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The Relationship between Iranian EFL Teachers' Empowerment and Teachers' Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

The present study focuses on the relationship between teacher empowerment and teacher self-efficacy. The research is a quantitative study in which the data is obtained to get a great understanding on the relationship between empowerment and self-efficacy of Iranian English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. The sample consisted of 60 teachers in Ilam and Eyvan high schools. Participants in this study answered the School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES) questionnaire (Short and Rinehart, 1992). The Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) was used to measure teacher self-efficacy and differences in teachers on age, gender, and years of teaching experience. Pearson Product -Moment correlation was computed to determine the relationship between teacher empowerment and teacher self-efficacy. The findings indicated significant positive correlation between teacher empowerment and teacher self-efficacy. Independent sample t-test revealed no statistically significant differences on empowerment or self-efficacy based on age and empowerment based on years of teaching experience or gender. In addition, a statistically significant difference was found between teachers' self-efficacy and gender. The results of this study can be useful for EFL teachers and administrators.

1. Introduction

Persistent change and challenges of the past two decades in the field of education have resulted in an increasing workload for teachers and administrators, because teaching is one of the most significant professions of the world. Schools are important place where children follow careers and give meaning to their lives. As teachers play a special

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role in setting the standards and creating the conditions for children's school attainments, they are considered to be a key element towards student's academic success. Teachers with high self-efficiency beliefs are more likely to implement innovative methods in the classroom to use classroom management approaches and adequate teaching methods that encourage students' autonomy and reduce custodial control to take responsibility, and to manage classroom problems than the teachers with a low sense of self-efficiency (Brien et al., 1994). So, an environment which encourages risk- taking, personal commitment and involvement, decision-making and professional growth will enhance teachers' sense of self-efficacy (O'Connor & Korr, 1996; Ashton, et al., 1983).

According to Byham and Cox (1992) empowerment helps employees take a personal interest in improving the organization. The construct of teacher empowerment is viewed by researchers as holding promise for improving the educational setting for both teachers and students. A teacher's sense of empowerment represents an important variable in comprehensive school improvement efforts of today's effective schools movement. Short and Rinehart (1992) believed that school improvement will occur if teachers are allowed more access to school decision making processes.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Empowerment

The historical evolution of the construct known as empowerment began with the human relations movement, which focused attention on the individual worker and his or her interactions with other workers (Short & Greer, 1997). Vroom (1964) summarized the research on participative decision making and also concluded that workers who reported being satisfied with their jobs also described greater opportunities to influence decisions which impacted their work environment. Empowerment has been coined as the term used to describe these participative methods (Owens & Valesky, 2007).

In the last two decades, the construct of empowerment has been defined similarly by educational researchers. Lightfoot (1986) defined teacher empowerment as a person's opportunities for autonomy, responsibility, choice, and authority. Maeroff (1988) explained that teacher empowerment requires autonomy, recognition, opportunities for increasing knowledge, and access to decision making. Teacher empowerment has become increasingly visible within current trends related to educational best practices. The empowerment of employees serves as a significant factor in the success of the schools, business, or other organizations in which people are working toward a common goal. Teacher empowerment and teachers' sense of empowerment represent important variables in comprehensive school improvement efforts of today's effective schools movement.

Teacher empowerment has been viewed by many researchers as promoting collegiality, providing quality professional learning, and acknowledging the impact that teachers have on student achievement (Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2005). Teachers are the most equipped to make decisions concerning teaching and learning, so it is imperative to research the conditions that will ensure that teachers are able to effectively perform their jobs (Hirsch et al., 2006a, 2006b; Wan, 2005). According to Wynne (2001) the goal of teacher empowerment is improved student achievement. Results from a study of 449 teachers in Cyprus to determine if professional growth, decision making, promotion, and status affect a teacher's sense of empowerment indicated that status, decision making, and personal growth does increase a teacher's feeling of empowerment (Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2005).

