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The relationship between teacher autonomy and teacher's sense of self-efficacy

Hadi Farjami, Department of English Language and Literature, Semnan University, Semnan 3514948681, Iran.
Ehsan Kazemi*, Payame Noor University, No. 82 Niyayesh Alley, Bistmertri Vahdat Street, Semnan 3514948681, Iran.

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the relationship between teacher autonomy and teacher's sense of self-efficacy, the two self-perceived constructs which turn to be the major concerns of current educational practitioners. A total number of 100 EFL teachers (male and female), who taught in English institutes, were participated voluntarily. The researchers employed a couple of self-reported questionnaires, Teacher Autonomy Scale and Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale. The two questionnaires were administered to teachers. After gathering the raw data from the questionnaires, the SPSS software was employed to have some statistical and interpretable data. The obtained correlation results indicated that there was a negative reversed relationship between the two variables; in other words, more teacher autonomy leads to a lower level of self-efficacy. The presumption is that when you are more autonomous in your teaching practice, you will feel more efficient. The results of this study are contrary to this presumption.

Keywords: EFL teachers, teacher autonomy, teacher's sense of self-efficacy.

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Ehsan, Kazemi,** Payame Noor University, No. 82 Niyayesh Alley, Bistmertri Vahdat Street, Semnan 3514948681, Iran. *E-mail address*: ehsan.kazemi2013@yahoo.com / Tel.:+98-91-93-741-089

1. Introduction

One may wonder how this sense of self-efficacy can contribute to a good education. In order to shed more light on this issue, we need to review the related literature of the field. Megan Tschannen-Moran (1956) and Anita Woolfolk Hoy (1947) operationalised teachers' sense of control over student outcomes in the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Instead of considering efficacy as an index for general sense of confidence, these two researchers defined teacher efficacy as teachers' perceptions of their resources and strategies for bringing about student behavioural and instructional outcomes.

The TSES explores 'How much can you do to help your students think critically?' instead of 'How much can you help your students think critically?'. Such a sharp distinction demonstrates a critical point in teacher efficacy research.

(Bandura, 1986, p. 391) defined self-efficacy like this: 'people's judgments of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances' (Jia, Eslami & Burlbaw, 2006) underpinned the importance of knowing about teachers' perceptions and beliefs since teachers are actual practitioners of educational principles and theories.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Teacher's sense of self-efficacy

The idea of teacher efficacy originates from studies carried out by the Rand Foundation, where the report shows a positive relationship between teacher's sense of self-efficacy and students achievements (Denham & Michael, 1981). Majority of research in the realm of teacher efficacy in both EFL and ESL settings are available with teacher efficacy as independent variable, and they mostly focus on student achievement as the most important realisation of teacher effectiveness. Such relation is documented by lots of research (Anderson, Greene & Loewen, 1988; Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008; Brownell & Pajares, 1999; Good & Brophy, 2003; Moore & Esselman, 1992). There are some indications in the literature that teacher efficacy is resistant to change (Ohmart, 1992) and some indications on the other hand showing that that the teacher efficacy is prone to change (Housego, 1990). As Henson's (2001) utters more recent evidence which shows that teacher efficacy is malleable, but that change will occur only by engaging in professional development opportunities.

2.2. Teacher autonomy

Research into teacher autonomy in ESL pedagogy has not had a long history. One of the pioneers in the field was Little (1995) who investigated the issue. Sacks and Eisenstein (1976, p. 7) came up with a definition of teacher autonomy from the view of a teacher who defines it in such a way 'Autonomy for me is believing in my own ability to do what I want to do, often taking productive, creative steps toward fulfilling my own goals. Autonomy for me is a personal thing, an internal thing, feeling that I have power'. Although Lortie (1969) considers a distinction between power and autonomy, where the former relates to the ability to establish one's own goals and the latter is the freedom to choose among selected goals. Throughout the literature you can notice that the idea of teacher autonomy has undergone considerable change and this change continues to evolve Willner (1990). Eye and Netzer (1965) believe that if a supervisor monitors the teachers in the class so strictly and gives all directions, teacher's creativity will be at stake. A sort of autonomy must be granted to teachers if you expect creativity from teachers work.

