The Synergistic culture type, as promoting an organic structure and processes, synergy between individuals and all actors as part of the community we are trying to build (Kazi, 2009).

This can be influenced by the very values that the institution promotes (Nordic principles) and also by the manager's studies (Finnish master in educational leadership). Sometimes the institution's dominant cultures clash with the national culture – the Bureaucratic and Paternalistic ones and also with the differences between private institutions and state ones. Also, even though there is a culture of autonomy in the workplace, this is perceived differently by the employees.

Every year the *stages* of autonomy are different and NEC has no scale of measurement and verified types of support to help the employees to reach a certain level of autonomy in the workplace, both at micro and macro level in the institution, but also for decreasing the dependency on the management.

1.2 Research objectives

The purpose of this study is to find out what perception the employees have about professional autonomy at NEC – thus leveling up the knowledge about the philosophy of the institution and working towards common knowledge.

Also, other objectives are to find out how autonomy is perceived/felt at different stages within the organization (for example beginner – middle – senior teachers) and how employees are experiencing it and to find out how to better support the needs of staff at different autonomy levels and build a future strategy towards this goal.

The benefits of the research would be translated into alignment and a strategy that would support the employee's needs regarding the autonomy stages they are in within the organization.

1.3 Research questions

This study is led by one main research question and four secondary ones.

The main research question for this study:

- How to support the need for professional autonomy in different stages of employment at NEC?

The secondary questions for this study:

- How NEC teacher - employees are experiencing professional autonomy?
- How much professional autonomy do teachers at NEC perceive they have?
- How professional autonomy is seen/perceived/felt according to the maturity of employment at NEC?

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

At NEC the autonomy principle, that the institution is based on, starts from the interview, with the job description and expectations. Autonomy though is not measured, but the employees learn that is nurtured and they are not alone in the process. Some things are directly related to them – like asking for help, checking for uncertainties, taking feedback and growing after making mistakes, inspiring by other teammates but not losing their way of being, collaborating, reflecting, love to learn and play.

There are mandatory directions for everyone, for example: the morning circle, a moment of lecture, English, going outside every day, sports, making a post for the parents and explaining how was the day.

How things are planned and executed – depends on the educators. They are asked to be themselves, to plan and to execute after the needs of their children. The directions are the same, but the groups, starting from classrooms, objects and arrangements, to objectives, core group values and execution, are different.

The teachers are allowed and encouraged to make modifications in the classroom, rearrange the furniture, follow their style of teaching (but having the institution's principle at the core), paint on their windows, choose and decide what is best for their group – while having the group at the center of the decision.

The management observations are that even though the teachers are not told how to do different things, or have pressure on them, some are feeling pressured, stressed and overwhelmed, mostly because they alone put pressure on themselves and don't know how to regulate the emotions that came along with the responsibility of being autonomous but also in charge of the results.

Some of them feel pressured by the parents (a very common thing in educational institutions, especially the private ones, where parents are also clients), but sometimes they are afraid to be autonomous because they don't believe in themselves, they are afraid to communicate with the parents, they lack some competences and experience in the educational field, or because the parents don't truly

understand what is *Nordic education* and so on. They sometimes don't own autonomy because autonomy, besides well-being, the feeling of appreciation, trust, etc., means also responsibility!

2.1 Self-determination theory and autonomy

Autonomy is often related to intrinsic motivation, which reflects the natural potential of humans of thriving in life.

When intrinsically motivated, people are willing to explore and learn, they don't need rewards or constraints (Deci, Pelletier, Ryan, Vallerand, 1991, 328 apud Deci & Ryan, 1985) and are engaged freely in activities that represent an interest for them, experiencing pleasure and self-determination.

Children are naturally motivated to learn, explore, be creative and try until they master a competence or have spontaneous interests, that help them develop cognitively and socially, in order to later succeed in life. They are born with motivational and autonomous tendencies, but by contrast, evidence shows that with aging and without proper support and maintenance, these natural tendencies are disrupted and lose their intensity (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 70) but they don't disappear as human basic needs.

If supported and nourished properly by the environment, conditions of it and social factors, intrinsic motivation will bloom, thus liberating the positive, natural aspects of humans' fundamental needs (Ryan and Deci 2000, p. 70). It is also stated that regarding the outcomes of the environment on intrinsic motivation, it is strongly correlated mostly with the dyad of autonomy versus control, as factors of liberation versus alienation of the positive aspects of one's nature of better thriving.

Autonomy is also understood as a fundamental predisposition of the organism to be self-ruled and self-organized (Varela, 1979; Varela et al., 1974). From the psychological lenses, autonomy – related to self-determination theory, is seen as a basic need to experience self-governance and the direction of ownership regarding to one's actions. Autonomy can also be regarded as an attribute of a fully functioning individual, including the following: physical, competence, cognitive

and emotional. The need for autonomy can be explained in terms of volitional and self-endorsed experiences. For example, both teachers and students can be autonomous if they voluntarily devote energy and time to the direction they choose (studies, planning, homework, evaluations, and so on) (Niemi, C., Ryan, R., 2009).

Across cultures, the meaning of autonomous experience is seen as positive and desirable, and needed to be cultivated and supported (Chirkov, 2009, p. 254), but can also be seen as negative or undesirable, thus needs to be prevented (*Idem*). In her research about autonomy and culture, Chirkov (2009) states that the universality of the autonomous need is accentuated by the perception that across cultures, when a behavior is non-autonomous, there can be consequences for the result, from the efficiency and well-being point of view.

Autonomy is best related as a component of self-determination theory and as a basic psychological need for motivation. The need for autonomy is expressed through one's inherent desire to experience psychological freedom, choice and feel volitional when conducting an activity (Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Witte, Soenens and Lens, 2010, p. 982 apud deCharms, 1968; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Deci and Ryan (2000, p. 68) brought to light the SDT as a mode of human motivation and ways of highlighting how inner resources can affect personality development and self-regulation.

In the presented concept, there are stated three basic psychological needs: competence, relatedness and autonomy (Ebersold, Rahm & Heise, 2018, 933), which are essential for a person's social development, well-being, or growth. By *competence*, one can understand how various outcomes can be attained and how different actions can be performed in an efficient or requested manner (Deci, Pelletier, Ryan, Vallerand, 1991, 327); *relatedness* refers to the social context and how one can develop relationship and connections with others (1991, p. 327); *autonomy* is related with the one being in charge with his/her actions, by self-initiating and self-regulating the inner intentions (1991, p. 327).

Related to the action of choosing for oneself, when the behavior is self-determined, self-initiated it correlates with positive benefits, but when the action is controlled, the effect is compliance, sometimes maybe defiance, and has a negative impact for the subject (Deci, Pelletier, Ryan, Vallerand, 1991, 327).

When applied to educational practice, it is stated that both intrinsic motivation and autonomous types of extrinsic motivation are conducted as a result to engagement and optimal functioning (Niemi, C., Ryan, R., 2009). If the evidence is mostly suggested for the teacher–student relationship, with implications regarding positiveness for learning, academic performance and well-being, can it be mirrored for the management or principal–teacher relationship if the same psychological needs are applied?

The SDT, mostly applied in research from educational contexts if is related to intrinsic motivation and autonomy, but also teacher-student relationship, can emphasize good examples also for teacher autonomy contexts. Deci et al. (1981), assessed the teachers' orientations toward supporting students' autonomy vs. controlling them. It was shown that autonomy supportive teachers increased intrinsic motivation, perceived competence and self-esteem over time, versus the controlling teachers. It is shown the importance of an autonomy-supportive authority vs. a controlling one and is notable for focusing on how human nature if nurtured in a positive way, could be at the base of having a positive working climate and professional fulfillment. Thriving and performing well, are just two of the outcomes examples of what supporting autonomy can generate for an employee (Lamb & Reinders, 2008 p. 36), and for an educational environment, especially for pre-schoolers, the satisfaction of the teacher, well-being and a positive way of acting are important for the educational process, because the teacher-student relationship is very strong and models the learning outcomes.

It is not expected that if an educational institution/organization/workplace, is autonomy supportive and has at its core the value of autonomy, employees are all the time intrinsically motivated and experience all the positive factors that came from an autonomy supportive environment. There are many factors that can influence an employee to be amotivated:

- Activities are not appealing

- They don't experience in the same manner the other 2 factors – competence and relatedness
- They don't value the activity
- They don't feel competent to do it
- They are not expecting a positive result

(Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 72, apud Ryan, 1995, Bandura, 1986, Seligman, 1975).

2.1.1 Self-determination theory and organizational autonomy

Regarding a work organization, the SDT view on autonomy is operationalized in a different way than the concept of autonomy used in organizational psychology (Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Witte, Soenens and Lens, 2010 apud Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). SDT refers to the individual's experience of choice and psychological freedom, during an activity or action, while some of the organizational definitions refer more to autonomy as a characteristic of a task (p. 982).

(...) autonomy as a task characteristic is likely to contribute to feelings of psychological freedom, people might also experience autonomy satisfaction when they depend on others and even when they follow others' requests. Employees might, for instance, follow-up a request from their supervisor (and thus fail to be independent) but nonetheless act willingly because their supervisor provided them a meaningful rationale for doing so (Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Witte, Soenens and Lens, 2010 apud Soenens et al., 2007).

Also in comparison, SDT defines needs differently (as stated before), while in organizational theories, the needs are shaped in correlation with particular things (for example: satisfaction related to job and job characteristics, work outcomes, engagement, lower burnout) (Gagne & Deci, 2005, 337; (Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Witte, Soenens and Lens, 2010, p. 984). It is also pointed out that in a work-related environment, autonomous motivation is correlated in a positive way with work-related well-being and optimal performance, which conducts to the satisfaction of the three natural psychological needs stated by Ryan and Deci (Gagne´ & Deci, 2005). In contrast, from a controlled perspective, when employees are forced to doing an action that constrains them (for example: meeting a deadline

or do an activity they didn't agree on), will express little volition regarding the task. Though it is not guaranteed, employees might find satisfaction despite the controlled background if they receive social support or by simply executing the proposed task and obtain results, but the pressure of engaging in something one doesn't desire, is not correlated always with peer support or positive outcomes (Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Witte, Soenens and Lens, 2010, p. 984).

Gagne´ & Deci (2005) also brings to light different studies (Deci et al. 2001; Baard, Deci and Ryan, 2004) stating that a working climate that promotes the three natural psychological needs (as stated by Ryan and Deci), will increase the employee's internal motivation and promote the internalization of extrinsic motivation, with the following work outcomes:

- (1) persistence and maintained behavior change;*
- (2) effective performance, particularly on tasks requiring creativity, cognitive flexibility, and conceptual understanding;*
- (3) job satisfaction;*
- (4) positive work-related attitudes;*
- (5) organizational citizenship behaviors;*
- (6) psychological adjustment and well-being.*

2.2 Teacher Autonomy

The concept of autonomy at the organizational level has been defined in different ways. As defined by Hall (1969), autonomy is seen as the feeling of making decisions without pressure from other actors (clients, organization or persons that don't share the same profession). Using Hall's definition, Forsyth and Danisiewicz are seeing autonomy as an element of power for professionals (Southern, 2018). Hackman and Oldham (1976, p. 258), refer to employee autonomy as "the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out" (Burchart, Knudsen, Søndergaard, 2016, p. 1250). Other sources are discussing autonomy from an entrepreneurship point of view, linked with creativity and performance when the perception of having choices about accomplishing a task is given (2016, p. 1250).