The six dimensions of teacher empowerment are decision making, autonomy, professional growth, impact, status, and self-efficacy (Short, 1994; Short & Rinehart, 1992). *Decision making* refers to the participation of teachers' in important decisions that directly affect their work life. Such participation is essential if teachers are to increase control over their work environment, increase their internal locus of control, and decrease feelings of alienation at the work place. *Autonomy* refers to teachers' believing that they have control over certain aspects of their working life, including scheduling, curriculum development, selection of textbooks and planning instruction; autonomy is directly related to decision making. *Professional growth*, refers to teachers' perception that the school provides them opportunities to grow and develop professionally, to continue to learn, and to expand their skills during their work in school. *Impact,* refers to the teacher's need to have an influence on the teaching and learning process in which teachers want to be told that they are positively affecting the teaching and learning process. *Status*, refers to the professional respect that teachers receive from peers; it is when peers acknowledge their expertise. *Self-*

efficacy refers to teachers believing they have the skills to perform the job, and are competent to develop curricula for students. The feeling of mastery, in both knowledge and practice, that results in accomplishing desired outcomes is critical in the teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

Several studies have been conducted on teacher empowerment. Short et al. (1992), for example, surveyed 257 teachers' from six states and eight schools about empowerment and school climate and found different responses. A negative correlation existed between the empowerment measure and the school climate measure. The findings suggest that as teachers are empowered they should also be sensitized to conflict resolution and group processes. It also suggests that as teachers become more empowered, they assume ownership of problem framing and problem solving making them more critical of school functioning and school processes.

Pearson and Moomaw (2005) examined the relationship between teacher autonomy and on-the-job stress, work satisfaction, empowerment, and professionalism. It was demonstrated that as general teacher autonomy increased so did empowerment and professionalism. Also, as job satisfaction, perceived empowerment, and professionalism increased on-the-job stress decreased, and greater job satisfaction was associated with a high degree of professionalism and empowerment.

2.2. Teacher Self-Efficacy

A number of literatures have been published about teachers' self-efficacy. The concept of self-efficacy was developed in 1986 by Bandura. Bandura (1994) defined self-efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p.71).

Perceived self-efficacy, i.e., "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required producing given attainment" (Bandura, 1997, p.3), can be developed by four main sources of influence. Bandura (1997) postulated these sources of efficacy expectations as: mastery experience, also called enactive self-mastery, vicarious experience, also called role-modeling, social or verbal persuasion, and arousal or physiological and emotional states.

The first source, enactive mastery experiences, is the most influential and is comprised of all successes one has experienced in specific environment. An individual's frequent successes,especially those accompanied with overcoming adversity, build robust self efficacy beliefs that fine tune abilities to better control events (Bandura, 1997).

Secondly, vicarious experiences are gained through observation of events that have modeled by others. They enable the observer to appraise his own capabilities in relation to the attainments of others (Bandura, 1997).

The third source of influence is social or verbal persuasion. Successful persuaders foster people's beliefs in their capabilities, while at the same, ensure that the visualized success is achievable. Negative persuasion, on the other hand, may tend to defeat and lower self-beliefs. The most contributing effect of social persuasion pivots around initiating the task, attempting new strategies, and trying hard to succeed (Pajares, 2002).

The last source, Psychological and affective states, such as stress, anxiety, and excitement also provide information about efficacy perception and boost the feeling of proficiency. Hence, trying to reduce an individual's stress and anxiety and modify negative states to positive facilitative states plays an influential role in amending perceived self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura (1986) believes that "student teachers who visualize success scenarios when confronted with challenging instances in their teaching, also project a greater sense of optimism in their belief that they can generate plausible and effective solutions. Low self-efficacious student teachers are more likely to visualize failure scenarios and their performance is impaired by their focus on what went wrong, or will go wrong" (Cited in Gibbs, 2003).