In the more recent literature, teacher freedom has attracted more attention as component of teacher autonomy. Teachers' attempts to promote autonomy are limited to the factors which are subject to control (Benson, 2000; McCasland & Poole, 2002; Vieira, 2003). Benson (2000) explains that

a self-critical approach to the ways in which teachers can mediate these limits is very important to teacher autonomy. In more recent literature related to teacher autonomy, there has been an attempt to strike a balance between professional attributes and teacher autonomy which is understood as the outcome of self-directed professional development (Barfield et al., 2002; Lamb, 2000; Mackenzie, 2002; McGrath, 2000). Some research in this field also includes some interesting accounts of teacher education initiatives (Hacker & Barkhuizen, 2007; Lamb, 2000; McGrath, 2000; Schalkwijk, van Esch, Elsen & Setz, 2002; Thavenius, 1999; van Esch, Schalkwijk, Elsen & Setz, 1999; Vieira, 2003; Vieira, Paiva, Marques & Fernandes, 2007). So far the idea of teacher autonomy has not been widely discussed and one who wishes to research in this field will find a bulkier literature on learner autonomy rather than the teacher autonomy.

2.3. Relation between teachers' efficacy and other factors

Teacher efficacy has been related to many individual and contextual factors, student outcomes and teacher behaviours; however, Guskey (1988) and Ghaith and Yaghi's (1997) investigated other factors, how teachers' sense of self-efficacy affects their attitude toward implementing instructional innovations. The findings indicate that teachers with a higher sense of teaching efficacy found instructional innovative practices in line with their present teaching methods, and also less difficult to implement. Chacon (2005) investigated the self-perceived efficacy of 100 EFL teachers in Venezuela and how it relates to English proficiency. He found that teacher efficacy proved to be positively correlated with the English proficiency. Goker (2006) analysed the effect of peer coaching on self-efficacy of EFL pre-service teachers in Cyprus. Goker found an improvement in teacher efficacy, thanks to peer coaching. Other studies such as Sia (1992) demonstrate that experiential activities and other mastery experiences appeared to have a great effect on teachers' self-efficacy.

In this research, the researcher investigated any relationship between teacher autonomy and teacher's sense of self-efficacy. Scrutinising the literature related to the field, one can understand that there has been a big load of research, which deals with the notion of self-efficacy in general and teacher's sense of self-efficacy in particular. One can also find some research on the construct of teacher autonomy, its definition and its connection with other variables. However, there is not any research which clearly addresses the relationship between these two constructs.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

In order to find any relationship between teacher's self-efficacy and teacher autonomy, the two questionnaires were administered to 100 EFL teachers. All English language teachers of institutes in cities of Tehran, Shahrood and Semnan were the targeted population; but the researchers applied the principle of random selection to have a sample of 100 teachers, from different institutes to answer the questionnaires, out of which 66 were female and 34 were male teachers.

3.2. Instruments

In order to carry out this study, two self-reported questionnaires and a checklist were used. The researchers employed two questionnaires: the Teacher Autonomy Scale (TAS) and Teacher Sense of Self Efficacy Scale (TSSES).

3.2.1. Teacher Autonomy Scale

As previously mentioned, teacher autonomy is one of the main variables in this study, so the researcher used a standard autonomy scale; TAS includes 18 questions and covers two factors: curriculum autonomy and general teaching autonomy. A previous study of the TAS by Pearson and

Hall (1993) which utilised exploratory factor analysis yielded this instrument, which had a good internal consistency reliability.

The TAS measures the individual degree of teacher autonomy. This measure was selected because its content, reliability and validity proved a strong improvement over the previous measures which assess the same construct. The instrument consists of 18 Likert-type items, seven of which are negatively worded and had to be reversed in scoring. The scoring ranges from 1 (definitely true) to 4 (definitely false).