The positive effects of general autonomy in a workplace are similar to those of a more narrowed kind of autonomy – the teacher’s one. There are stated increased motivation, lower stress, empowerment and professionalism (Marshall, 2019 apud Davis & Wilson, 2000; Pearson & Hall 1993; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Giving a brief review of the relevant academic literature that narrows the concept of autonomy through the teacher’s lenses, we are noticing different definitions. According to McGrath (book Terry Lamb, La Ganza, 2008, p. 72 apud McGrath 2000, p. 100-101), teacher autonomy refers to the *freedom from control by others* or *teacher autonomy as self-directed professional development*. We understand by “others”, that in most cases are the educational authorities, mentors or institutional managers and even the government policies that might affect the teacher’s autonomy.

Friedman (1999) regards autonomy as a means of encouragement and strength of a teacher’s power, in the personal or professional sense, and not just as a buffer against the pressures that are exerted on the teachers in general. He describes that an autonomous teacher is one that can generate change in accordance with the needed conditions (1999, p. 60). He also states that in order to have clarity about teacher autonomy at work, there is a need for conceptualizing the teacher activities in two imaginary axes (1999, p. 62): the decision-level axis (principle or routine) and the decision-content axis (pedagogical or organizational). For better clarity and operationalization of teacher autonomy, Friedman created the Teacher Work Autonomy Scale (TWA), which measures teacher power.

For Pearson (1993), teacher autonomy means teachers having control over their work. For him and Hall (1993), TA is conceptualized as “the perception that teachers have regarding whether they control themselves and the work environment.” Their conception of TA is translated in the Teacher Autonomy Scale, in a form of a survey that measures the teacher’s perceived autonomy and would also be used for the purpose of this thesis.

Pearson and Moomaw (2005), referred to TA as how a teacher chooses to interpret and teach the curriculum and also the management of time for the structure of the workday.

Charters (1976), sees autonomy as separation and freedom from external forces, while Mintzberg (1979) describes it as teachers that have control over their classroom, work relatively independently and are professionals within their field of work. He also incorporates the element of professionalism, while describing the concept of teacher autonomy: “Control over his work means that the professional works relatively independently of his colleagues, but closely with the clients he serves” (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 349)”. For the teachers, the *clients* are especially the children, because they are at the core of their work, but the parents, especially of the preschoolers are also an important element for the whole complex environment of the educational field.

The concept of TA is also closely related to teacher participation in decision-making in the classroom or their institution and also with the sense of empowerment (Bacharach, Bamberger, Conley, and Bauer, 1990). At NEC, participation in decisions is a must for the teachers, because the vision is that they know what is better for the children they are working with, they are the ones that keep a close relationship with the parents and are considered the leaders of their group – so their input is seen as very important for the organization.

For this paper, when we refer to relationships related to professional autonomy, we refer to (book Terry Lamb, La Ganza, 2008, p. 71):

Autonomy in relation to the teacher’s own internal dialectics with teachers, mentors, or significant others who, in their continuing “presence”, might or might not support his or her freedom to be creative as a teacher and foster the autonomy of learners;

Autonomy in relation to learners, who might support the teacher’s freedom to be creative as a teacher, including, should it be the case, his or her attempts to encourage their autonomy;

Autonomy in relation to those, in the institution in which he or she is teaching, who could potentially make decisions influencing the teacher’s freedom to be creative as a teacher, to develop and practice ideas, and to pursue his or her ideals;

The proposed definition of TA that is going to be used in this paper is an operationalization of Friedman (1999), Pearson and Hall (1993) and Pearson and Moomaw (2005) and the NEC vision about this:

TA is a means of encouragement, empowerment and strength of teacher's power and control, in both the personal and professional sense, in order to generate positive changes in accordance with themselves (personal development, learning, acting) and other work community factors (children, curriculum, time, activities, decisions, parents, structure of the day), at both micro and macro level within the institution.

The term of professional autonomy, used in this paper is going to be correlated with the TA operationalization from above, with accents for the professional directions and in accordance with a personalized scale.

2.3 Self-perceived autonomy

As shown in the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), autonomy is one of the fundamental universal psychological needs, important for motivation and well-being. In order to have intrinsic motivation, it is stated that people need to feel competent and autonomous (Gagne & Deci, 2005); perceived autonomy should predict teacher engagement and correlate with job satisfaction positively. Also in educational professions, when dealing with children and unexpected situations, one should have freedom in choosing the right response in order to deal adequately with the issue, but also to feel support from the hierarchical line.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009) showed in their research that perceived autonomy is negatively correlated with all the burnout dimensions – that are so common in the educational field: emotional, depersonalization and the feeling of reduced accomplishment.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) reviewed that started from the self-determination perspective, where autonomy is regarded as a universal need, teachers' autonomy *is expected to be adaptive and independent* of the teaching situation, competencies and expectations, but it can, in other situations, be conceptualized as *dependent on the teachers' mastery expectations*.

Autonomy is regarded as more than *the freedom to choose* instructional practices, it also means that the teacher is *responsible for the practices and the results* (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009). For the teachers that have experience and high mastery expectations, *autonomy (...) can be perceived as an opportunity to teach according to one's values and ideas, (...) to experiment with teaching methods*

(idem); I may add here that it can mean to accept one's personality and teaching style and as it was stated before, a strong link for job satisfaction and engagement for teachers with high self-efficacy. In contrast, for those with little experience and low mastery expectations, autonomy *might feel less comfortable when they are made responsible for choosing educational practices* (idem), therefore is expected that autonomy is less related to job satisfaction and engagement for low-efficacy teachers.

2.4 Support for teacher's autonomy

From the SDT point of view, the sense of autonomy is linked with the autonomy supportive environment and leadership, which can influence how autonomy is perceived. The role of the leader and organizational style has a big impact on how the employees perceive professional autonomy.

An autonomy supportive environment means firstly that employees don't experience pressure (Lamb & Reinders, 2008, p.36), thus finding more motivation regarding their actions, "experienced personal autonomy, and feeling of competence and relatedness, which in turn enhanced their well-being". (Lamb & Reinders, 2008p. 36).

"Over the last three decades SDT has demonstrated the crucial importance of authority, autonomy-supportiveness (versus controllingness), for a wide variety of outcomes including subordinate's performance, motivational internalization, emotional tone, and personal growth. This research indicates that when authorities support choice and encourage self-regulation within their subordinates those subordinates are more likely to thrive, perform well, and develop to the maximal extent." (Lamb & Reinders, 2008p. 36)

Autonomy-supportive is a mode in the leadership strategy of an organization that can improve team effectiveness, professional autonomy and well-being (p.40).

There can be different levels of how one can perceive professional autonomy. When newly employed, the teacher may be dependent, hesitant and in need of control and structure, thus engaging the leader to act this way – but this would not be optimal in the future (Lamb & Reinders, 2008p.40).

Correlated with education, SDT, focuses on students and how learning, interest in education, or confidence could be grown and become outcomes of the educational process (Deci, Pelletier, Ryan, Vallerand, 1991, 325). Intrinsic motivation is the drive for what an educational actor would directly correlate with success for its learners.

We can mirror the process of SDT applied for students, with the one that can be applied to their teachers, as direct models for growth, a way of engaging in learning, well-being and motivation in an institution.

Different research and studies correlated inner and autonomous motivation with better educational results (1991, p. 332) and also that support for autonomy will facilitate self-determination rather than control.

When looking at the supportive form the teacher's autonomy direction, there are concluded various means of for maintenance. It is often seen mirrored in studies with the support teachers give to students in order to have an autonomy-supportive classroom, but I think that many of the used strategies inside a teacher's classroom can be used from an educational organization/management point of view. It is stated that if we want something to work for the children, we have to first feel it ourselves or have competencies for it in order to build an experience or contain others' experiences.

In their research about explanations of the professional development of teachers' motivating style, Cheon et al., (2017) explained that autonomy support is a form of the interpersonal tone of support and understanding in which the teacher actively supports students' inner motivation by utilizing forms of appreciation, vitalization of the process, using teaching practices and strategies, such as:

- Be open and take the students' perspective
- Creating opportunities for their input and initiative
- Offering learning activities in innovative and needed ways
- Providing and explaining why they request something
- Be empathic with their emotions, acknowledge them and make them feel safe

These interventions can also be used by having the teacher in mind and reflecting the process from a management/ leadership/ organizational etc., point of view. An autonomy-supportive motivating style catalyzes engagement and high-

quality functioning and outcomes (Cheon et al., (2017) *apud* Assor et al., 2002; Cheon, Reeve, & Moon, 2012; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Soenens, & Matos, 2005). As stated in a multilevel analysis, with over 10,395 participants, students and teachers, in the Educational Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten, teachers might experience difficulties in meeting and supporting their student's autonomy, if their own needs are not supported (Marshik et al., 2016). It was shown that teachers who had low autonomy at work (for example: they couldn't influence school policy, or how and what they teach, or had to complete paperwork that interfered with their teaching), were less likely to support their students' needs for autonomy (Idem). In comparison, the higher autonomy and support for autonomy the teacher had, the higher the support for the students (higher intrinsic motivation, engagement, perceived competence and self-esteem).

Stefanou et al. (2004) found three main types of autonomy support for students, that in my opinion can be also transferred to teachers: cognitive, procedural and organizational.

Cognitive autonomy support – methods that enable the other to think for himself, explore ideas and become a self-sufficient learner (knows how and what to learn, is curious, thinks out of the box)

Procedural autonomy support – encourages ownership of form and presentation

Organizational autonomy support – ownership of the learning environment

As stated in the self-determination theory, greater need satisfaction comes from an autonomy-supportive environment (Ryan & Deci, 2017), because the students experience greater psychological need satisfaction during their activity (for example: greater autonomy, competence and relatedness satisfaction; (Cheon et al., 2012). In the same way as the students, teachers also experience their own need of satisfaction after they learn how to be more autonomy supportive (Cheon et al., 2014), thus experiencing giving and receiving gratitude.

Another study related to autonomy support in healthcare, but that can be applied also to teachers', states that contextual factors that can influence it are work organization, the attitude of professionals and also that one of the most important

is relationship building (Kors et al. 2020). In an educational institution, these factors seem crucial for well-being and a healthy work environment because the work related to children ideally needs mirroring and modeling the process for adults before passing it on.

From an organizational perspective, an autonomy supportive environment has at the core both determinants (e.g., support and supervisor autonomy support) and consequences (e.g., satisfaction or turnover intentions), in order to facilitate employee satisfaction (Gillet N., et al. 2012). One of the hypotheses is that the supervisor autonomy support and a build relationship can predict autonomous motivation (e.g., Black & Deci, 2000; Muraven, Gagne´, & Rosman, 2008; Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, & Briere, 2001). Gillet N. et al. (2012) states that managers are autonomy-supportive when they provide a meaningful rationale for doing tasks, focus attention on choice to the detriment of control and acknowledges employees' feelings and perspective (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989; Hardre´ & Reeve, 2009). These examples are more or less the same as the ones teachers should use in order to emphasize students' autonomy. Research also has shown that environments rich in autonomy-supportiveness lead to autonomous motivation, that is associated with positive outcomes (Gillet N., et al., 2012 *apud* Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989; Hardre´ & Reeve, 2009).

This is evident in case of Hardre´ and Reeve (2009) which exemplified in an experiment that when a manager displayed an autonomous supportive management style, the employees under their supervision were more autonomously motivated and engaged than the ones supervised by more controlling managers. Another example of a positive correlation between supervisor autonomy support and autonomous motivation was stated by Kuvaas (2009) and predicted positive-ness to work performance, pointing out the hypothesis that - regarding this paper - teachers' perceptions of autonomy support from their managers/supervisors should be positively related to their autonomous motivation.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

This chapter will present the methodological approach, data collection method and analysis, but also the limitations of this research.