Gibbs cites Trentham, Silvern, & Brogdon (1985) who believe that people with strong self-efficacy are more satisfied with their job and demonstrate more commitment. He continues to cite Gibson & Dembo (1984) who assert that teachers who have high self-efficacy tend to persist in failure situations and use new teaching approaches. Efficacy has a positive influence on teachers' persistence when they encounter difficulties in work (Smylie & Denny, 1989). Evidence shows that teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more committed to school management and teaching, more open to innovations and tougher in case of plights (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Guskey, 1988; Stein & Wang, 1988).

Mahajna (2014) examined correlations between self-efficacy and teacher training variables among 218 Arab teacher students' citizens of Israel. Their findings showed direct correlations between self-efficacy and teacher training variables, but not also with Social Context variables, specifically the importance of expressive skills in promoting teaching self-efficacy. Several studies have also established that teachers with a strong sense of efficacy tend to exhibit greater levels of planning, organization, and enthusiasm (Vaezi and Fallah, 2011).

Tabatabaee Yazdi, Motallebzadeh, and Ashraf (2013) in a qualitative mixed research investigated the relation between self-efficacy of Iranian English as foreign language (EFL) teachers and their reports of burnout comparing two big provinces of Tehran and Khorasan Razavi. The result showed that the participants' self-efficacy has a reverse relationship with their burnout. In addition, a significant relationship was observed between teachers' age, gender, years of experiences and reports of burnout.

3. Significance of the Study

Bateman (1999) believed that in addition to completing the myriad of instructional tasks, teachers must be more involved in decisions as they relate to all levels of the school organization. Bateman asserted that teachers will have an impact on an organization if they feel that they have the power to solve problems, institute change, and share responsibility for organizational outcomes.

Teacher participants will also benefit from the study as teacher roles have become more complex in this era of testing and accountability. A negative correlation tends to be explained in the literature by the fact that as teachers are more empowered to participate in autonomy, decision making, self-efficacy, status, professional growth, and impact, then student achievement may suffer. Findings of the study may tend to support an empowerment role or a relief of the role for teachers because it will identify whether or not a focus on teacher empowerment is warranted.

Also teachers with a strong sense of individual efficacy tend to spend more time planning, designing, and organizing what they teach. They are open to new ideas, willing to try new strategies, set high goals, and persist through setbacks and times of change (Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000).

This study is important to the researcher because high schools system is on the "needs improvement" list; these schools have not made adequate yearly progress for several years. All of the schools in the county have a school improvement plan; one of the components in the plans is teacher empowerment. Therefore, it will be beneficial to the researcher to determine if there is a relationship between teacher empowerment and teacher self-efficacy.

4. Research Questions

In order to fulfill the above mentioned purposes, the following research questions were designed:
1.   Is there any significant relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their empowerment?
2.   Is there any significant relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their gender?
3.   Is there any significant relationship between teachers' empowerment and their gender?
4.   Is there any significant relationship between teacher's empowerment and their years of teaching experience?

5. Methodology

5.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 60 EFL teachers from high schools in Eyvan in the province of Ilam and province of Ilam- west of Iran. Selection was done from all available professional experienced teachers having university education (Bachelor: 35; Master: 22 and PhD: 3). They were both males (26) and females (34) and aged between 26 to 46 years old with a range of between 2 to 29 years of teaching experience. Their field of study was Teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL) (38), English Translation (6), and English literature (13), and Linguistics (3).

5.2 Instruments

Based upon research questions and hypothesizes in this study, only two variables were analyzed. The two variables are teacher empowerment and teacher self efficacy. Two independent survey instruments were utilized to collect data for measurement of the two variables.

