The Role of Self-Efficacy and Autonomy in Iranian EFL Teachers' Engagement

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Abstract: There has been growing interest in the role of teachers in teacher education programs. Hence, this study was conducted to examine the role of teacher efficacy and autonomy in teachers’ engagement. For this purpose, 80 EFL teachers were sampled from an English language institution in Tehran to answer three questionnaires, teacher self-efficacy scale (TSES), teacher autonomy inventory (TAI), and the Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES). The results of data analysis revealed that both teacher efficacy and autonomy were positively associated with teachers’ engagement. Therefore, it could be concluded that teacher self-efficacy and autonomy positively predicted engagement. And more specifically, among the teacher efficacy and autonomy, teacher autonomy with a higher value predicted more changes in teachers’ engagement. The present study sheds light opportunities to improve teacher development that impact on not only teachers’ classroom practices but also students’ achievements.

Index Terms: Teacher autonomy, teacher efficacy, teacher engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, post-method and critical pedagogy have paid more attention to teachers. Kumaravadivelu (2001) stressed on empowering teachers “to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize”. And also Pennycook (1989) concerned teachers as “transformative intellectuals”. Therefore, many studies have been carried out on the teacher’s characteristics. It has commonly been mentioned that teacher development can impact not only teachers’ classroom practices but also students’ achievement. Teacher efficacy, teacher autonomy, and teacher engagement can be central tenet of teacher development.

Broadly speaking, self-efficacy refers to people’s beliefs about their capacity to perform at a given level of achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Initially, Bandura (1977) proposed that these beliefs effect how much effort people make, how long they continue in the face of problems, how much they tolerate failures, and how much stress they experience in coping with demanding situations.

According to social cognitive theory, self-efficacy impacts both one’s cognition and emotion (Pajares, 1997). Bandura (2006) has consistently claimed that efficacy can affect how people perceive opportunities and obstacles in the environment and affect choices, effort, and endurance when working with difficult tasks. In this respect, teacher efficacy can be defined as teachers’ beliefs about their ability to influence student’s achievements (Wheatley, 2005). Moreover, Bandura (1986) proposed that teachers’ efficacy affect their general orientation toward their educational process and their specific instructional activities. Teachers with low efficacy are associated with strict regulations and rules. On the other hand, teachers with
high efficacy seem to be more open to new ideas and are more willing to apply new methods (Berman et al. 1977; Guskey 1988). For this reason, teacher efficacy is one of the effective teachers' characteristics (Henson, 2001). In some researches were revealed that self-efficacy can be positively related to teacher engagement and job satisfaction, and negatively related to burnout (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012).

Furthermore, many studies were extensively considered the role of autonomy in teacher development. It is assumed that autonomy, a fundamental universal psychological need, is vital for motivation. (Deci & Ryan, 2000). People need to feel autonomous to promote their intrinsic motivation (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Thereby, teacher autonomy deals with teachers' feelings of controlling themselves and their work environments (Pearson & Hall, 1993; Pearson & Moomwa, 2006).

In fact, autonomy has three different dimensions. First, the ability for self-directed professional action, teacher is autonomous in the way of having a sense of personal responsibility for teaching, and reflecting on the teaching process' (Little 1995). Second, the ability for self-directed professional development, in the way teacher is autonomous and aware of why, when, where and how pedagogical skills can be acquired in the self-conscious awareness of teaching practice. (Tort-Moloney, 1997). And the third dimension is the freedom from control by others. Most teacher education programs have focused on autonomy as vital construct due to teachers must be able to cope immediately and adequately with unexpected situations.

On the other hand, engagement concerns to positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind which including three aspects of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigor refers to high levels of energy to invest in one's work, while dedication deals with a sense of significance, enthusiasm, pride and inspiration. Absorption is defined as being completely and willingly engrossed in one's work.

Some studies have shown that engagement is positively related to both individual classroom performance as well as teachers' organizational commitment (Bakker & Bal, 2010; González-Romá & Bakker, 2001).

To sum up, autonomy does not only provide freedom to choose instructional practices, but also makes the teacher responsible for both the practices and the results. Consequently, it provides an opportunity to improve teachers' engagement. Also, self-efficacy deals with teacher's belief about their ability which affects how to engage with teaching situations. As the result, it can be related to teacher engagement. Hence, the following research questions were addressed in the present study.