The first purpose of this study was to find out the perception of NEC employees about professional autonomy and level up the knowledge about the institution's philosophy and working towards a common one. This proposal was formed from the daily basis observations and analysis of the NEC context from a managerial point of view, regarding the different stages of employees' (teachers and teacher assistants) autonomy, support directions and perception of both autonomy and professional autonomy. The other objectives were to find out how autonomy is perceived at different stages of employment and how to better support the needs at different autonomy levels within the organization.

3.2 Methodological approach

The methodology framework for the thesis research used the form of quantitative method approach, comprised of an online survey that used both qualitative and quantitative data in the form of close – ended and open - ended questions. A survey provides quantitative data of trends, attitudes or opinions of a population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 207). For the purpose of this study, because the researcher is conducting the research within her place of employment, the survey was the best method that could be used, given the fact that a more interactive method could bias the responses, thus the research results. It was also the preferred type for approach to this study because of rapid data collection, more ethical and objective results, but also for the maximization of the response rate of participants. This study is considered to be a local knowledge case (Thomas and Myers, 2015) and the participants are the teachers and teacher assistant from the institution NEC.

As a general approach, quantitative research is looking to confirm hypotheses about a phenomenon (Mack et al., 2005), an online survey was used to establish

the perception of teacher autonomy, autonomy support and basic need satisfaction at work based on autonomy in forms of pre-determined scales. The participants were allowed to choose from fixed responses, closed-ended questions, thus allowing a meaningful comparison of their responses, in order to find the justification for the research questions. The survey was combined with open – ended questions and allowing the participants the opportunity to respond using their own words and understanding of the studied phenomenon, but also to describe their individual experiences. According to Mack et al. (2005, p. 4), open – ended questions also have the ability to „ evoke responses that are meaningful and culturally salient to the participant, unanticipated by the researcher and rich and explanatory in nature”. Also, Cohen et al. (2007, p. 113), stated that a qualitative feature in the form of open – ended questions, allows the respondents to state freely their opinions.

3.3 Data collection

The survey was created through Microsoft Forms, using both Romanian and English language. The responses were gathered in Romanian language, in order to maximize the respondents rate but also for the comfort and easiness of understanding and completion, given the fact that all the respondents were Romanians. The researcher chose to use Microsoft Forms because of the familiarity within all members of the NEC institution and because it facilitated easy distribution.

The survey was cross-sectional, gathering data in a fixed time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 211), over a period of one week and was administered online through e-mail. The targeted respondents were all the sixteen employees of NEC, eligible for this research (Fowler, 2014, p 30), from the educational department: teachers and teacher assistants, sixteen of which completed it. The participants were assured of the data confidentiality and that their opinions would be processed strictly within the research, under anonymity.

The survey consisted of four sections:

1. Generalities about the respondents, their role and period worked in the institution and also experience in education; in order to gather information about participants, their seniority and role.

2. **Self-determination theory and autonomy in general**, consisted of 2 open-ended questions about autonomy in general and employees' perception of autonomy at their workplace, one close-ended and the instrument „Basic psychological need satisfaction at work scale” (Deci, Ryan, Gagné, Leone, Usunov, & Kornazheva, 2001; Ilardi, Leone, Kasser, & Ryan, 1993; Kasser, Davey, & Ryan, 1992)., using only the autonomy subscale of 7 items out of 21 of the original questionnaire. The scale is a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 7 (very true). This section of the survey tackled a part of what is central to self-determined theory - autonomy and satisfaction of psychological needs regarding the workplace. The instrument can be found in Appendix 1.

3. **Teacher autonomy and self-perceived autonomy** as a teacher, was collected using the Teacher Autonomy Scale (Pearson & Hall, 1993). Teacher autonomy is „the perception that teachers have regarding whether they control themselves and the work environment” (Pearson & Hall, 1993). The TAS (Teacher Autonomy Scale) is a four-point Likert-type scale, that is ranging from 1(definitely false) to 4(definitely true) and consists of 18 items that measure the perception that teachers have about their own autonomy in the following areas: selection of activities and materials, classroom standards of conduct, instructional planning and sequence and personal on-the-job decision making (Idem). Pearson and Moomaw (2006) stated that the „items are also logically consistent with the literature; researchers therefore might use it in the future studies of the autonomy construct”. This part also has three open-ended questions that seek to find out the respondents' perception about professional autonomy and examples of it within their workplace.

There are four areas contained by TAS that measure the teacher perception, originally designed by Pearson and Hall (1993) as it can be seen below. Eleven of the items reflected high autonomy and the rest of the questions had low autonomy.

- a) selection of activities and materials
- b) classroom standards of conduct
- c) instructional planning and sequencing
- d) personal on-the-job decision making

The authors also discovered two items with good consistency reliability: *curriculum autonomy* and *general teaching autonomy*. The questions for each item can be seen in Appendix 3. The TAS instrument can be found in Appendix 3.

4. **Support teacher autonomy**, build around the Work Climate Questionnaire – Perceive Autonomy Support part, the short form containing six of the items, using a Likert type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). It is used with a focus on work settings, teams or working groups with one manager (WCQ, 2000). The questions regard the autonomy support of the respondents' manager and is used to evaluate a general work climate, focusing on the autonomy support in general of the manager of the company/department/organization (*idem*). For the short version of the questionnaire, there are used only items 1, 2, 4, 7, 10 and 14. It also has three open-ended questions that regard the respondents needs about their professional autonomy and how their manager can better support it. The instrument can be found in Appendix 5.

An overview of the survey results can be seen in TABLE 1. It regards their role in the institution, and seniority at NEC.

TABLE 1. Demographics of the survey respondents

Category	Role at NEC		Seniority at NEC		
	Teacher	Teacher Assistant	Beginner (>1y)	Middle (<1y)	Senior (>2y)
Percentage	50%	50%	37,50%	43,75%	18,75%

3.4 Data analysis

3.4.1 Quantitative data analysis

The data analysis was divided into two stages (adapted from Croswell & Park, 2007) and the findings were analyzed separately (FIGURE 1). For the *quantitative* part of the survey, the results were instant, because they were carried out online, using Microsoft Forms. The used language was Romanian and for the

purpose of this study and a better understanding, all the responses were also translated into English; for the same purpose, some of the graphs and tables were remade using Microsoft Excel. The quantitative data was analyzed and added to focus on common patterns and themes.

For a better flow of this research, all the findings would be represented under the major chapters of the theoretical framework:

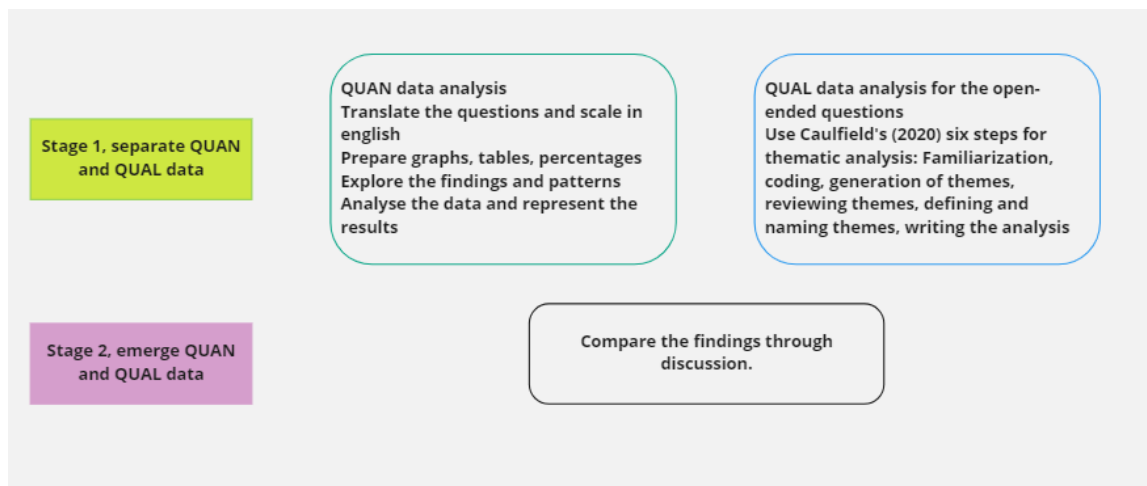
Self-determination and autonomy

Teacher autonomy

Self-perceived autonomy

Support teacher autonomy

FIGURE 1. Stages of analysis (adaptation from Crowell & Park, 2007)



3.4.2 Qualitative data analysis

For the survey's open-ended questions, the *qualitative* part, there was used a coding protocol that resulted in themes. The data analysis for this part debuted with readings of the responses, transcribed them into the program Miro, using a brainstorming and ideation template and categorize them into common patterns that occur with the data. The target was, as Caulfield (2020) stated „identify common themes, topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly”.

A thematic analysis could be inductive, meaning that the data determine the themes, and deductive, when the researcher has predetermined themes and expects to find them based on previous assumptions, observations, knowledge, or theory (Idem). This research used for the qualitative findings a deductive approach, given the fact that the theoretical framework is well built and has clear ideas of themes that could originate from the analysis.

There are six steps according to Caulfield (2020) and developed by Braun & Clarke (2006), that are mostly found in thematic analysis:

1. Familiarization, where the researcher gets familiarized with the collected data.
2. The coding process, means to highlight the sections of the registered text, and giving it a label, depending on what it transmits. Because there were only seven open-ended questions, the coding for this research was done manually by using highlighting and color coding, using the program Miro. This process was done for each of the seven open-ended questions. An example can be found in Appendix 6. The initial figure of codes can be found in the FIGURE 2 below.
3. The generating of the theme part means ordering the common ideas into themes that give a broader meaning to codes.
4. Reviewing themes, in order to make sure that they are useful and represent the data in a truthful manner.
5. Defining and naming themes, in order to better capture the meaning and understanding of the data. For a better flow of this research, all the findings would be represented under the major chapters of the theoretical framework with the addition of the list of found themes that derived from the codification. This can be seen in FIGURE 3, below.
6. The last stage is to write up the analysis of the data.