3.2.2. Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale

The other questionnaire is the TSES designed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001). The TSES, also called the Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale, encompasses two versions: long form (including 24 items) and short form (including 12 items). The long form was utilised in the present study. Every item was measured on a 9-point scale anchored with the notations: 'nothing, very little, some influence, quite a bit and a great deal'. This scale seeks to capture the multi-faceted nature of teachers' efficacy beliefs in a concise manner without becoming too specific or too general.

3.2.3. Check list

The researchers also used a checklist to randomly observe 10 classes to ensure that the teachers did not self-flatter while answering the questionnaires. The topics included in the checklist were mainly derived from the questions in teachers' self-efficacy scale.

3.3. Procedure

The data collection for this research initiated in April 2014 when the researcher showed up in different English institutes in Semnan and handed out the TAS and teacher self-efficacy scale questionnaires to teachers, who were currently working there. Then the researchers travelled to cities of Shahroud and Tehran in person to have access to all participants in the targeted population. All the 100 questionnaires were returned to the researcher as result of much attempt to collect them back. After gathering the raw data from the questionnaires, the main body of descriptive and inferential calculations was done using SPSS software (version 16). As for the descriptive calculations, answers to items of the two administered questionnaires were classified in terms of mean and standard deviations. In order to find the relationship between the two variables, TSSE and teacher autonomy, Pearson's product correlation was applied.

As previously noted, some of the participants had to undergo a random monitoring sessions. So the researcher developed a self-made check list which was inspired by and derived from the questions in teacher efficacy scale, then, he attended 10 classes based on random selection in 1 week intervals to figure out how truthful the teachers were in responding the questionnaire and to see if they had self-flattered or not. When the researcher showed up in the institutes to meet teachers, he first introduced the goals and the nature of the study and what he was looking for. Then, he explained to them that the participation in the research was not obligatory and that this was not a concocted pre-planned survey by institute authorities to evaluate them in terms of their efficacy in the classroom. Since some teachers might not feel secure to answer these questions, the researcher repeatedly emphasised that the result of the study would be used only for research purposes. They were told that there was no need to write their names and they were also assured of the anonymity, privacy and the confidentiality of the recorded data. Regarding the accuracy of the information presented, the researcher tried his best to keep the accuracy of the included information in terms of names, dates and resources.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics of teacher autonomy

According to Table 1, the participants in this study reported a moderate level of teacher autonomy (Mean = 2.5439). The low standard deviation in this study indicates that the data is reliable, they are clustered around the mean, and we have a homogeneous sample.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of teacher's marks in TAS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
TAS	100	1.56	3.44	2.5439	0.28386

4.2. Descriptive statistics for teacher sense of self-efficacy

Table 2 indicates that the participating teachers in this study enjoy a high level of self-efficacy (Mean = 7.04) and the fact that the standard deviation is low is, again, endorsing the reliability of the data and the homogeneity of the sample.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of scores in TSSES

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
TSES	100	4.50	8.62	7.04	0.90803

4.3. Inferential results

In order to investigate the relationship between teacher autonomy and teachers' sense of self-efficacy, the researchers employed Pearson Product-Moment correlation. The result of the test is as follow:

According to Table 3, it can be seen that there is a strong meaningful linear relationship between the two variables at significance level of 0.05 (the amount of probability 0.014 is smaller than significance level of 0.05 which means the relation is meaningful). The amount of correlation is (–0.209) which indicates that there is a negative reversed relationship between the two variables.

Table 3. Pearson product correlation between teacher autonomy and teachers' sense of self-efficacy

Correlations				
			TAS	TSES (long form) teacher beliefs
Pearson correlation	TAS	Correlation coefficient	1.000	–0.209
		Sig. (two-tailed)		0.014
		N	100	100
	TSES (long form) teacher beliefs	Correlation coefficient	–0.209	1.000
		Sig. (two-tailed)	0.014	
		N	100	100

5. Discussion

As a large number of studies on different aspects of self-efficacy were reviewed, it turned out that they mostly aimed to evaluate the relationship with different factors and they were mainly concerned with correlational investigations which merely investigate the type and the degree of relationship.