5.2.1 Teacher empowerment scale

The instrument used to assess teacher level of empowerment was the School Participant Empowerment Scale SPES (Short and Rinehart, 1992). Short and Rinehart reported that "components of empowerment represented in the item's content include: knowledgebase, competence, status, influence, autonomy, control, responsibility, collaboration, involvement in decision making, impact, and choice" (p.954). It is a 38-item instrument on a 5-point scale that scored from 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, and 5= strongly agree. that asked participants to describe how they felt about responsibility, participation, teacher selection, fiscal involvement, professionalism, student learning, empowerment, difference making, control, innovation, and collaboration in their schools. The instrument required or response from participants.

5.2.2 Teacher self-efficacy scale

For measuring teachers' self-efficacy the researcher utilized the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy (2001). This study utilized the long summated rating scale (24 items) consisting of three distinct domains: *efficacy for instructional strategies* (8 items)*, efficacy for classroom management* (8 items)*,* and *efficacy for student engagement* (8 items). Items were added to assess candidates' perceptions of their preparation in the items on the *TSES*. The efficacy items asked teacher candidates to rate their level of capability on each item using the following scale: 1= Nothing, 3= Very little, 5= Some influence, 7= Quite a bit, 9= A great deal.

5.3 Procedure

In this study, participants who are all Iranian ELT teachers in different high schools from Ilam province were selected. They were from both genders and from different ages with different years of experiences. In this study, for collecting the data, questionnaires in the form of papers and online (using email) were spread up to different English Language teachers. Collecting data started at April to May 2014. The probable needed time for filling out both questionnaires was about 10 minutes.

To compute each teacher's scale score, the researcher entered each teacher's response from each of the items from The School Participate Empowerment Scale (SPES) and Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) into an Excel file then the Excel file was uploaded into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The scales scores were computed.

6. Results

6.1 The Relationship between Teacher Empowerment and Teacher Self-Efficacy

In order to test the relationships between teachers' empowerment and their self-efficacy, a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was run.

Table1: Correlation between Teachers' Self-Efficacy Level of Preparation in Three Domains
of Teacher Self-Efficacy and Teachers' Empowerment

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	(r)	(Sig)	N
Empowerment	Self-efficacy	0/53	0/001	60
	Student engagement	0/48	0/001	60
	Instructional strategies	0/51	0/001	60
	Classroom management	0/39	0/002	60

The results indicated that there was significant positive relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and teachers' empowerment (r = 0/53, P = 0/001) (See Table 1). In addition, as table 1 revealed all sub-scales of teacher self-efficacy namely Student engagement, Instructional strategies, and Classroom management were positively correlated with teachers' empowerment as follows: empowerment and (1) Student engagement (r = 0/48, p < 0.01), and (2) Instructional strategies (r = 0/51, p < 0.01), and the third sub-scale, (3) Classroom management (r = 0/39 , p < 0.01).

To know any difference between teachers' self-efficacy and teachers' gender, independent sample T- test was used. According to mean differences between male and female teachers, result showed that self-efficacy among female teachers is higher than among male teachers (sig = 0.02< 0.05, t = -2/40). But on the other hand, the difference between teachers' empowerment is not significance according to gender (sig = 0/38 > %5, t = -0/88), and it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between teachers' empowerment and gender.

In addition Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was computed to assess the relationship between teachers' empowerment and their teaching experience. The results revealed, difference between teachers' empowerment is not significance according to teaching experience (r = 0/05, P=0/68), and it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between teachers' empowerment and teaching experience.