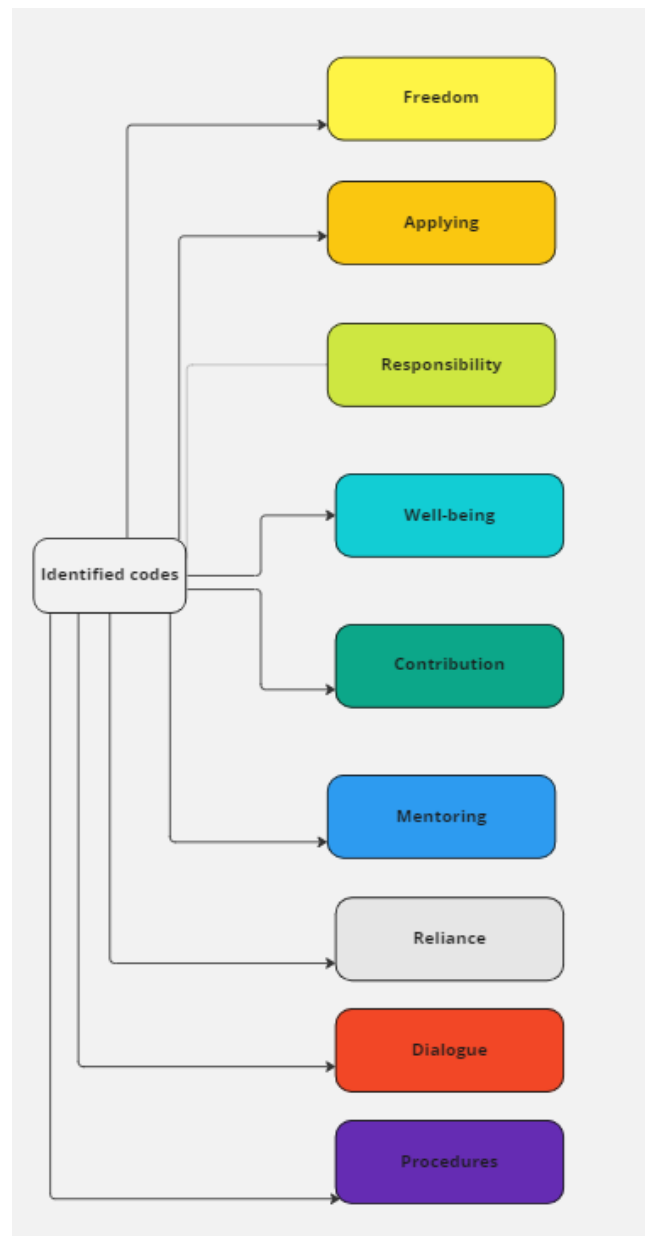


FIGURE 2. Initial codes

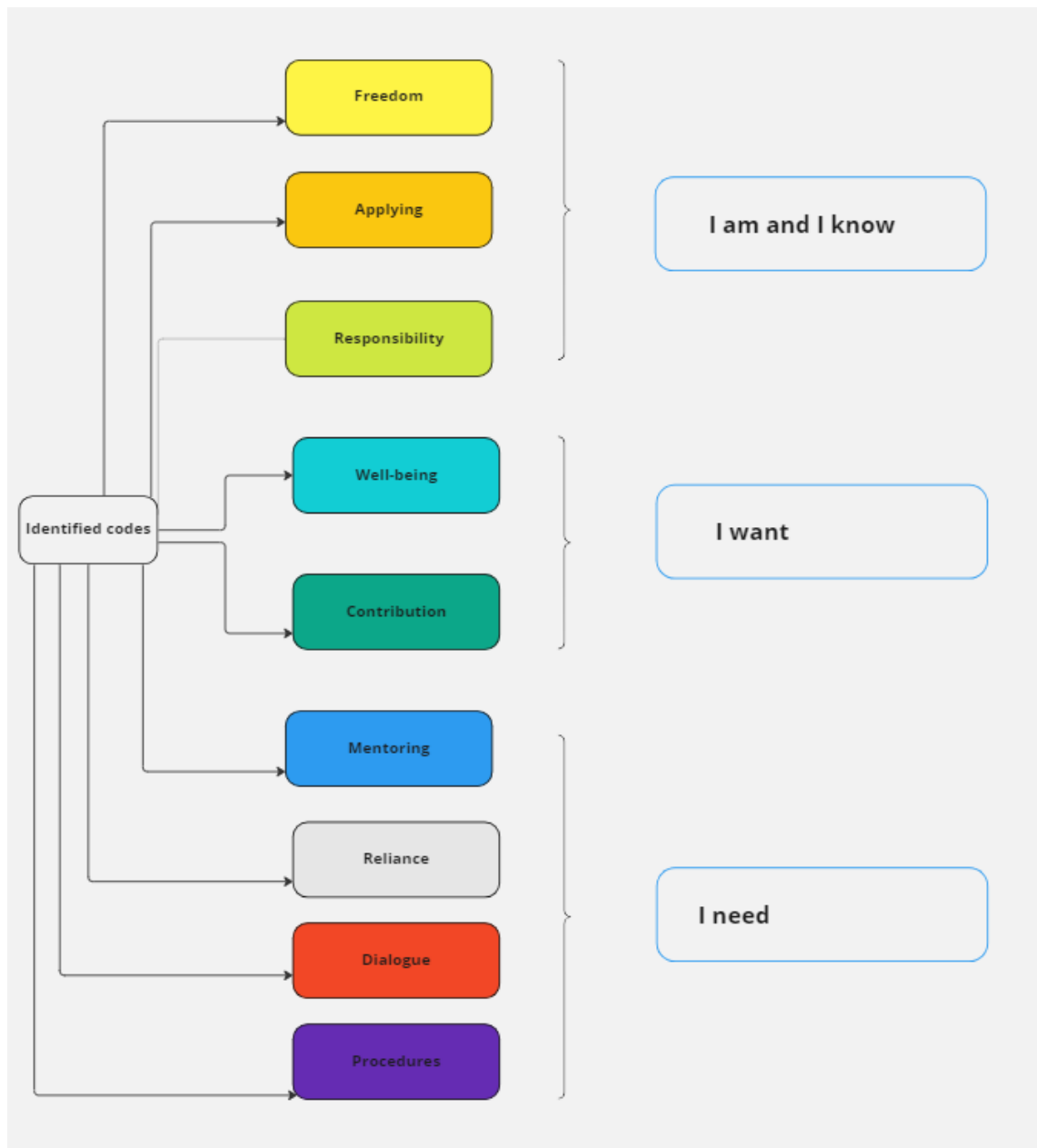


FIGURE 3. Codes to themes

3.5 Limitations

Firstly, there were encountered limitations, and for this research was taken into consideration that the researcher was part of the NEC employees and the position as manager placed her in a delicate, authoritative position.

The respondents were told in advance that the completion of the survey was voluntary and it was given a period of one week. Because after 4 days there was a low rate of responses, the researcher (also the manager) gave a reminder. This may be created pressure or constrained some of the employees. There were no time constraints or a fixed moment for completing the survey, but as it can be

seen in the details of form results, 90% of the respondents completed the survey during working hours, and there are possibilities of distractors, them not reading or understand the question carefully or click on any answer just to finish the "task". Also, it is taken into consideration that, because of recent resignations, 2 of the respondents were new to the institution, with under one month of seniority at work and their answers might not be conclusive.

Secondly, even though the participants were assured of their anonymity, some questions (e.g. *your role in the institution you are working is...; total number of years you have worked at NEC*) might be considered as a clue for the researcher that knows the employees very well. This could have also been constituted as an inhibitor for some of the respondents.

Finally, another limitation of the research is using only the survey as a research method. Given the above-mentioned shortcomings, a mixed method approach could have tackled the research objectives of the thesis in a more profound way and with fewer biases (e.g. observations over a long period of time, focus group with a skillful moderator – other than the researcher).

4 ANALYSIS

4.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the perception of NEC employees about professional autonomy, how autonomy is perceived at different stages of seniority and how to better support the employees' needs at different autonomy levels within the organization. The first section discusses the quantitative data collected, regarding autonomy & self-determination in the form of the *Basic psychological need satisfaction work scale* (BPNSS – Work, Deci, Ryan, Gagné, Leone, Usunov, & Kornazheva, 2001; Ilardi, Leone, Kasser, & Ryan, 1993; Kasser, Davey, & Ryan, 1992), the autonomy part; the teacher's autonomy (Pearson & Hall, 1993) and the *Work Climate Questionnaire – Perceive autonomy support* (WCQ, 2000). It also touches on *how much professional autonomy NEC teachers perceive they have*. For a better flow of this research all the findings would be represented under the major chapters of the theoretical framework:

Self-determination and autonomy

Teacher autonomy

Self-perceived autonomy

Support teacher autonomy

Qualitatively, the research takes a closer look at the open-ended questions of the survey, by meaning closely the same categories as the quantitative data, with an addition of the list of found themes that derived from the codification: *I am and I know, I want, I need*.

4.2 Quantitative data

In this research, the survey was distributed to 16 teachers and teacher assistants from NEC institution. The return rate was 100%: teachers 50% and teacher assistants 50%.

4.2.1 Self-determination theory and autonomy

In the BPNS scale, in response only to the autonomy subscale of 7 items, out of 21 of the original questionnaire, NEC employees' responses overall show that *when they are at work* there is autonomy involved (FIGURE 4).

For the question (a) *I feel like I can make a lot of inputs to deciding how my job gets done*, 37.5% answered (7) *very true*, 31.3% chose 6, 6.3% (5), 18.8% answered (4) *somewhat true* and 6.3% (1) *not at all true*. It is interesting that the one person that considers that can't make a lot of inputs in deciding how the work gets done, is a beginner in the NEC institution, with seniority of only two weeks and this is considered absolutely normal, because it takes time to accustom in any workplace, independent of the seniority in education in general (in this case, 7 years). There is also a pattern in answers for the beginner employees (with >1y seniority), where they consider they have less input in deciding how their job is done: all of them had answered lower than 7 (very true), 42.85% considered that the statement is *somewhat true*.

Regarding their role in the institution, is significant that besides the single person that answered *not true at all* and is in the position of coordinator – a teacher, the other respondents that answered *somewhat true* are teacher assistants, in a position of support for the entire activity that happens in the classroom and less in a position of taking decisions.

7. When I am at work/ Când sunt la muncă

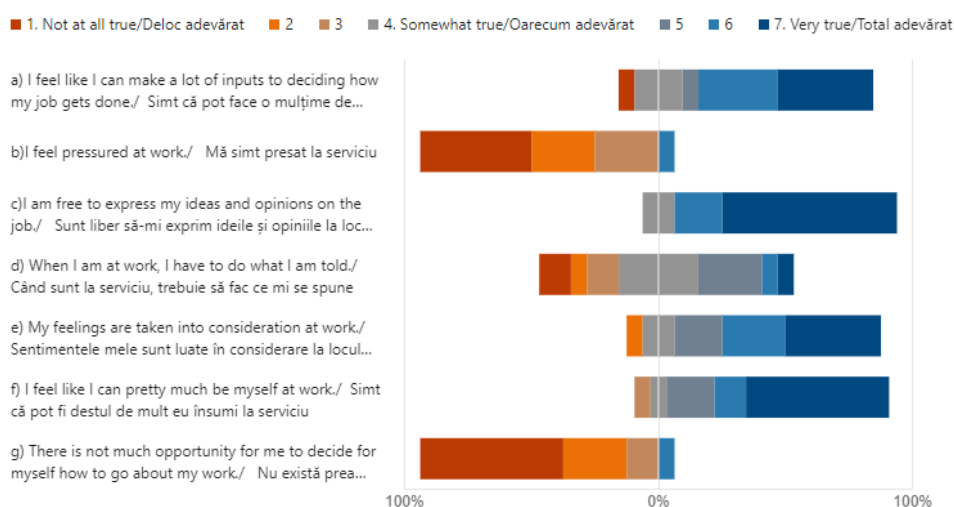


FIGURE 4. Overall autonomy

For question (b) *I feel pressured at work*, 43.8% answered 1 (*not at all true*), 25% with 2, 25% with 3 and 6.3% with 6 - meaning that they are close to feeling the pressure.

There is no pattern in answers to include the seniority or role inside the organization. The majority of responses stand on the positive side of not feeling pressured (scale from 1-4 in this case). There is one answer with 6, close to feeling the pressure at work, middle seniority and a teacher; this singular case might be depending on the personality of the person or how she perceives pressure in general life situations. Because the answers are under anonymity, we can't extrapolate any further in this case.

Question (c) *I am free to express my ideas and opinions on the job*, which marks the balance on the positive side, with 68.8% answering (7) *very true*, 18.8% (6) and 12.5% (4) *somewhat true*. With only 2 out of 16 respondents answering that the statement is near the truth, the pattern might be their role and seniority: teacher assistants and beginners. Also, we might advance in assumptions and say that this particular cases might depend on the relationship with the teacher and how activities are coordinated from the latter. If the teachers are more on the side of controlling things, an assistant might feel that his opinions are not important; also this is the case when someone in a position of coordination (teacher, manager) might have a difficult temper, thus not giving the freedom of expression in given situations.

Question (d) *When I am at work, I have to do what I am told*, and registers all the answers, from 1 to 7: 12.5% (1) *not at all true*, 6.3% (2), 12.5% (3), 31.3% (4) *somewhat true*, 25% (5), 6.3% (6) and 6.3% (7) *very true*. At the workplace, in general, as an employee you are supposed to *do what you are told*. The range of responses marks an equilibrium, meaning that most of the respondents answered with 4 and 5, placing the average in the middle. There are no correlations between seniority, work position, or experience in education overall.

