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Investigating the Relationship between Iranian EFL Teachers' Empowerment and their Self-Efficacy as a Consequence for their Educational Improvement

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Abstract:

INTRODUCTION: Teacher empowerment is thought to improve student learning by fostering teaching quality. Therefore, the purpose of this study is investigating the relationship between empowerment and self-efficacy of Iranian English as Foreign Language teachers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: The present study is an experimental study; the population of the study includes all the English language teachers of the universities of Ilam, Iran. Among whom by random sampling, the sample which was consisted of 60 teachers were selected. Participants in this study answered the School Participant Empowerment Scale questionnaire (Short and Rinehart, 1992) as the instrument of the study. The Pearson product-moment correlation was computed to determine the relationship between teacher empowerment and teacher self-efficacy.

RESULTS: The results showed that there was a positive correlation between teacher empowerment and their self-efficacy ($r = 0.55$, $P < 0.01$) and differences among teachers' self-efficacy is not significant according to age ($r = -0.14$, $P = 0.23$).

CONCLUSIONS: Based on the results of the study, empowerment and self-efficacy have interactive relationships; i.e. self-efficacy in teachers leads to empowerment and empowerment in teachers leads to self-efficacy.

Keywords:

Empowerment, Iranian English as foreign language teachers, self-efficacy

Introduction

In general, teacher empowerment is thought to improve student learning by fostering teaching quality. Still, teacher empowerment is affected by factors such as the nature of teaching, the features of teaching as a profession, teacher background knowledge, school organizational features, and its environmental context. According to Shen *et al.*,^[1] teacher empowerment is an essential condition for enhancing students'

academic performance. According to Shen *et al.*,^[1] the effects of teacher empowerment on their job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and morale have been examined. Yet, little research has been carried out to display its effects as an expanded commitment to teaching and students.

According to Ashton Webb, and Doda teachers with high self-efficiency beliefs are more likely to implement innovative methods in the classroom which encourage

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students' autonomy and reduce custodial control to take responsibility.^[2] Hence, an environment which encourages risk-taking, personal commitment and involvement, decision-making, and professional growth will enhance teachers' sense of self-efficacy. According to Balyer *et al.*, empowerment helps employees take a personal interest in improving the organization.^[3] Lee and Nie believed that school improvement will occur if teachers are allowed more access to school decision-making processes.^[4]

Lebrón *et al.*^[5] state that "teacher empowerment is defined as investing teachers with the right to participate in the determination of school goals and policies and to exercise professional judgment about what and how to teach." Shah^[6] states, "in schools where teachers are empowered to be leaders, the focus of control changes from the principal to the teachers." Empowerment also increases productivity when teachers have more time to collaborate. Teachers need to be placed in situations where they can learn from other teachers. Therefore, administrators should provide structure for collective practice. Whistaker^[7] said that "teachers should be placed in situations where they can learn from other teachers."

Empowerment is conceptualized as the autonomy given to the employees in making decisions about how they do their duties and tasks.^[8] Seibert *et al.*^[9] defined empowerment in relation to the changes in cognitive variables, which are important in motivating employees and workers.^[8] Radford and Hellyer^[10] explained that teacher empowerment requires autonomy, recognition, opportunities for increasing knowledge, and access to decision-making. 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.^[4] According to Wells,^[11] 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.^[4]

The concept of self-efficacy was developed in 1986 by Bandura. Bandura^[12] 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. Bandura (1986) believes that people with strong self-efficacy are more satisfied with their job and demonstrate more commitment. He asserts 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.^[13]

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.^[14,15]

Several studies have also established that teachers with a strong sense of efficacy tend to exhibit greater levels of planning, organization, and enthusiasm.^[16] Tabatabaee Yazdi *et al.*^[17] 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.

Considering the significance of this study, it can be said that 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. Furthermore, teachers with a strong sense of individual efficacy tend to spend more time on 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.^[18] Teacher efficacy is a simple idea with significant implications. A teacher's efficacy belief is a judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated. Self-efficacy is defined as one's self-judgment of personal capabilities to initiate and successfully perform specific tasks at designated levels, expend greater effort, and persevere in the face of adversity.^[19] Ultimately, those teachers who put forth the additional effort to develop lessons that are successful and who are motivated to make changes when necessary to improve their instruction have the likelihood of increasing student motivation.

Since Iranian universities have not made adequate yearly progress for several years considering English language courses and since one of the components in the progress plans is teacher empowerment it will be beneficial to determine if there is a relationship between teacher empowerment and teacher self-efficacy as one of the teacher empowerment dimensions. Self-efficacy appears to be crucial in predicting organizational outcomes and should, therefore, be strongly acknowledged by decision-makers who strive to raise teachers' commitment to the organization and to the profession and to increase teachers' motivation for the benefit of the university. Since there is limited research that identifies

a direct correlation between teacher empowerment and teacher self-efficacy, the researcher aimed to add to the body of literature on teacher empowerment and teacher self-efficacy.

Materials and Methods

The present study is an experimental study; the sample consisted of 60 EFL teachers in the universities of Ilam in the west of Iran. The selection was done based on simple random sampling from all available professional, experienced teachers having a university education (master: 49, and PhD: 11). They were both males (33) and females (27) and aged between 29 and 48 years old with a range of between 4 and 25 years of teaching experience.

The instrument used to assess teacher level of empowerment was the School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES).^[20] Short and Rinehart reported that "components of empowerment represented in the item's content include: knowledge-based, competence, status, influence, autonomy, control, responsibility, collaboration, involvement in decision making, impact, and choice." 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, 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 overall scale was calculated the reliability of 0.96, and the same reliability level of alpha was found in the current study.