It is noticeable that although majority of the studies consider it as an independent variable, the researcher considers teacher efficacy as a dependent variable that other factors like teacher autonomy can affect it. Most studies dealing with the efficacy of teachers have been particularly investigating it in terms of student achievement outcomes which seem to be the most important manifestation of teacher effectiveness.

This study can also be given a credit for shedding more light on the question that whether teacher efficacy is fixed (resistant to change) or not. There are some indications in the literature that teacher efficacy is fixed and resistant to change. The result of this study is in line with the second category which supports that teacher efficacy is likely to change if the level of teacher autonomy changes.

6. Conclusion

The core purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between teacher autonomy and teacher's sense of self-efficacy. The obtained results indicated that there was a negative reversed relationship between two variables.

The presumption is that when a teacher has autonomy in the classroom and he can do his teaching practice as he wishes without being regulated by supervisors, he feels that his teaching practice is more efficient and the desired outcome is maintained. On the contrary to this common belief, the result of this study shows something different; if teacher autonomy increases, teachers will experience lower sense of self-efficacy. The fruit of my research should be tasted by those teachers who think they are limited by the educational rules and regulations of the institutes, though it may taste bitter to them. They should know that the guidelines and prescribed rules of teaching given to them by the institutes could help them to have a better feeling of efficacy.

Officials and supervisors of educational institutes believe that if they observe teachers' classes and set teaching standard for them, both teachers and students will get better results. The results of this study, to some extent, support this notion because as this research demonstrates, those teachers who had more autonomy experienced a lower level of self-efficacy.

7. Recommendations

As it was mentioned previously, this study was conducted with the participation of 100 EFL teachers from three cities. Further research can be conducted with a more number of EFL teachers from more educational setting to further examine the generalisability of the results. Further research should be conducted to broaden the scope of the present study. Follow-up research can dig deeper and study the effect of demographic variables like age, gender, teaching experience and university degree of teachers. It is also recommended to replicate the same research in other settings to figure out if the same outcome is obtained.

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Appendix A

Teacher Autonomy Scale

Instructions: Please fill in the blank or mark your choice as appropriate.

	Definitely true	**More or less true**	**More or less false**	**Definitely false**
1. I am free to be creative in my teaching approach				
2. The selection of student-learning activities in my class is under my control				
3. Standards of behaviour in my classroom are set primarily by myself				
4. My job does not allow for much discretion on my part				
5. In my teaching, I use my own guidelines and procedures				
6. I have little say over the content and skills that are selected for teaching				
7. The scheduling of use of time in my classroom is under my control				
8. My teaching focuses on those goals and objectives I select myself				
9. I seldom use alternative procedures in my teaching.				
10. I follow my own guidelines on instruction.				
11. I have only limited latitude in how major problems are resolved				
12. What I teach in my class is determined, for the most part, by myself.				
13. I have little control over how classroom space is used				

14. The materials I use in my class are chosen, for the most part, by myself
15. The evaluation and assessment activities are selected by others
16. I select the teaching methods and strategies I use with my students
17. I have little say over the scheduling of use of time in my classroom
18. The content and skills taught in my class are those I select

Appendix B

Teacher's Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale (long form)

Directions: This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below. Your answers are confidential.	Nothing very little some influence quite a bit a great deal
How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How much can you do to help your students think critically?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How much can you do to control disruptive behaviour in the classroom?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behaviour?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How much can you do to help your student's value learning?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How much can you do to foster student creativity?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)

How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How well can you keep a few problem students form ruining an entire lesson?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation for example when students are confused?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How well can you respond to defiant students?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?	(1)(2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)