For question (e) *My feelings are taken into consideration at work*, the majority of the respondents gave a positive answer, with 37.5% answering (7) *very true*, 25% (6) and 18.8% (5). The lower scores were 12.5% (4) *somewhat true* and 6.3%

(2). Again, in this situation, there are no correlations between role or seniority. It is interesting that the person that gave the lower score (2), close to *not at all true* has the longest working experience at NEC (4 years); some hypotheses in this case are the personality type and relationship with emotions, dealing with feeling in a workplace or different situations that made her feel that way, dealing with actors that may give this impression – with colleagues/management/parents.

Question (f) *I feel like I can pretty much be myself at work*, also has a positive rate of answers, meaning that the employees experience authenticity. 56.3% stated that this is *very true* (7), 12.5% answered (6) and 18.8% with (5). The scores for the lower answers were 6.3% (4) *somewhat true* and 6.3% (3). There can't be made assumptions regarding the seniority or role. The question marks the sense of belonging, of authenticity and being able to assume your personality and way of being. Maybe some people are not able to do this, especially in the workplace.

The final question, (g) *There is not much opportunity for me to decide for myself how to go about work*, has a positive distribution of answers, this time using the reverse scale, with 56.35 answering (1) *not at all true*, 25% (2) and 12.5% (3). Only one person answered (6) stating that the question is close to, 25% (2) and 12.5% (3). Only one person answered (6) stating that the question is close to *very true*. This is also the respondent that stated at the previous question that *she doesn't feel as herself at work* and also feels pressure. The person is a beginner and works for only 7 months within the NEC institution and also in the position of teacher assistant – a role that supports the activities in the classroom and answers to a coordinator of the process (the teacher); these are useful information, even though is a singular case, because it can predict a resignation, a work conflict or simply that one of the employees have a problem that needs to be addressed.

The answers are in general subjective, they depend on the person that gives it, but a mean of positive answers can be seen (Figure 4, overall autonomy, above), which indicates that the employees at NEC feel that they have the satisfaction of autonomy at the workplace and that this basic psychological need exists.

4.2.2 Teacher autonomy

This part represents according to Pearson & Hall (1993), „the perception that teacher have regarding whether they control themselves and the work environment”. The FIGURE 5. Perception of autonomy at workplace – TAS (below), shows an average of positive answers in favor of autonomy perception at NEC in general, in accordance to the professional perception.

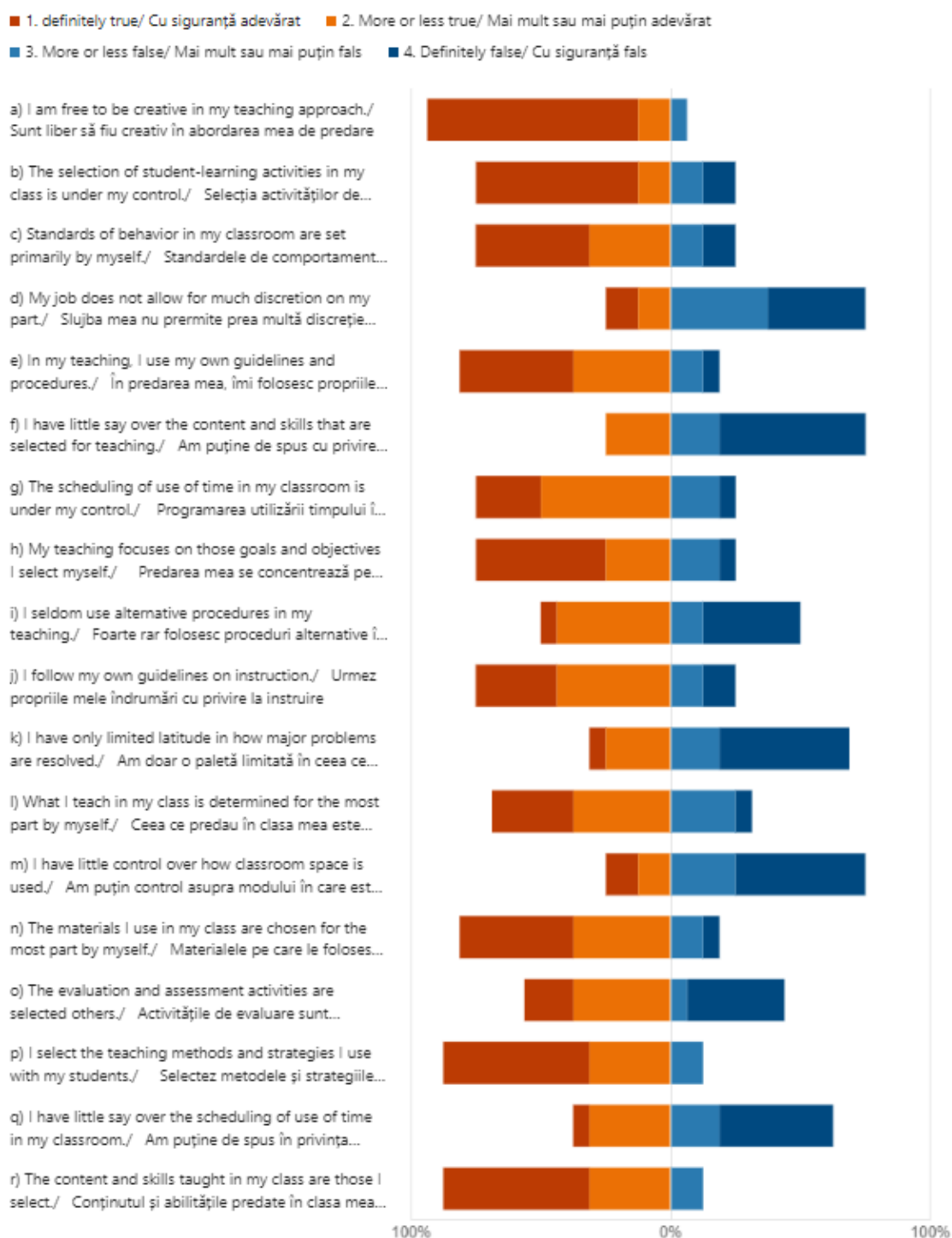


FIGURE 5. Perception of autonomy at workplace – TAS

There can be seen differences in answers, according especially regarding the role within the organization. For example, at the first question, *I am free to be creative in my teaching approach*, one that includes high autonomy, 100% of the teachers answered with *definitely true*, while the teacher assistants 62.5% *definitely true*, 25% *more or less true* and 12.5% with *more or less false*. Again this pattern occurs in question (b) *the selection of student learning activities in my class is under my control*, where 87.5% of the teachers answered with *definitely true* and 12.5% with *more or less true*, while the teacher assistants only had 37.5% *definitely true*, 12.5% *more or less true* and the rest of the respondents showed a lack of autonomy in this case, with 25% *more or less false* and 25% *definitely false*.

It is clearly a different dynamic when it comes to autonomy inside the classroom, because of the two roles that govern it: the coordinator – teacher and the assistant – the one that sustains the process but doesn't have a coordination role. For the purpose of this study and a better understanding, we decided to analyse separately the teachers from the assistants, alongside the two structured items of the TAS (Pearson and Hall, 1993): curriculum autonomy and general teaching autonomy as it can be seen in APPENDIX 2.

For the curriculum autonomy part, the differences in the perception of autonomy are clear, meaning that the teachers perceive a greater degree of autonomy, while the assistants don't. As a statement in this case, could be question *I have little say over the content and skills that are selected for teaching*, where the teachers answered with 87.5% *definitely false*, revealing a high level of autonomy while the assistants 25% *definitely false* and an average of 37.5% between *more or less false* and *more or less true*. This range of answers could also predict the relationship between the teacher and the assistant, but also how they micro-manage. It is also interesting to notice that seniority in the case of assistants, affects the perception of autonomy: those with little seniority (e.g. 2 weeks, 4 months, 6 months, 7 months) tend to perceive themselves as less autonomous. This is somehow natural because as a beginner you tend to be an executant, an observer and non the less, a learner that needs guidance.

It is also noticeable that are some questions (e.g. *What I teach in my class is determined for the most part by myself* or *The materials I use in my class are chosen for the most part by me*) even though are reflecting the perception of autonomy for the teachers, only 50% answered with *definitely true* and the others with *more or less true*; this is because at NEC there are some principles and procedures regarding the curriculum that must be followed by everyone and are part of the educational standards.

The general teaching autonomy items reveal also the fact that teachers perceive that are more autonomous than the assistants in their profession. For example, this is natural when deciding the teaching methods, that the teachers are perceiving autonomy 87.5% with *definitely true*, while the assistants only 25%. Also, according to their job description, teacher assistants are by nature followers when it comes for example to decisions about evaluation methods, choosing standards of behavior or scheduling. Their role is to sustain these processes and help the teacher when needed. We can see that the distribution of answers is not even, there are cases when assistants chose different ranges of answers for example: *Standards of behavior in my classroom are set primarily by me*, 25% chose *definitely true*, 25% *more or less true*, 25% *more or less false* and 25% *definitely false*; also for *The selection of student-learning activities in my class is under my control*, 37.5% went for *definitely true*, 12.5% for *more or less true*, 25% chose *more or less false* and 25% *definitely false*. This could be correlated with the dynamic of the classroom and the relationship between the teacher and assistant. Also, we are taking into consideration the seniority at NEC, where most of the beginner assistants (under 1 year of employment at NEC) tend to perceive that are less autonomous than the ones that have more seniority. A less perceived autonomy of the teachers couldn't be correlated positively with seniority.

The distribution of answers for the question *My job does not allow for much discretion on my part* is even and mirrored between teachers and assistants; this could be interpreted as a distribution of personalities in a workplace, because discretion or the lack of it, could be associated with those who are more extrovert and communicative and others who are more introvert.

The questions that assess for example the schedule, evaluation and space in the classroom and are subject to certain procedures and rules of the institution can be seen to have a more range of answers and an equilibrium of opinions shared between teachers and assistants. This could be because, as stated before, there are pre-determined things where employees must be aligned and apply the established rules and norms. The evaluation for example could be according to the vision of the teacher but is also mandatory to complete a certain instrument for every student, that assess the grade of autonomy according to observable behavior. Also, the schedule has some mandatory time frames that need to be followed (e.g. arrival and departure of the children, lunchtime, optional activities, snack time, etc.).

4.2.3 Self-perceived autonomy

This part is related to the Teacher Autonomy Scale that measured the perception teachers have about their autonomy, but in our survey was also a question strictly about the professional perception of autonomy in general, that employees perceive they have within the workplace.

6. How much autonomy do you perceive you have at your workplace?
Cât de multă autonomie profesională percepi că ai la locul de muncă?

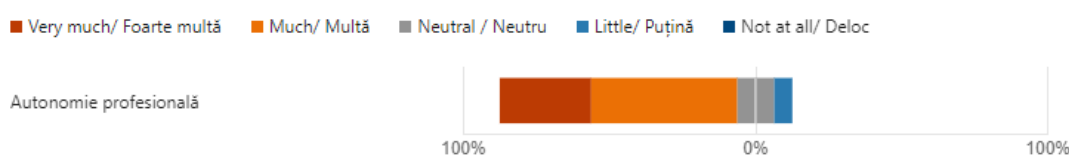


FIGURE 6. Perception of autonomy at workplace

As it can be seen in FIGURE 6 above, the mean of responses shows that in general, the employees perceive they have professional autonomy. 31.3% of the respondents chose *very much*, 50% *much*, 12.3% chose to be *neutral* and 6.3% stated they have *little*. None of the respondents chose *not at all* and this is a positive aspect for an institution that promotes autonomy. There could not be made correlations between the role or seniority within the institution. There is something that stood out, the 6.3% with the perception of little autonomy and

investigating more deeply, the respondent is also the one that considers there is *not much opportunity for her to decide how to go about work* or to be like herself in the workplace. Aligning with the theoretical framework, this could predict a change of dynamic within the teaching group (e.g. teacher and assistant), or even the institution (e.g. resignation, choosing a different path in life).