For measuring teachers' self-efficacy, the researcher utilized the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES). 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 teachers' 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, and 9 = a great deal. As the previous instrument again, the overall scale was calculated the reliability of 0.94 and the same reliability level of alpha was found.

Procedure

In this study, for collecting the data, questionnaires in the form of papers and online (using E-mail) were spread up to different English Language teachers. Collecting data started in April–May 2018. The probable needed time

for filling out both questionnaires was about 15 min. To compute each teacher's scale score, the researcher entered each teacher's response from each of the items from The SPES and TSES into an Excel file then the excel file was uploaded into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences Inc., Version 21, Chicago, IL, USA. Then, the scales scores were computed.

Results

In order to test the relationships between teachers' empowerment and their self-efficacy, a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was run.

The results indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and teachers' empowerment ($r = 0.55, P < 0.01$) [Table 1]. In addition, as Table 1 revealed all subscales 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 ($r = 0.47, P < 0.01$), (2) instructional strategies ($r = 0.50, P < 0.01$), and the third subscale, and (3) classroom management ($r = 0.37, P < 0.01$). 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, results showed that self-efficacy among female teachers is higher than that of male teachers (significant = $0.02 < 0.05, t = -2.38$). However, on the other hand, the differences among teachers' empowerment are not significant according to gender (significant = $0.37 > 5\%, t = -0.86$), 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, differences among teachers' empowerment is not significant according to teaching experience ($r = 0.05, P = 0.66$), and it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between teachers' empowerment and teaching experience.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their age. The result was shown in Table 2.

Table 1: Correlation between teachers' empowerment and their self-efficacy

Dependent variable	Independent variable	<i>r</i>	Significant	<i>n</i>
Empowerment	Self-efficacy	0.55	0.001	60
	Student achievement	0.47	0.001	60
	Instructional strategies	0.50	0.001	60
	Classroom management	0.37	0.002	60

Table 2: Correlation between teachers' self-efficacy and age

Dependent variable	Independent variable	<i>r</i>	Significant	<i>n</i>
Self-efficacy	Age	-0.14	0.23	60

As shown in Table 2, differences among teachers' self-efficacy are not significant according to age ($r = -0.14$, $P = 0.23$), so it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between teachers' self-efficacy and age.

Discussion

The results indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between teachers' empowerment and self-efficacy. 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 the teaching profession. Based on the results of this study, if policymakers want to create a satisfying work environment, they should focus on empowering teachers. In this study, empowerment served as an internal indicator of the extent to which the work environment fulfilled the individual's requirement; the theory of work adjustment (Dawis *et al.*, 1968) and Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg *et al.*, 1959) posited that individuals are motivated more by intrinsic factors of their work.^[21,22]

Regarding the effect of teacher empowerment on student achievement as an indicator to teacher self-efficacy, the results indicated that teacher empowerment directly impacted on student achievement in the Iranian EFL context. The results of the present study can support the findings of studies done by.^[10,23,24] Instead, the findings of this study were incongruent with the studies.^[25,26]

Based on the results of the present study, empowerment is an important factor which can lead to self-efficacy. As indicated above, if policymakers and school administrators can increase teacher empowerment, self-efficacy will also increase, which in turn can lead to creating teachers who feel more empowered.

Conclusions and Implications

As one of the conclusions of the present study, it is safe to say, there is a positive relationship between teacher empowerment and teacher self-efficacy. One of the important conclusions 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 decision-makers 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 a high level of competency, and experiencing high status and self-esteem.

As it is common with any study, the present study suffers some limitations. First, the participants were selected according to available sampling while it is good to be replicated using procedures that allow a higher degree of randomization which consequently may lead to more generalizability. Second, teachers' self-efficacy and their empowerment were assessed through questionnaires. Using some other approaches, such as interviews, case studies, and observations would allow researchers to have a deeper understanding on the relationship between the two variables of the study. Third, self-efficacy measures only assessed individual teachers' self-efficacy. However, collective self-efficacy is another type of teachers' self-efficacy which represents the judgment of teachers in the university as a whole about their abilities "to organize and execute the courses of action required to have a positive effect on students" (Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy, 2004, p. 4).

As one of the implications of the present study, administrators need to work on status, recognizing teachers as experts. 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 the 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.

All of the teacher empowerment features can be used by university managers to enhance teachers' commitment to the university. In addition, it is necessary for policy-makers in different universities to create an appropriate atmosphere to work to direct teachers to a high level of competency, high status, and self-esteem. They also require to take into consideration the feelings and perceptions of instructors about the university, and their desire to achieve opportunities for professional growth. Thus, policy-makers in the universities should take into account the role of teachers in making a decision about teaching and other variables which

may play a role in university promotion. As far as the implications of the results of the present study outside the university are concerned, policy-makers in different organizations related to training should consider the role of organizational commitment as important. Thus, the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology as the primary decision-making center, and its operational units should foster teachers to workshops to direct them toward teacher professional development, autonomy, status, and self-efficacy. It is hypothesized that experienced teachers move toward professional development and are able to get their aims. It is assumed that once the teachers experience greater opportunities for professional growth and acquires greater trust in their ability to achieve high-order goals (i.e. greater self-efficacy), their status will improve as well. As a result, teachers may feel empowered at university when they participate in shared decision-making with the university.

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Ethical approval

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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