



NATIONAL INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE AND THE FORMATION OF HISTORY TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL AGENCY: A CENTRAL ASIAN CASE

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***Abstract** Contemporary history teacher education increasingly emphasizes professional agency, understood as teachers' capacity for independent judgment, critical interpretation of knowledge, and responsible professional action. However, dominant models of teacher education often marginalize national and indigenous intellectual traditions, particularly in post-socialist and postcolonial contexts. This creates a theoretical gap regarding how national intellectual heritage may contribute to the formation of teachers' professional agency.*

Addressing this gap, the article explores the role of national intellectual heritage in shaping the professional agency of history teachers through a Central Asian case. Drawing on a conceptual and historical–pedagogical analysis, the study examines key educational ideas of the Jadid intellectual movement and analyzes their relevance to contemporary history teacher education. The analysis focuses on how Jadid educational thought promotes independent thinking, moral responsibility, civic engagement, and reflective professional positioning.

The findings suggest that national intellectual heritage can function as a significant conceptual resource for strengthening history teachers' professional agency by linking subject knowledge with ethical commitment and social responsibility. The article argues that integrating such heritage into teacher education frameworks offers an alternative to purely instrumental or technocratic models of professional preparation. By foregrounding a Central Asian perspective, the study



contributes to international debates on teacher agency, postcolonial knowledge production, and the role of indigenous intellectual traditions in education.

Keywords: professional agency, history teacher education, national intellectual heritage, Jadid educational thought, Central Asia.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary debates on history teacher education, increasing attention has been paid to the concept of **professional agency**, commonly understood as teachers' capacity for independent judgment, critical engagement with knowledge, and responsible professional action within institutional and social constraints (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015; Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Rather than functioning as passive transmitters of prescribed curricula, history teachers are expected to act as reflective professionals who actively interpret historical narratives, negotiate contested meanings, and address ethical and civic challenges in the classroom (Biesta, 2015; Barton & Levstik, 2004). Consequently, professional agency has emerged as a central analytical lens in research on teacher education.

Despite this growing emphasis, dominant models of teacher preparation remain largely **technocratic and competency-driven**, prioritizing standardized skills, performance indicators, and measurable outcomes (Ball, 2016; Cochran-Smith et al., 2018). Such approaches often marginalize the cultural, historical, and intellectual dimensions of teacher formation, reducing professional development to a set of externally defined competencies. In this context, national and indigenous intellectual traditions are frequently overlooked in international educational research, particularly in post-socialist and postcolonial settings (Connell, 2007; Santos, 2014). This marginalization has resulted in a limited theoretical understanding of how locally grounded intellectual heritage may contribute to the formation of teachers' professional agency.

This theoretical gap is especially evident in **history education**, where teaching is inseparable from questions of identity, values, and collective memory (Carretero, Berger, & Grever, 2017). While existing scholarship has explored teacher agency from sociological, psychological, and policy-oriented perspectives (Priestley



et al., 2015; Tao & Gao, 2017), comparatively little attention has been paid to the pedagogical role of national intellectual heritage as a conceptual resource for agency formation. As a result, teacher education research often reproduces Eurocentric assumptions about valid sources of educational knowledge and professional legitimacy (Connell, 2007).

Against this background, the present article explores the role of **national intellectual heritage** in shaping the professional agency of history teachers through a **Central Asian case**. Focusing on the educational ideas of the **Jadid intellectual movement**, the study examines how principles such as independent thinking, moral responsibility, civic engagement, and social reform through education may inform contemporary approaches to history teacher education. Rather than treating Jadid thought solely as a historical phenomenon, the article engages with it as an intellectual resource that can illuminate alternative pathways for developing professional agency.

By situating this analysis within broader international debates on teacher agency and postcolonial knowledge production (Connell, 2007; Santos, 2014), the article argues that integrating national intellectual heritage into teacher education frameworks can challenge narrowly instrumental models of professional preparation. In doing so, the study contributes to a more pluralistic and context-sensitive understanding of history teacher education, offering insights that extend beyond the Central Asian context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PROFESSIONAL AGENCY

In recent years, professional agency has emerged as a key concept in teacher education research, offering an alternative to deterministic or purely structural accounts of professional practice. Rather than viewing teachers as passive implementers of externally imposed policies, agency-oriented perspectives conceptualize teachers as active professionals who interpret, negotiate, and shape educational practices within specific social, cultural, and institutional contexts.

Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) propose an ecological model of teacher agency, which understands agency not as an individual trait but as an



achievement that emerges through the interaction of three temporal dimensions: the iterative (teachers' past experiences and professional biographies), the practical-evaluative (present judgments and actions), and the projective (orientations toward the future). From this perspective, professional agency is always contextually embedded and historically conditioned, rather than freely chosen or universally distributed.

Complementing this view, Eteläpelto et al. (2013) emphasize the relational nature of agency, highlighting how professional agency is shaped by power relations, professional identities, and opportunities for participation within institutional settings. Agency, in this sense, involves not only competence and autonomy but also ethical positioning and the capacity to resist or transform constraining structures. This understanding is particularly relevant for history teachers, whose work often involves negotiating contested narratives, moral judgments, and civic responsibilities.

Biesta (2015) further extends the concept of agency by linking it to questions of purpose and responsibility in education. From this normative perspective, professional agency is inseparable from ethical judgment and educational values. Teachers' agency is not simply about effectiveness or performance but about making informed and responsible decisions concerning what is educationally desirable. Together, these perspectives frame professional agency as a dynamic, context-sensitive, and value-laden process, providing a robust theoretical foundation for examining how intellectual and cultural resources contribute to teacher formation.

NATIONAL INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE AND JADID THOUGHT: A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

Within international educational research, knowledge production has long been shaped by Eurocentric epistemological frameworks, often marginalizing intellectual traditions from the Global South and postcolonial regions (Connell, 2007; Santos, 2014). Postcolonial scholarship challenges this imbalance by foregrounding the legitimacy of locally grounded intellectual traditions and their potential contributions to global theoretical debates. From this perspective, national



intellectual heritage can be understood as a repository of ideas, values, and pedagogical visions that have historically shaped educational thought and practice within specific cultural contexts.

In Central Asia, the Jadid intellectual movement represents a significant strand of national intellectual heritage. Emerging in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jadid thinkers such as Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy, Abdulla Avloni, Abdurauf Fitrat, and Munavvarqori Abdurashidkhanov articulated a reformist educational vision that combined indigenous cultural values with critical engagement with modern knowledge. Central to Jadid educational thought were principles of independent thinking, moral responsibility, social reform through education, and the cultivation of active, critically minded citizens.

Viewed through a postcolonial lens, Jadid thought can be interpreted not merely as a historical phenomenon but as an alternative epistemological resource that challenges dominant, technocratic models of teacher education. Rather than positioning teachers as transmitters of standardized knowledge, Jadid pedagogy emphasized education as a transformative and ethically grounded practice. This orientation aligns closely with contemporary conceptions of professional agency, particularly in its emphasis on reflective judgment, civic engagement, and moral accountability.

By engaging Jadid intellectual heritage as a conceptual resource, this study resists the tendency to treat non-Western educational traditions as peripheral or supplementary. Instead, it situates Jadid thought within broader international debates on teacher agency and professional formation, arguing that national intellectual heritage can actively inform theoretical understandings of agency rather than merely illustrating them.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: CONCEPTUAL–HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

The study adopts a conceptual–historical analytical approach, appropriate for exploring the theoretical relationships between professional agency and national intellectual heritage. Rather than generating new empirical data, the research focuses



on the critical examination and reinterpretation of existing theoretical frameworks and historical-pedagogical sources.

The analysis proceeds in two interrelated stages. First, key concepts of professional agency are systematically examined through a close reading of foundational theoretical literature, particularly the works of Priestley, Biesta, and Eteläpelto. This stage establishes the analytical criteria used to identify dimensions of agency relevant to teacher education, including independence of judgment, ethical responsibility, and professional identity formation.