1. To what extend can self-efficacy and autonomy predict changes in Iranian EFL teachers' engagement?
2. Which one, self-efficacy or autonomy, is the better predictor of teacher's engagement?

2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Teacher Efficacy

For the first time, Self-efficacy was proposed by Bandura (1977) in social cognitive theory which refers to “beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required managing prospective situations”. Tschanne-Moran and Hoy (2001) assumed that self-efficacy does not exactly reflect people's actual ability; however, it shows their perceptions of it. Therefore, they may underestimate or overestimate their real abilities.

There are four sources in shaping self-efficacy. The first one is enactive or mastery experience. It deals with people's success or failure in doing a task. "Successes build a robust belief in one's personal efficacy as well failures undermine it, especially if failures occur before a sense of efficacy is firmly established" (Bandura, 1998). The second source of efficacy is named vicarious experience, which concerning with the fact that most people try to choose models for themselves from among other persons. In this respect, the successes of the selected model enhance individuals' sense of efficacy, especially when there are a lot of similarities between the individual and the chosen model. Social persuasion, as the third source of efficacy, refers to the verbal encouragement people receive from others. If the person who provides verbal persuasion is
dependable, individuals' self-efficacy tends to increase. The last source of efficacy is physiological and emotional states constitute and pertain to people's physical and affective condition during task completion. Namely, relaxation signals self-assurance then increase self-efficacy.

Many studies have tended to show that the context in which teachers work, involving the colleagues and the students' characteristics, can affect their self-efficacy beliefs to a great extent. Moreover, researches were revealed that variables such as gender, age, experience, and academic degree can differ in the perception of self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

2.2 Teacher Autonomy

Teacher autonomy was proposed into the language teaching by Allwright and Bailey (1991) and later developed by Little (1995). Teacher autonomy can be defined as a generalized "right to freedom from control" (Benson, 2000), to teachers' capacity to engage in self-directed teaching (Little, 1995), and to teacher's autonomy as learners (Smith, 2000). Therefore, the variety of teacher autonomy definitions reflects that while for one teacher may perceive autonomy as a means to gain freedom from supervision, another teacher may perceive it as the freedom to develop collegial relationships and accomplish tasks that extend beyond classrooms.

Littlewood (1999) viewed autonomy from two different aspects. First, the capacity of independent decision making, which involves having abilities and skills for action and then the willingness, which includes motivation and confidence to carry out choices. It is worth nothing, the promotion of learner autonomy is one of the responsibilities of the autonomous teacher (McGrath 2000).

Huang (2007) defined teacher autonomy as "teachers' willingness, capacity and freedom to take control of their own teaching and learning". The three terms "willingness", "capacity", and "freedom" take special attentions. They linked to the social-motivational, technical-psychological, and critical-political dimensions of teacher autonomy. Many researchers have defined teacher autonomy from different perspectives; it may be because teacher autonomy in different social and cultural contexts is employed by different researchers for different purposes.

2.3 Teachers Engagement

Engagement can be characterized as persistence, cognitive effort, excitement and interest. In this extent, teacher engagement needs the teacher be highly enthusiastic, curious, and interested. In teacher education, teacher's engagement plays a vital role because it may stimulate student engagement and thus serve to facilitate learning (Bakker& Bal, 2010).

According to Col framework, six aspects of teacher engagement can be existed. However, it depends on the context and environment. The first part of teacher engagement is designing and organizing, which include creating a mix of individual and group learning activities and establishing a timeline (Anderson et al., 2001). The second is facilitating discourse. The CoI framework directs teachers to facilitate discourse with and among students (Anderson et al., 2001). Instructing is the third element of teacher engagement. Teachers must provide direct instruction when necessary (Anderson et al., 2001). Nurturing is an essential element of teacher engagement, specified by Picciano, Seaman and Allen (2010) in the statement that teachers "are incredibly important socializing agents who nurture and provide social and emotional support". The next element, motivating, is affirmed by the CoI framework as important in facilitating discourse (Anderson et al., 2001). Monitoring is the last element of teacher engagement.

Engaged teachers are likely not only to work harder to make classroom activities meaningful, but also to introduce new ways of learning (Newmann, 1989). Moreover, Dworkin (1987) shows that the students of teachers who show lower solidarity and work satisfaction means less engagement showed lower achievements.
3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

To cover the purpose of the current study, 80 EFL teachers were sampled from an English language institution in Tehran. The majority of the teachers were females with at least five years of experiences with different levels of proficiency from elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate to advanced levels. Among them, sixty nine (69%) teachers held a bachelor degree and thirty nine (38 %) reported holding master degree in English-related majors.