Looking at the range of responses for this question, it is interesting to notice that at the deeper questions from the TAS, some of them gave answers that predicted a perception with less autonomy; in this case, there are no notable differences between teachers and assistants as it was the case before.

4.2.4 Support teacher autonomy

The Work Climate Questionnaire (WCQ): Perceived Autonomy Support, was used as a short version, with only 6 out of 15 items (# 1 (a), 2 (b), 4 (c), 7 (d), 10 (e) and 14 (f)). As it can be seen in FIGURE 7 below, the higher average scores represent that NEC employees perceive a higher level of autonomy support.

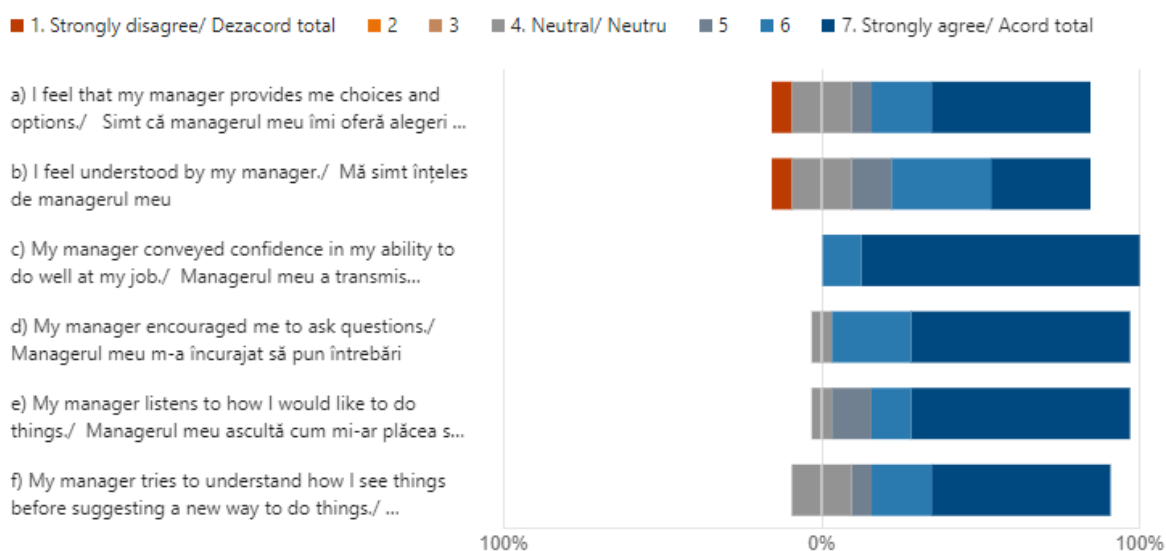


FIGURE 7. Perceived support autonomy

Analyzing in a deeper manner, the percentages of answers for each question, we can see in TABLE 2 the same higher score distribution of answers with *strong agreement*. There are two questions that registered answers at an extreme and a *strong disagreement*: q (a) *I feel that my manager provides me choices and*

options and q (b) *I feel understood by my manager*, the respondents are different, and neither the role nor seniority could predict meaning. A hypothesis could be that a different moment in time, the persons had a misunderstanding of opinions with the manager or that there is simply an error in completing the questionnaire, given the fact that all the other scores are marked with the highest range.

TABLE 2. Distribution of answers. Perceived support autonomy

Question	1.Strongly disagree	2	3	4.Neutral	5	6	7.Strongly agree
a	6.3%			18.8%	6.3%	18.8%	50%
b	6.3%			18.8%	12.5%	31.3%	31.3%
c						12.5%	87.5%
d				6.3%		25%	68.8%
e				6.3%	12.5%	12.5%	68.8%
f				18.8%	6.3%	18.8%	56.3%

It is also notable that question (b), already mentioned above, registered the lowest score out of the other questions from the point of view of the *strongest agreement*, with only 31.3%. The answers took the point of view of *feeling understood* by the manager can be subjective, and depend on the relationship with the latter, events that gave the impression or maybe are about personality or the fact that in a workplace, there is room for understanding but not every time. Another question that registered a slightly lower score with *stronger agreement* is (f) *my manager tries to understand how I see things before suggesting a new way to do things*; this is a remark that has to be taken into consideration for further actions. There are no correlations between seniority or role within the institution, but as the researcher and also the manager, I could definitely state that there is sometimes a tendency of mentoring and giving solutions if is more practical for a given situation.

The range of neutral responses is also important because they can forecast indifference, could be a bias knowing that the researcher is also the manager (e.g the respondents chose the safest answer), but can also predict the relationship created between the manager and respondents at some point.

The question that registered the strongest perceived autonomy support is (c) *my manager conveyed confidence in my ability to do well at my job*; this statement is part of the organization's principles and an important aspect of NEC culture. As an educational institution, it is important to communicate confidence to adults that are taking care of children: in order to mirror and modulate a behavior you have to be able to feel it first.

It is also noticeable that there is a positive correlation between supervisor autonomy support and perceived professional autonomy. Linking the theoretical framework with the results, there is meaning and accuracy.

4.3 Qualitative data

The open-ended questions served to duplicate the quantitative data and give a broader meaning of the concepts, by allowing the respondents to state more freely their opinions. This was also the case for the present research, where the answers from the seven open-ended questions brought up some different aspects than anticipated, thus enriching the findings. Even though the open-ended questions were under a predetermined theme (e.g. *at your current workplace do you experience professional autonomy* – under the subchapter *Teacher Autonomy* or *what autonomy support means to you* under the subchapter *Support Teacher Autonomy*), the data collected from the answers was codified, organized and categorized in more tangible themes that emerged: I am and I know, I want, I need, by truly picking the point of view from the respondent's perspective. The answers were given in Romanian and for the purpose of this research and a better understanding, they would be translated in English.

Each of the three themes would bring together the major chapters of the theoretical framework, which were also the basis for the quantitative part: Self-determination and autonomy, Teacher autonomy, Self-perceived autonomy and Support teacher autonomy.

4.3.1 Theme: I am and I know

The respondents were asked to write in their own terms (a) ***What autonomy means*** to them in general and their answers brought to light parts of their personality, principles of living and customs. For most of them, autonomy meant *freedom, independence* and the *capacity to do things without help*. The answers also included a communication component for *the freedom of speech, express without constraints* or *having my own opinions*. These are natural things that should govern one's life and key components not only in a workplace, but in general.

The responses also expressed the desire to be able to be authentic (*to be myself; manifest myself freely, without constraints*) and also to master their own life ((...) *to make my own decisions and conduct my own life*).

As freedom also comes with responsibility, some of the responses expressed this value according to being able to do and decide things and have ownership (e.g. *autonomy means responsibility, to do and decide; (...) being responsible for your life; (...) conduct your life and make decisions*).

Autonomy also was associated with trust and the *ability to implement*, to have competencies, information and the *possibility to apply things the way you want and know it's better*.

“Autonomy for me means being independent, doing something with pleasure, having your own opinions about everything, being yourself and being responsible for your life.”

“For me, autonomy represents awareness of one's skills and the ability to put them into practice.”

“For me, autonomy means the ability of an individual to carry out actions and make decisions on his own, in a natural order.”

When asked about (b) ***how they perceive autonomy in their workplace***, the respondents went out of the generalization sphere and depth of their beliefs,

stating that autonomy in a workplace should be something *natural; day by day work; innate*. This surprises also a basic of things, in a simpler manner, because yes, in a workplace, autonomy should be perceived as normality, a part of being and doing things. The freedom theme also surfaces, this time compressing the daily activities surrounding the workplace and their role. The respondents see autonomy as a way to express themselves and their attributions, as a chance to be independent and *have complete freedom in all of the activities*. Freedom is also a subject for better collaboration alongside other colleagues, but also the liberty to put into practice *the vision of educational concept* of the employees.

Some of the responses linked autonomy with the children they are taking care of, mirroring the process and one of the NEC work principles: if you want to give to others, you should first experience yourself. For them, autonomy lies in their day by day activities, and means to support the children to make decisions on their own and carry out activities *thus helping them to develop harmoniously*.

Association with competencies and applying them is mentioned alongside dealing with emergency situations, thus knowing what to do and how to make the best decisions, but also with confidence and self-esteem, coordinating something according to their own ideas and responsibility for their actions.

One of the respondents stated that workplace autonomy also depends on the role you have – teacher or assistant, because in the case of the latter you first have to correlate your actions with the teacher, as he is the coordinator. This is an important aspect of the research and a theme for further recommendations.

“(perceive workplace autonomy) as a good thing, useful for our development. A source of confidence in one’s own strength.”

“since I have been working in this environment, it seems to me more than a necessity, both for me and the children.”

“our chance (as employees) not to depend on anyone and to have complete freedom in all our activities.”

“autonomy at the workplace can consist in the possibility of coordinating various activities according to one’s own ideas.”

The way (c) **professional autonomy** (PA) is brought to light in the answers, aligns with how respondents feel about autonomy in general, and freedom is again a common concept. Respondents recognize that in their role, autonomy means the freedom to decide and apply, to work alongside their principles and their own way to act in front of a situation. PA is also translated into instinct, *the capacity to bring new ideas* and healthy collaboration with other peers.

Because in this case, PA is narrowing the concept of autonomy with the position they have inside the institution NEC, a big part of autonomy is enclosed in the liberty to apply, decide and communicate in their classroom. It is seen in how they manage to see progress in children, which came from their own actions (as teachers), in collaborating with other peers, but also how they act according to their instincts as professionals.

The translation of curriculum autonomy and general teaching autonomy is seen in the way they perceive the liberty of expression and creativity translated into the best teaching methods, organizing the environment, applying rules and evaluate progress, in order to feel their mark and personality, but also to find out what best fits their children.

There couldn't be seen within the statement different approaches according to the role if the respondents in the institution. It seems that there is alignment in beliefs and perceptions of PA.

“Professional autonomy is a central principle of professional ethics; for me it means being able to choose the activity and lesson I want to do in class. In addition, I can decide what is good for the child in the rest of the situations at the kindergarten.”

“Professional autonomy, in this field, can also mean freedom of expression and decision regarding teaching methods, organization of activities, establishment and application of rules, imposition of an education standard that is not contested by parents, colleagues, etc.”

“To know well what I am doing at work, to be something instinctive, to be able to act in emergency situations without being afraid and to have professional freedom.”

The respondents were also asked to write about situations where they experienced professional autonomy and their answers could be categorized into the capacity to decorate the classroom, implement procedures and rules, practices of pedagogy or materials and time management, but also the flexibility of their actions. It is noticeable that in some of the examples, the respondents stated that changes inside their classroom were also discussed with the children, from the desire to strengthen their degree of autonomy and responsibility. These can be seen in FIGURE 8 below.

