



THE EFFECT OF TEACHER AUTONOMY ON ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AMONG MALAYSIAN CLUSTER SCHOOL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Teacher autonomy has become an important aspect of the teacher professionalism. An autonomous teacher while able to produce autonomous learners are also able to be independent implementers of government policies in particular education policies. Therefore the aim of this quantitative study is examine the perception of teacher autonomy among the Cluster School teachers, and its' effect on their assessment practices. Data for this study were obtained from randomly selected 471 trained teachers from all Malaysian Cluster Schools. The findings reveled that teacher autonomy and assessment practices are at moderately level respectively. Meanwhile findings also indicate that only teacher autonomy dimension of curriculum autonomy possess a significant effect on assessment practices in terms of explicit learning, students autonomy, and student performance. Finally implications and contributions of the study were also discussed.

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Keywords: Teacher autonomy, Assessment practices, Malaysian cluster school, Assessment for learning, freedom.

Contribution/ Originality

This study documents that all dimensions of autonomy at workplace namely meaningful work, sense of belonging to community, and coherent with organizational values were found positively related with commitment to change (personal goals, capacity belief, context belief, and emotional arousal). Findings from this study have several implications. Firstly, this study represents the theoretical or empirical research regarding spirituality at workplace on commitment to change in secondary school education learning. Secondly, despite the fact that autonomy at workplace is an important factor which could enhance higher commitment, this findings also have added value to literatures on Malaysia education management especially in the Malaysian various type of secondary school settings since there were limited literatures done on similar setting. As

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conclusion, this study recommends that the school administrators should fully exploit the role of autonomy at workplace in order to increase teachers' commitment to change and performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers are regarded as professionals and they should be empowered and given the freedom or autonomy to determine the best possible treatment for their students learning problems (Pearson and Moomaw, 2005; 2006). Pearson and Moomaw (2005; 2006) further claimed that recognizing teaching as a profession and developing professional teachers as well as empowering them is a possible solution to teachers' lack of motivation and satisfaction, professionalism and teacher stress. Autonomous teachers are able to bring desired changes to the teaching and learning environment of the students. It also helps in producing autonomous learners which will benefit the learning process of the students particularly in decision making. Teachers play a major role in producing students who excel in their studies. Based on several motivation theory, students engagement in learning is determined by their teachers motivating style and according to self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), teachers motivating style toward their students learning can be related along a continuum from highly controlling to highly autonomy-supportive (Reeve *et al.*, 2004; Leroy *et al.*, 2007). Other than teaching, teachers are responsible to assess their student's achievement in line with the prescribed learning standard determined by the curriculum. One of the role teacher's plays is to carry out assessment of students learning and to determine how well the students have acquired the knowledge.

2. RELATED LITERATURE

Teachers like other professionals have a great amount of responsibility in their job. As implementers of the government policies teachers are bound to be looked up as a person in charge of delivering the said policies responsibly. This in turn requires a vacuum of space for the teachers to carry out their duties and freedom to decide on their action that best suits their working environment and fulfill the need of the stakeholders. Teachers need professional autonomy in order to carry out their duties diligently without any short comings. Autonomy as defined by Pearson and Hall (1993) is a sense of control teacher's desire of themselves and their working environment. Wilucki (1990) relates teacher's autonomy in a wide spectrum from being self-governing, independent thinking persons, capable of making wise judgments and able to make well-informed decisions. The role of an autonomous teacher according to Wilucki (1990) reflects highly of a professional. Lamb (2008) on the other hand suggests that the capacity teachers have in determining the improvement of their teaching through their own effort through research and reflective thinking shows one facet of teacher autonomy. Lamb (2008) goes on to indicate that the freedom to be able to teach in the way that one desires is also a manifestation of autonomy. Montgomery and Prawitz (2011) claims that teacher autonomy is closely related to independence in carrying out their Teaching and Learning (T&L) process. Klecker and Loadman (1998) sees teacher autonomy as empowering teachers. The definition and suggestion of teacher autonomy shows that the main emphasis is the freedom of teachers in carrying out their duty independently without top-down bureaucracy that hamper the self regulation of their duty. Archbald and Porter

(1994) suggests that top-down bureaucracy would likely undermine professional autonomy of teachers and impede the effectiveness of pedagogy. Freedom in carrying out their duty would reflect well in the quality of the work they produce. Further more, an autonomous teacher is highly likely to produce an autonomous student who would be able to be independent learners and take control of their learning environment. They would be more susceptible to face their own learning needs. Teachers play many important role in the classroom. Other than teaching, teachers are also responsible to assess the progress of their student learning which has taken a new dimension in the Malaysian Education System. The introduction of school based assessment (SBA) has given a wider responsibility to the teachers. This has also brought along a new continuum and need for the teachers professional autonomy.