Second, selected texts and pedagogical writings of Jadid thinkers are analyzed as historical-intellectual sources. These materials are examined not for their descriptive historical value alone but for their underlying educational assumptions and normative orientations. Through a comparative conceptual analysis, the study identifies points of convergence between Jadid educational ideas and contemporary theories of professional agency.

This methodological approach allows for a theoretically informed reinterpretation of historical intellectual heritage without reducing it to anecdotal evidence or purely contextual description. At the same time, the study acknowledges its limitations, particularly the absence of empirical data on current teacher practices. The aim is not to generalize empirically but to contribute conceptually by demonstrating how national intellectual heritage can function as a meaningful resource in theorizing the formation of history teachers' professional agency.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Mapping Jadid Educational Thought onto Professional Agency

This section analyzes how key principles of Jadid educational thought can be conceptually mapped onto contemporary theories of history teachers' professional agency. Rather than treating Jadid ideas as historically bounded or culturally specific, the analysis positions them as intellectual resources that resonate with and enrich current agency-oriented frameworks in teacher education.

Independent Thinking and Professional Judgment



A central element of Jadid pedagogy is the emphasis on independent thinking (*mustaqil fikrlash*) as a foundation of education. Jadid thinkers consistently criticized rote learning and passive knowledge transmission, advocating instead for critical reasoning and intellectual autonomy. When viewed through the lens of professional agency, this emphasis aligns closely with Priestley et al.'s (2015) understanding of agency as teachers' capacity for practical–evaluative judgment in complex situations. For history teachers, whose work involves interpreting contested narratives and making pedagogical decisions under curricular and political constraints, independent thinking functions as a core dimension of agency rather than a peripheral skill. More specifically, Jadid thinkers' critique of rote learning and their emphasis on independent reasoning can be interpreted as addressing the *iterational* and *practical–evaluative* dimensions of professional agency. By encouraging teachers to draw critically on prior intellectual traditions while exercising judgment in present pedagogical situations, Jadid educational thought resonates with Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological model of agency. In this sense, independent thinking functions not merely as a cognitive skill but as a condition for teachers' capacity to act agentially within historically and institutionally shaped contexts.

Moral Responsibility and Ethical Positioning

Jadid educational thought places strong emphasis on moral responsibility and ethical self-awareness, framing education as a means of personal and societal transformation. This orientation parallels Biesta's (2015) argument that professional agency cannot be reduced to effectiveness or technical competence but must be understood in relation to educational purpose and ethical responsibility. From this perspective, Jadid ideas contribute to an expanded conception of agency that foregrounds teachers' moral positioning and civic accountability. For history teachers, this dimension is particularly salient, as historical interpretation inevitably involves ethical judgments about the past and its relevance to the present. From the perspective of professional agency, the Jadid emphasis on moral responsibility can be understood as contributing to the *normative* dimension of agency highlighted by Biesta (2015). Jadid pedagogy frames teaching as an ethically consequential practice,



thereby positioning teachers as responsible decision-makers rather than neutral transmitters of knowledge. This ethical orientation strengthens professional agency by linking pedagogical action to questions of purpose, responsibility, and educational judgment.

Civic Engagement and Professional Identity

Another key aspect of Jadid pedagogy is the integration of education with civic engagement and social reform. Jadid thinkers viewed teachers not merely as instructors but as active social actors responsible for fostering public consciousness and national development. This view resonates with Eteläpelto et al.'s (2013) emphasis on agency as relational and identity-based, shaped through participation in social and professional communities. In this sense, Jadid thought supports a conception of history teachers' professional identity that extends beyond classroom instruction to include broader social and civic roles. By linking teaching to social responsibility and collective transformation, Jadid educational ideas reinforce the understanding of professional agency as embedded in social relations rather than confined to individual autonomy.

Challenging Technocratic Models of Teacher Education

When mapped onto contemporary agency frameworks, Jadid educational ideas collectively challenge technocratic and instrumental models of teacher education. Rather than positioning teachers as implementers of externally defined standards, Jadid pedagogy conceptualizes teaching as an intellectually and ethically grounded profession.

This alignment suggests that national intellectual heritage can function not only as contextual background but as a conceptual counterpoint to dominant global discourses that prioritize standardization and accountability over professional judgment and ethical agency.