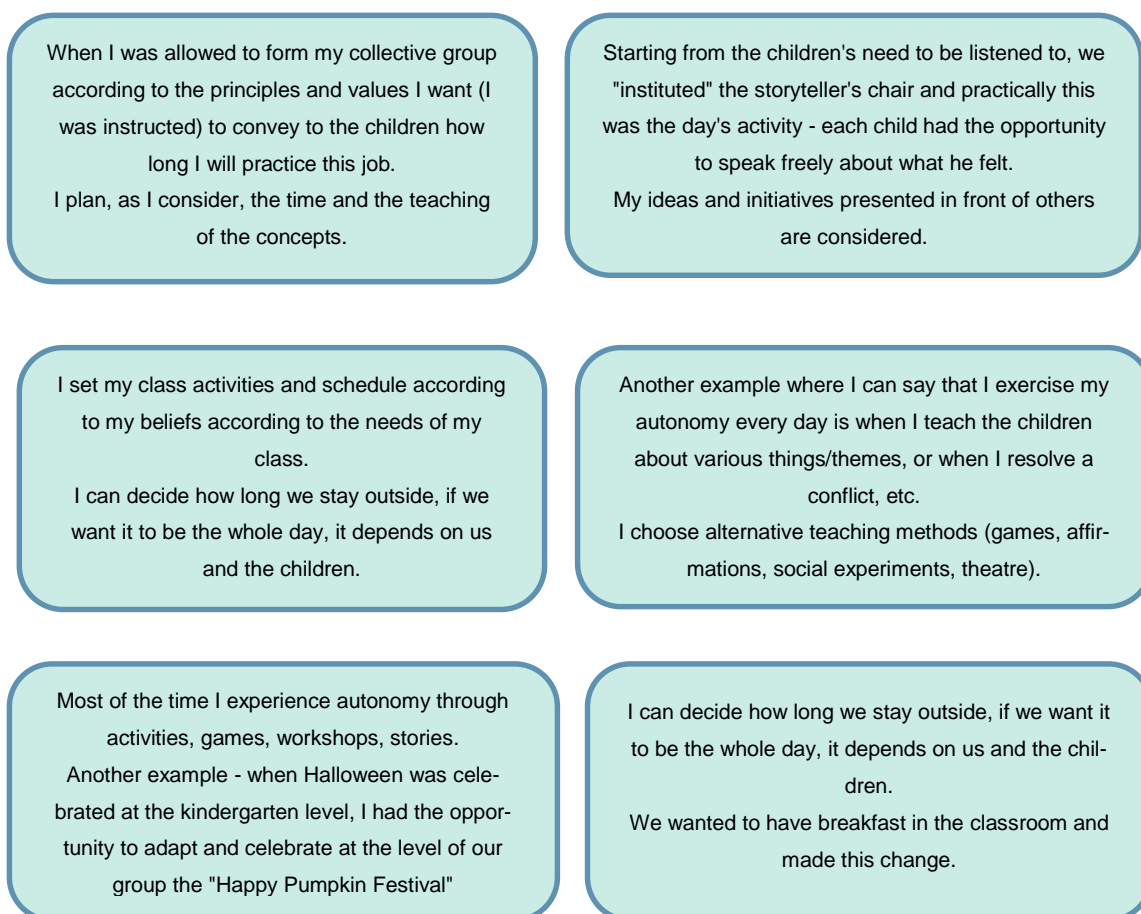


FIGURE 8. Examples of professional autonomy

4.3.2 Theme: I want

The theory stated that the sense of autonomy comes with positive benefits, motivation and well-being. When the place of work is where you spend most of your time (eight to nine hours per day), you need to make sure that the environment is healthy, equilibrated and brings you long-term benefits. The respondents were also surprised by what autonomy means to them in a different manner, aligned with the theoretical framework. A sense of *good feeling* emerged from the fact that they consider autonomy to be *harmony, understanding* and *pleasure*. Some considered it to be in the form of free play activities and expression of one's creativity of emotions, while others a feeling of empowerment and growth self-esteem, when you are in the position of power over your own life, or others' lives (the children) and are trusted and motivated (e.g. *autonomy means confidence in one's own strength, in information and the possibility to apply it as I wish and it is good for my class*).

Ownership is also mentioned as the capacity to be in charge of your own path and take the best decisions for yourself, but also to be able to do simple things, that is for most taken for granted (e.g. *autonomy represents the independence of carrying out on one's own the necessary actions in everyday life (dressing, undressing, eating, walking, washing, tidying up, etc.; a source of confidence in one's own strength)*).

Authenticity is mentioned as an important aspect, having the courage and freedom to act accordingly to your beliefs, principles and values, but also to be able to speak your mind.

"Liberty to speak my mind"

"Harmony, understanding, free expression"

"(...) the ability to express myself and manifest myself freely, without constraint."

"The right to work according to one's own beliefs."

"Represents our own way of acting on a situation".

From a professional point of view, it is derived from something *good, normal* and *open, a chance* and a way to act in harmony on everyday work. It is also the expression of contribution and the capacity to bring new ideas, but also to respect others. In a workplace, especially in education, it is desirable for adults to collaborate and to contribute, while also benefiting for all the perks of autonomy, but without violating someone else's freedom, beliefs and authenticity. This would be an idea for reflection and future recommendations, as we saw that in some situations, the relationship between teachers and assistants is not built in the desired direction.

“Mutual decision on all aspects in which I am involved at work.”

“To have freedom of expression, respect, a healthy collaboration.”

“The ability to bring new ideas and to contribute to the process.”

“The free decision to carry out the work day and activity with the children, with the implicit opinion of the children and my colleagues.”

Autonomy is a way in which you have consideration for others and as stated by the respondents, but also by the theoretical framework – you contribute with motivation, one of the key ingredients of well-being in a work environment.

4.3.3 Theme: I need

The respondents were asked to write in their own terms (a) ***What autonomy support*** meant to them. In order for autonomy as a process to be visible and fulfilled, it needs to be supported, grown and nourished. Some of the answers stated that the motivation itself is the basis for their autonomy and the feeling of support in the decisions taken. Encouragement, trust and openness to be listened are also ways in which NEC employees feel that their autonomy is sustained.

The pattern of freedom is also found in their answers, but it is seen from the perspective of the interlocutor: I need to *“be listened, to give pieces of advices, to confirm or infirm”*, to be offered liberty and listening to ideas; *to be asked for*

my opinion on certain topics; to apply my recommendations and respect my decisions. It is seen that in other words, the respondents need a “someone” to be present, to respect them as professionals and listen to them.

It is also taken into consideration that the management decisions should be taken *with balance in mind, in such a way that the well-being (of the employee) should matter.*

For question (b) ***what are your needs in order to feel professional autonomy,*** the mentoring theme stood out, expressing the need for soft things, as emotional support, the desire to receive (more) trust, validation and being understood, but also tangible aspects like more class visits, 1:1 discussion, the chance to try new methods, access to resources, training, courses and information, or for someone with greater experience to give advice when in doubt.

There are also answers about administrative and procedural aspects that could strengthen the relationship between teachers and assistants, but also clarity about roles and job descriptions:

“Better communication with my colleague, distribution of tasks, offering opportunities to contribute equally to activities.”

“Moments for me to decide at work, not just to support what the teacher does. To somehow get out of the role and demonstrate what I can do.”

“To be understood, to have my opinion understood and taken into account, to have someone teach me how to do certain tasks well and if I do them equally well, to have freedom and creativity regarding those.”

The responses correlate with the quantitative data, giving deeper meaning and explanations to some of the scaled answers and are aspects that would be taken as recommendations for this research. There are no correlations between the seniority at NEC and the need of support, but there is a certainty formed regarding the roles and different types of affirmation, contribution and autonomy that are needed.

There is also stated the feeling that there is no need for more support than is already given:

“I have no needs.”

“At the moment, I feel professionally fulfilled and I feel that I have evolved since I have been here.”

“I feel very very very good.”

“At the present moment I benefit from all the conditions to carry out my activity.”

“I believe that at the moment there is nothing that the manager could do more to achieve the professional autonomy of all pedagogues.”

These affirmations are a great statement for an institution that promotes autonomy, well-being and Nordic educational principles. Bearing these in mind, another aspect to consider in terms of autonomy support is the democratic feeling, that comes along with open dialogue, transparency, trust and common decisions.

“Get understanding from the manager when appropriate. To communicate with me. Encourage me and honestly communicate to me the grievances he has about me (if any). To listen to me (and possibly help me with a proposal, if he has one), when I encounter a problem with a child/parent.”

“Decisions by mutual agreement - balance between the needs and well-being of the teachers - the good of the parents or business.”

These remarks are pertinent and are responding to the research questions of this paper, thus would be taken into consideration for further recommendations.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the educational institution NEC are based on the findings derived from data analysis. The suggestions may not need an implementation, but the list includes some possible solutions to some of the key discoveries.

The results have shown that there are differences in the perception of autonomy, regarding seniority at NEC. The beginner employees considered that they have less input in deciding how their job is done and also the newest employee, of only two weeks, stated that he has no input regarding the same matter. These are all natural aspects of an employer's journey, but a good system of *welcoming* process and *introduction to the institution's culture* could help a lot by taking some pressure of the beginning, by aligning the employees to the vision of the institution and setting the expectations.

A solution for these could be the implementation of an onboarding process, that could include:

An Employees NEC Guide, with all the rules and procedures of the institution, but also predictability statements and stories about autonomy, how it is sustained and what it means for the institution

A list of things that are part of the informal life of the institution and are learned in dialogue with employees that have more seniority or with the passage of time. This could install predictability, but also future familiarity among the newest members of the team.

A mentoring system with colleagues that have seniority at NEC and could introduce the beginners in the *twist and turns* of the institution, but also with the classroom activity (ideas, methods, way of doing things) and how autonomy is perceived, applied and sustained.

Programmed one on one discussions with the manager, at least 1/month in the first three months, that are implemented by contract in Romania to be a trial and learning period

List of resources, readings and recommendations of learning, that could align the beginner employees to the same understanding

Onboarding training – a list of definitory and must-knows – about NEC, philosophy, ways of working

Another aspect that must be taken into account is the difference of autonomy in general and the perception of professional autonomy between the institution's roles: Teacher and teacher assistant.

The findings showed that the teachers perceive to have more professional autonomy, are free to be creative in their role and with deciding what is best for their classroom, while the assistant not that much, with an average of answers below the scale mean. It is clearly a different dynamic when it comes to autonomy inside the classroom and the perception of professional autonomy, because of the two roles that govern it: the coordinator – teacher and the assistant – the one that sustains the process, but doesn't have a coordination role. As stated in the findings, the differences could also predict the relationship between the teacher and the assistant, but also how they micro-manage. It is also interesting to notice that seniority in the case of assistants, affects the perception of autonomy: those with little seniority (e.g. 2 weeks, 4 months, 6 months, 7 months) tend to perceive themselves as less autonomous. This is somehow natural because as a beginner you tend to be an executant, an observer and not the less, a learner that needs guidance.

Also, the different perception sometimes is part of the job description and is not part of a change; for the teacher role you have to be qualified in the educational field, with specific studies done (for example The Faculty of Educational Sciences, Primary and Preschool Education, while for the assistant role you only have to be qualified in the educational field or an adjacent study field (e.g. Social Sciences).

A recommendation for this could be in the form of:

Classroom visits and observation of the team teacher & teacher assistant dynamics, followed by a team discussion and reflection. This could address some am-

biguities and team issues, but also align the perception of roles, what could autonomy be perceived, what is changeable and what is part of the job description and sometimes is not negotiable.

If the assistant is a good executant and demonstrates that have great ideas, or could implement things as a teacher does, there should be allowed to choose moments (activity, routine, evaluation, method, etc.) over which they have complete autonomy and accountability. This could allow the assistant to feel the power of decision-making, but also to acknowledge the skills, while having a higher sense of autonomy.