7. Discussion

The present study sought to explore the relationship between self-efficacy and empowerment among Iranian EFL teachers in high schools. The results indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between teachers' empowerment and self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is one's perception of one's competence and ability to act. In educational settings, it was found that when teachers believe that they can make a different with their students, they do (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). The importance of self-efficacy as a predicator of three outcomes can be understood if we relate to the original concept of self-efficacy developed by Bandura (1977). According to Bandura, self-efficacy is based on two dimensions that he labeled "outcome expectancy" and "efficacy expectancy" (p.79), "outcome expectancy" implies that an individual estimates that given behavior will result in certain outcomes. "Efficacy expectations" refer to behaviors toward the expected outcomes. Not surprisingly, where teachers report higher levels of self-efficacy, they exhibit more organizational behaviors. Teachers who have high expectations of themselves to perform effectively and successfully in school will carry out extra functions beyond the formal ones and will feel more committed to their school and to the teaching profession. Therefore, we can conclude that the relationship between empowerment on self-efficacy is likely same for all content area teachers. It is important for school administrators to recognize that these findings indicated that as empowerment increase, self-efficacy also decreases. Therefore, in order to create a satisfying work environment, school administrators should focus on empowering teachers. For this study, empowerment served as an internal indicator of the extent to which the work environment fulfilled the individual's requirement and thus were indicators of satisfaction as defined by the Theory of Work Adjustmet (Dawis et al., 1968) and Herzberg's Two Factor Theory (Herzberg et al., 1959). These theories posited that individuals are motivated more by intrinsic factors of their work. The findings of this study indicate that empowerment may be an important factor that contributes to self-efficacy.

This finding was significant because it indicated that the same types of empowerment and teacher development can be implemented regardless of gender and years of experience. Based on this study, empowerment was strongerto feelings of self-efficacy than demographic variables. Regardless of years of experience or gender, if administrators

can increase teacher empowerment, self-efficacy will also increase. Likewise if administrators can increase self-efficacy, teacher will feel more empowered.

8. Conclusions and Implications

The following conclusions were drawn based on the findings of this study:

1. There is a positive relationship between teacher empowerment and teacher self-efficacy. A Pearson correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between the variables empowerment and self-efficacy. Empowerment and self-efficacy showed a statistically significant positive relationship. The practical significance of these findings was large.

2. There is no significance difference between teachers' empowerment and age.

3. Female teachers have high self-efficacy.

4. There was no significant difference between teachers' empowerment and teaching experience. Participants with 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-20 years, and over 21 years reported similar levels of empowerment. There was not a statistically significant difference between teacher gender and empowerment. These findings were consistent with the research of Gonzales and Short (1996) which found no relationship between perceptions of empowerment and teacher characteristics such as gender and years of experience. Conversely, other studies found years of teaching experience (Short & Rinehart, 1992) and gender (Scribner et al., 2001), to be statistically significant predictors of empowerment.

5. There is no significant different between teachers' empowerment and their age. Teachers indicated that they have been empowered along the teaching self-efficacy dimension. Their enhancement of sense of self-esteem, status, and professionalism may have been influenced by the school improvement planning and clinical professor training components of the program.

One of the important contributions of the present study is that self-efficacy as one of the teacher empowerment dimensions, appears to be crucial in predicting organizational outcomes and should therefore be strongly acknowledged by school principals who strive to raise teachers' commitment to the organization and to the profession and to increase teachers' motivation for the benefit of the school. Principals need to establish working conditions that will bring teachers to perceive themselves as having a high level of competency, and experiencing high level of competency, and experiencing high status and self-esteem.

There is research that indentifies teacher empowerment as an important component to teachers, but there is limited research that identifies a direct correlation; the researcher aimed to add to the body of literature on teacher empowerment and teacher self-efficacy. Findings from this study have implications for teachers and administrators. Data from this study showed that levels of teacher empowerment are related to principal effectiveness.

First implication from this study is that administrators need to work on status, recognizing teachers as experts. The master teachers need to be recognized and encouraged.

Secondly, teachers may still only perceive their role as carrying out orders. Teachers want to be involved in decisions that concern their work; namely, designing innovations related to their classroom and student learning.

Another implication for this study is that school leaders should consider strategies that would provide teachers more autonomy. They should also explore the use of distributed leadership practices.

The last implication from this study is that teachers need to be motivated to contribute to collective effort of the school. Shamir (1990) indicated that teachers need to believe that they can contribute to the faculties' efforts to improve collective performance or to implement change; while, concurrently, maintaining their own identity. Results from this study indicated that teachers believed decision making appears to be lacking.

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