Taken together, this analysis demonstrates that Jadid educational thought offers a coherent set of principles—independent thinking, moral responsibility, and civic engagement—that correspond closely with contemporary theoretical understandings of professional agency. The Central Asian case thus illustrates how



national intellectual heritage can contribute substantively to international debates on teacher agency, rather than merely supplementing them.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HISTORY TEACHER EDUCATION

The conceptual alignment between Jadid educational thought and contemporary theories of professional agency has several important implications for history teacher education.

First, teacher education curricula can move beyond instrumental approaches by integrating national intellectual heritage as a theoretical and reflective resource rather than merely as historical content. Engaging future history teachers with Jadid ideas can support the development of independent professional judgment and critical historical thinking, both of which are central to agency-oriented teacher education.

Second, the findings suggest that professional agency should be addressed not only through methodological training but also through the ethical and civic dimensions of teacher formation. Incorporating discussions of moral responsibility, social commitment, and the public role of teachers—central themes in Jadid pedagogy—can strengthen history teachers' capacity to navigate contested historical narratives and societal expectations.

Third, from an institutional perspective, teacher education programs may benefit from adopting a more pluralistic epistemological stance that recognizes national intellectual heritage as a legitimate source of pedagogical knowledge. Such an approach challenges Eurocentric assumptions about teacher professionalism and contributes to more context-sensitive models of professional preparation.

Finally, the Central Asian case highlights the potential of postcolonial and indigenous intellectual traditions to inform global debates on teacher agency. Rather than positioning such traditions as exceptional or peripheral, history teacher education can draw on them to rethink foundational assumptions about what it means to be an active, responsible, and professionally autonomous teacher.

At the policy level, this perspective suggests that teacher education standards and accreditation frameworks should move beyond narrowly defined competency-based models to explicitly recognize professional judgment, ethical responsibility,



and engagement with national intellectual heritage as core dimensions of history teacher professionalism. In practical terms, accreditation and quality assurance frameworks could incorporate criteria that assess teachers' capacity for ethical decision-making and critical engagement with contested narratives and collective memory. Instead of relying solely on measurable outcomes, such standards would acknowledge candidates' ability to interpret national intellectual heritage and articulate its relevance for contemporary educational practice.

CONCLUSION

This article set out to examine how national intellectual heritage can contribute to the formation of history teachers' professional agency, drawing on a Central Asian case grounded in Jadid educational thought. By bringing together contemporary theories of professional agency and postcolonial perspectives on knowledge production, the study addressed a theoretical gap in teacher education research concerning the role of locally grounded intellectual traditions.

The analysis demonstrated that key principles of Jadid pedagogy— independent thinking, moral responsibility, and civic engagement—align closely with central dimensions of professional agency as conceptualized by Priestley, Biesta, and Eteläpelto. Rather than functioning as historically bounded ideas, these principles offer enduring conceptual resources for understanding how teachers develop professional judgment, ethical positioning, and socially engaged identities. In this sense, Jadid intellectual heritage contributes not merely as contextual background but as a meaningful theoretical interlocutor in international debates on teacher agency.

The findings also underscore the limitations of narrowly technocratic models of teacher education that prioritize standardized competencies over professional judgment and ethical responsibility. By integrating national intellectual heritage into agency-oriented frameworks, history teacher education can adopt more pluralistic and context-sensitive approaches to professional formation. The Central Asian case illustrates how non-Western intellectual traditions can challenge Eurocentric assumptions and enrich global understandings of teacher professionalism.



This study is primarily conceptual in nature and does not claim empirical generalizability. Future research could build on this framework through empirical studies examining how engagement with national intellectual heritage influences history teachers' agency in practice. Comparative research across different cultural contexts may further illuminate the conditions under which intellectual heritage becomes a productive resource for teacher education.

In conclusion, the article argues that recognizing national intellectual heritage as an active component of teacher education theory opens new pathways for conceptualizing professional agency. Such an approach not only strengthens the preparation of history teachers but also contributes to more inclusive and dialogical forms of educational research.

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