The analysis pointed out that there is one employee which comes out of the so-called norm of answers and shows a predisposition of resignation, an issue inside between the relationship teacher & teacher assistant and a level of dissatisfaction. This is an important aspect in the life of the institution, because, besides the turnover situations, there could be negative influencing, mirroring of the bad energy for the children and non-alignment with institutional principles and philosophy. The finding could be addressed in one on one discussions with the manager, but also periodical feedback and lessons learned with employees, over a range of different aspects of NEC.

The support for teacher autonomy revealed a high perception level of autonomy support, with only two answers at an extreme, with strong disagreement. A hypothesis, as already stated, could be that a different moment in time, the persons had a misunderstanding of opinions with the manager or that there is simply an error in completing the questionnaire, given the fact that all the other scores are marked with the highest range. There were taken into consideration also neutral responses, which could predict the relationship created with the manager, or even indifference regarding the issue. This could be addressed in one on one discussions, but also in trainings, learning moments and alignment processes.

A strong recommendation also comes from positive answers for the statement *my manager conveyed confidence in my ability to do well at my job*, and shows that the organization's principle is working and the job done in this area is working.

The answers to the open-ended questions are also aspects for recommendations, revealing that even though some understandings are similar, it is in the human nature to see and perceive different some notions. This could depend on each individual's experiences, socialization, values and so on.

Some point to be taken are coming from the respondents themselves: training for a common understanding of others' perception, but also for alignment; constant dialogue; class visits and mentoring, but also keeping up with the already implemented aspects that work; access to resources and openness for advice and implementation of good ideas regardless of the roles.

Other pertinent remarks are made from the point of view of a democratic feeling, mutual respect, transparency, trust and common decisions. Some recommendations could be:

An implementation of visuals and posters, made by the employees, with the purpose of alignment, but also surprising the perception of others and accepting that it is okay to be different and to have various needs.

One-on-one meetings and follow-up discussions if it is necessary

Keeping accountability for decisions and meeting minutes after common gatherings or learning moments.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine the perception of employees about professional autonomy at NEC and find solutions for leveling up the knowledge about the philosophy of the institution and working towards common knowledge. Also, it was followed how autonomy is perceived at different stages within the organization (for example beginner – middle – senior teachers) and how employees are experiencing it and to find out how to better support the needs of staff at different autonomy levels and build a future strategy towards this goal.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

Main research question

- How to support the need for professional autonomy in different stages of employment at NEC?

The secondary questions for this study

- How NEC teacher - employees are experiencing professional autonomy?
- How much professional autonomy do teachers at NEC perceive they have?
- How professional autonomy is seen/perceived/felt according to the maturity of employment at NEC?

The findings were aligned and answered the research questions and also the purpose of the study was attained along with the final recommendations.

For some, an autonomy-supportive environment, enriches their potential, well-being and feeling of appreciation, while for others, when in the role of beginners an environment that promotes and encourages autonomy can be less desirable when they are not accustomed to this direction.

It was shown that there are differences of autonomy perception and professional autonomy at NEC, and also that seniority correlates positively with the perception of autonomy.

The role of employees also gave a deeper understanding of how professional autonomy is experienced and marked some pertinent recommendations.

Positive answers regarding the support of autonomy and the general feeling of autonomy perceived at NEC, showed that the organization's principles are felt and the job already done in this area works; the tendency to take decisions with well-being in mind, flexibility and autonomy can be physically seen and perceived in the institution, from the procedures to the curriculum.

The findings were also correlated with the theoretical framework showing the validation of the research.

6.1 Limitations

An important limitation of this study was that the researcher was part of the NEC employees and in a management position, which could have biased some of the research answers. It was also used only the survey as a research method and a mixed method approach could have tackled the research objectives of the thesis in a more profound way and with fewer possible biases (e.g. observations over a long period of time, focus group with a skillful moderator – other than the researcher).

The recommendations part was also written with a subjective twist and points of view; the research managed to confirm some already known shortcomings and the researcher-manager was already aware of some ideas for implementation and future strategies.

Another limitation was that of a too-long period of writing and completion of the thesis, within a total of almost one year with gaps. From the starting time, until the finishing one, there were lots of turnovers inside the NEC institution and changes in the dynamics of roles, that could have changed the results of the research; therefore, it is taken into account that the research results reveal the direction from the present moment of NEC. The pandemic situation, but also the managerial position of the researcher brought shortcomings in implementing a longer period of dedication to this project or a more rigorous and deeper coverage of some aspects.

6.2 Suggestions for further research

The purpose of this research was specific for NEC and its employees. Research with a larger number of participants and an extended study could broaden the findings.

Opportunities for further research could exist and be explored. The study could be replicated and extended in other contexts and educational institutions, but also at different levels of education, other than preschool, thus expanding the findings of this study. Other suggestion is to use other methods than the survey, to capture a deeper understanding of the phenomena and also to replicate the research without the manager in the posture of the researcher.

Suggested addition and findings to this study would be further analyses.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Basic Psychological need satisfaction at work scale. Autonomy

Appendices are numbered consecutively in the order they are referred to in the text. The appendices must have a title and reference if not constructed by the author. If the appendix has for example three pages, you should write 1 (3) on the right top of the first page, 2 (3) on the following page, and 3 (3) on the last page.

Basic Need Satisfaction at Work

When I Am At Work

The following questions concern your feelings about your job during the last year. (If you have been on this job for less than a year, this concerns the entire time you have been at this job.)

Please indicate how true each of the following statement is for you given your experiences on this job. Remember that your boss will never know how you responded to the questions. Please use the following scale in responding to the items.

1 not at all true	5
2	6
3	7 very true
4 somewhat true	

I feel like I can make a lot of inputs to deciding how my job gets done.

I feel pressured at work.

I am free to express my ideas and opinions on the job.

When I am at work, I have to do what I am told.

My feelings are taken into consideration at work.

I feel like I can pretty much be myself at work.

There is not much opportunity for me to decide for myself how to go about my work.

(Deci, Ryan, Gagné, Leone, Usunov, & Kornazheva, 2001; Ilardi, Leone, Kasser, & Ryan, 1993; Kasser, Davey, & Ryan, 1992).

Appendix 2. Curriculum autonomy and General teaching autonomy 1(3)

Curriculum autonomy: teachers and assistants

Curriculum autonomy questions	1) Definitely true		2) More or less true		3) More or less false		4) Definitely false	
	Teacher	Assistant	T	A	T	A	T	A
In my teaching, I use my own guidelines and procedures.	62.5%	25%	37.5%	37.5%		25%		12.5%
I have little say over the content and skills that are selected for teaching.			12.5%	37.5%		37.5%	87.5%	25%
My teaching focuses on those goals and objectives I select myself.	75%	25%	25%	25%		37.5%		12.5%
What I teach in my class is determined for the most part by myself.	50%	12.5%	37.5%	37.5%	12.5%	37.5%		12.5%
The materials I use in my class are chosen for the most part by me	50%	37.5%	50%	25%		25%		12.5%
The content and skills taught in my class are those I select.	87.5%	25%	12.5%	50%		25%		

Curriculum autonomy and General teaching autonomy 2(3)

General teaching autonomy: teachers and assistants

General teaching autonomy	1) Definitely true		2) More or less true		3) More or less false		4) Definitely false	
	Teacher	Assistant	T	A	T	A	T	A
I am free to be creative in my teaching approach.	100%	62.5%		25%		12.5%		
The selection of student-learning activities in my class is under my control.	87.5%	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%		25%		25%
Standards of behavior in my classroom are set primarily by me.	62.5%	25%	37.5%	25%		25%		25%
My job does not allow for much discretion on my part.	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%	37.5%	37.5%	37.5%	37.5%
The scheduling of use of time in my classroom is under my control.	37.5%	12.5%	50%	50%	12.5%	25%		12.5%
I seldom use alternative procedures in my teaching.		12.5%	37.5%	50%	12.5%	12.5%	50%	25%
I follow my own guidelines on instruction.	37.5%	25%	62.5%	25%		25%		25%
In my situation, I have only limited latitude in how major	12.5%		12.5%	37.5%	25%	12.5%	50%	50%

problems are solved.								
In my class, I have little control over how classroom space is used.		25%	12.5%	12.5%	25%	25%	62.5%	37.5%
The evaluation and assessment activities used in my class are selected by others.	12.5%	25%	25%	50%		12.5%	62.5%	12.5%
I select the teaching methods and strategies I use with my students	87.5%	25%	12.5%	50%		25%		
I have little say over the scheduling of use of time in my classroom.		12.5%	25%	37.5%	12.5%	25%	62.5%	25%

Appendix 3. Curriculum autonomy and General Teaching autonomy

Curriculum autonomy	General teaching autonomy
In my teaching, I use my own guidelines and procedures.	I am free to be creative in my teaching approach.
In my situation, I have little say over the content and skills that are selected for teaching	The selection of student-learning activities in my class is under my control.
My teaching focuses on those goals and objectives I select myself.	Standards of behaviour in my classroom are set primarily by me.
What I teach in my class is determined for the most part by myself.	My job does not allow for much discretion on my part.
The materials I use in my class are chosen for the most part by me	The scheduling of use of time in my classroom is under my control.
The content and skills taught in my class are those I select.	I seldom use alternative procedures in my teaching.
	I follow my own guidelines on instruction.
	In my situation, I have only limited latitude in how major problems are solved.
	In my class, I have little control over how classroom space is used.
	The evaluation and assessment activities used in my class are selected by others.
	I select the teaching methods and strategies I use with my students.
	I have little say over the scheduling of use of time in my classroom.

Appendix 4. Teacher Autonomy Scale 1(2)

Read each item and circle the number that corresponds with your agreement with the statement

(1) definitely true

(2) more or less true

(3) more or less false

(4) definitely false

1. I am free to be creative in my teaching approach.

1 2 3 4

2. The selection of student-learning activities in my class is under my control.

1 2 3 4

3. Standards of behavior in my classroom are set primarily by myself.

1 2 3 4

4. My job does not allow for much discretion on my part.

1 2 3 4

5. In my teaching, I use my own guidelines and procedures.

1 2 3 4

6. I have little say over the content and skills that are selected for teaching.

1 2 3 4

7. The scheduling of use of time in my classroom is under my control.

1 2 3 4

8. My teaching focuses on those goals and objectives I select myself.

1 2 3 4

Teacher Autonomy Scale 2(2)

9. I seldom use alternative procedures in my teaching.

1 2 3 4

10. I follow my own guidelines on instruction.

1 2 3 4

11. I have only limited latitude in how major problems are resolved.

1 2 3 4

12. What I teach in my class is determined for the most part by myself.

1 2 3 4

13. I have little control over how classroom space is used.

1 2 3 4

Teacher Autonomy Scale 2(2)

14. The materials I use in my class are chosen for the most part by myself.

1 2 3 4

15. The evaluation and assessment activities are selected others.

1 2 3 4

16. I select the teaching methods and strategies I use with my students.

1 2 3 4

17. I have little say over the scheduling of use of time in my classroom.

1 2 3 4

18. The content and skills taught in my class are those I select.

1 2 3 4

(Pearson & Hall, 1993)

Appendix 5. The Work Climate Questionnaire

Short version, 6 items, only items 1, 2, 4, 7, 10, 14.

This questionnaire contains items that are related to your experience with the manager who is your most immediate supervisor. Managers have different styles in dealing with employees, and we would like to know more about how you have felt about your encounters with your manager. Your responses are confidential.

Please be honest and candid.

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1 Strongly agree | 5 |
| 2 | 6 |
| 3 | 7 Strongly agree |
| 4 Neutral | |

I feel that my manager provides me choices and options.

I feel understood by my manager.

My manager conveyed confidence in my ability to do well at my job.

My manager encouraged me to ask questions.

My manager listens to how I would like to do things.

My manager tries to understand how I see things before suggesting a new way to do things.

Appendix 6. Coding process example using Miro