3.2 The Instruments

To measure variables of this study three questionnaires were used; teacher self-efficacy scale (TSES), teacher autonomy inventory (TAI), and the Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES). In the following sections, these instruments will be explained.

3.2.1. Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES)

Teacher self-efficacy scale (TSES) was developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001). It consists of three subcomponents: student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. The first part, student engagement, measures how much teachers believe in their ability to engage the learners in class activities. Efficacy for instructional strategies is related to teachers’ belief in effectiveness of their strategies used in the classroom. Efficacy for classroom management is deal with teachers’ belief in their ability to manage the class in the best way. Indeed, internal consistency reliability of TSES was estimated .94 (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) and its validity has been proved in different contexts (Klassen et al., 2009).

3.2.2. Teacher Autonomy Inventory (TAI)

Teacher Autonomy Inventory (TAI) was constructed by Pearson & Moomaw (2005) which is the verified version of the previous 2-factor structure of the Teaching Autonomy Scale (TAS) from Pearson & Hall (1993). It is based on a two factor model consisting of general teaching autonomy and curriculum autonomy that the first part, general teaching autonomy is related to classroom standards of conduct as well as personal job discretion and curriculum autonomy is deal with the selection of activities, materials, instructional planning, and sequencing. Moreover, internal consistency reliability of the autonomy scale of was estimated to be .80 by Pearson and Hall (2005) and its external validity was supported by Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2009).

3.2.3. Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)

UWES refers to the nine-item short version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The scale includes items measuring three correlated dimensions of work engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor is characterized by investing high energy and mental strength in the work, whereas dedication refers to experiencing enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption deals with to being concentrated and involved in one's own work. The internal consistency reliability of the scale was .91 and also its external validity has been supported (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

3.3 Procedure

To assess reliable information, the participants were informed the purpose and significance of the study. Then three questionnaires were distributed in three separate days during a semester. Teacher self-efficacy scale (TSES) in the first day
of semester, teacher autonomy inventory (TAI) in the middle of the semester, and the Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES) in the last day of the semester were distributed. Finally, the collecting scores through three questionnaires were fed in to SPSS software, version 20.

4. RESULTS

4.1. First Research Question: To what Extent can Self-efficacy and Autonomy Predict Changes in Iranian EFL Teachers’ Engagement?

First of all, the mean score and standard deviation of the three variables were calculated. Then to examine the significant relation, Pearson correlation coefficients was applied. Finally, in order to find out to what extent self-efficacy and teacher autonomy might have a predictive power in predicting teachers’ engagement, a regression analysis was run.

| Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of the Teacher Efficacy, Autonomy, and Engagement |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                             | Mean            | Std. Deviation  | N               |
| Teacher Efficacy            | 93.8375         | 2.91849         | 80              |
| Teacher Autonomy            | 49.6250         | 4.93085         | 80              |
| Teacher Engagement          | 85.5250         | 5.55747         | 80              |

As indicated in Table 1, the mean score and standard deviation of teacher efficacy, autonomy and engagement are 93.83 (SD = 2.91), 49.62 (SD = 4.93), and 85.52 (SD = 5.55) respectively. Also, teacher efficacy has the highest mean score among the other two variables.

| Table 4.2 Pearson Correlation for the Teacher Efficacy, Autonomy, and Engagement |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                             | Engagement      | Autonomy        | Efficacy        |
| Pearson Correlation         |                 |                 |                 |
| Engageement                 | 1.000           | .276            | .069            |
| Autonomy                    | .276            | 1.000           | .216            |
| Efficacy                    | .069            | .216            | 1.000           |
| Sig. (1-tailed)             |                 |                 |                 |
| Engageement                 | .                | .007            | .271            |
| Autonomy                    | .007            | .                | .027            |
| Efficacy                    | .271            | .027            | .               |
| N                            | Engagement      | Autonomy        | Efficacy        |
|                             | 80              | 80              | 80              |

As displayed in Table 2, the results of Pearson correlation demonstrated that there is a very minute correlation between efficacy and engagement (r = .069), while there is a small correlation between autonomy and engagement (r = .276). Hence, it can be concluded that autonomy scores correlated with engagement, however, efficacy scores, had a lower correlation than did autonomy.
Table 4.3 Multiple Regression Results

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<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.276*</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>5.41079</td>
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a. Predictors: (Constant), efficacy, autonomy
b. Dependent Variable: engagement

Table 4.3 illustrates the model summary of regression analysis predicated to answer the question to what extent can efficacy and autonomy predict changes in Iranian EFL teachers’ engagement. The results reveal that the R value is .076, which indicates efficacy and autonomy altogether predicated .076 percent of changes in engagement scores.

In this study, the first research question is to what extend self-efficacy and autonomy can predict changes in Iranian EFL teachers’ engagement? Therefore, one of the main goals of this research was to attempt to find a way to what extent self-efficacy and teacher autonomy might have a predictive power in predicting teachers’ engagement. In this part, the analysis revealed that both teacher efficacy and autonomy were positively associated with teachers’ engagement. The current study concluded that teacher self-efficacy and autonomy positively predicted engagement. Besides, the findings of the present research are in line with pervious study by Federici and Skaalvik (2012) which showed that self-efficacy can be positively related to teacher engagement and job satisfaction, and negatively related to burnout. It can be concluded that autonomy can provide freedom to choose instructional practices as well as to make the teacher responsible for both the practices and the results. Consequently, it provides an opportunity to improve teachers’ engagement. Also, self-efficacy because it deals with teacher’s belief about their ability it can affect to teacher engagement.

4.2. Second Research Question: Which one, Self-efficacy or Autonomy, is the Better Predicator of Teacher’s Engagement?

To answer the second research question of this study, which variable (teacher efficacy or autonomy) is the better predicator of teacher’s engagement. The unique contribution of teacher efficacy and autonomy on teacher engagement was investigated.

Table 4.4 Regression Analysis Predicting Engagement

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<th>Coefficients*</th>
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a. Dependent Variable: engagement

Checking with the beta value for teacher efficacy, as the result of the table shows, it has predicated .010 changes in
engagement. Autonomy, on the other hand, has predicted .27 of changes in the engagement which is a better predictor of changes in engagement scores. Therefore, between the teacher efficacy and engagement, autonomy with a higher value predicts more changes in Iranian EFL teachers’ engagement.

![Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual](image)

**Figure 1. Normal P-P Plot of Engagement Regression Standardized**

Figure 1 depicted the normality and multicollinearity assumptions are met. So, it could be claimed a significant interaction was between self-efficacy and autonomy when analyzing engagement. Therefore, both teacher self-efficacy and teacher autonomy were positively and uniquely related to Iranian EFL teacher engagement.

The present study tried to scrutinize which one, self-efficacy or autonomy, is the better predictor of teacher’s engagement? However, few or to the best of my knowledge no studies have already considered to find out whether teacher self-efficacy and teacher autonomy were independent predictors of teachers’ engagement. The current study concluded that between the teacher efficacy and engagement, autonomy with a higher value predicts more changes in Iranian EFL teachers’ engagement. It is very likely that teachers with high efficacy seem to be free to apply different methods. For this reason, autonomy with a higher value predicts more changes in Iranian EFL teachers’ engagement.

5. CONCLUSION

Autonomy is an essential construct for all teachers, regardless of their mastery and the teaching situation. It makes the teacher responsible for both the teaching practices and the learners’ achievements. In this respect, autonomy may provide an opportunity to teachers’ engagement. Indeed, self-efficacy deals with teacher’s belief about their abilities that can affect how to engage with teaching situations. Hence, the current study was designed to find out whether teacher self-efficacy and teacher autonomy were independent predictors of teachers’ engagement.

The results of data analysis of three questioners, teacher self-efficacy scale (TSES), teacher autonomy inventory (TAI), and the Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES) reveal that both teacher self-efficacy and teacher autonomy were positively associated with Iranian EFL teachers’ engagement. Additionally, the regression analyses showed that teacher self-efficacy and autonomy positively predicted engagement. Specifically, between the teacher efficacy and autonomy, autonomy with a higher value predicts more changes in Iranian EFL teachers’ engagement.

The present study shed light opportunities to improve teacher development which impact on not only teachers’ classroom practices but also students’ achievement. So, the results of this study can be beneficial for teacher educators and supervisors of language institutes. For future research, the same study can be replicated with higher number of participants from different cities.
Reference