Queensland Studies Authority (2010) outlined the importance and benefit of SBA in the education system claiming that:

- The students are able to improve their learning to the optimum,
- The students constant and detailed feedback and suggestions to improve,
- Teachers have the opportunity to use variety of assessment techniques,
- Teacher's are able to improve on their assessment knowledge and techniques,
- Teacher's are able to adopt the curriculum and assessment to the students local needs

The role of the teacher in this teaching environment demands more independence as they should be free to determine the best remedy for their students learning problem. Teachers are the best person to determine their students need and address their learning problems. Teacher's responsibility in SBA is viewed as an important aspect in the T&L process. Integration of assessment in the T&L process would help the teachers in identifying their students immediate learning problem and help the teachers to provide real-time solution to overcome the problem. Dunn and Mulvenon (2009); Kellaghan and Greaney (2001) insists that assessment is done to identify and relate student learning with the stipulated learning needs and assist in overcoming their learning problems.

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine (a) the teacher autonomy and assessment practices among Malaysian Cluster School teachers; and (b) the effect of teacher autonomy on their assessment practices.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive research design. The data were obtained through the administration of questionnaires to randomly selected from 471 trained teachers from all Malaysian Cluster Schools. The sample of this study consist of 58 percent female and 42 percent of male teachers. A set of questionnaires were employed using four Likert scales measuring teacher autonomy and assessment practices. This questionnaires was mailed to selected teachers. The Teacher Autonomy Scale was adapted from the work by Pearson and Hall (1993) while the instrument on Assessment Practices was adapted from the work by James and Pedder (2006) in the Improving School Effectiveness Project.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. Teacher Autonomy and Assessment Practices among Malaysian Cluster Schools

The descriptive statistics outcomes includes the mean and standard deviation value of the dimensions identified through factor analysis were presented in Table 1 below.

Table-1.Teacher Autonomy and Assessment Practices Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
Teacher Autonomy	2.76	0.23
Curriculum Autonomy (CA)	2.83	0.24
General Autonomy (GA)	2.69	0.32
Assessment Practices	3.05	0.29
Explicit Learning	3.19	0.35
Student Autonomy	2.81	0.39
Student Performance	3.15	0.36

The mean value for the teacher autonomy falls in the moderately high category indicating that the teachers in the Cluster School generally view autonomy at moderate level. This shows that the teachers are not highly autonomous and they rely for external factors such as the stipulated curriculum and operating procedures as stated in the general order in carrying out their duty. It also suggests that the teachers are bounded by the external powers that limit their freedom in carrying out their duty which are administrative in nature. The teachers have the freedom to carry out their T&L procedures with reference to the standards document provided by the ministry of education as the main stakeholder and policy developer. Curriculum autonomy and general autonomy, the two factors of Teacher Autonomy, that falls in the moderately high category is a clear indication of teachers view of autonomy in general. This shows that the teachers are in need of professional guidance to educate them of the professional autonomy they possess in order to make the teaching profession purely thought provoking. While the teachers perceive their assessment practices is at moderately high level respectively. The factors of assessment practices namely explicit learning, student autonomy and student performance is focused on the students. This finding indicates that teachers should give more emphasis on assessment in T&L. The view that student learning could be improved with suitable AfL techniques should be put into practice in the T&L process. The value teachers hold of assessment clearly indicates that their main concern is student participation in the T&L process

5.2. Effect of Teacher Autonomy on Assessment Practices

Table 2 shows that the model (teacher curriculum and general autonomy) explained 15% of variance in assessment practices explicit learning; 7% of variance in student autonomy and 16 % of variance in student performance. The research's findings also indicate that only teacher autonomy dimension of curriculum autonomy possess a significant effect on assessment practices in terms of explicit learning ($\beta=.38$); students autonomy ($\beta=.27$); and student performance ($\beta=.35$).

Table-2. Effect of Teacher Autonomy on Assessment Practices

Predictors	Assessment Practices		
	Explicit Learning	Student Autonomy	Student Performance
Curriculum Autonomy	.38**	.27**	.35**

General Autonomy	.02	.09	.10
R ²	.15	.07	.16
Adjusted R ²	.14	.06	.15
F Value	40.05**	17.11**	45.84**

** sig. at $p < .01$

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The finding shows that the teachers in the Malaysian Cluster Schools perceive teacher autonomy at moderately high level. This indicates that the teachers view autonomy as an important aspect of their professional need. Both the constructs of teacher autonomy is seen as teachers routine work. Their planning and conducting lessons is seen as one facet of their duty as in curriculum autonomy. Teacher's are fully aware of this need and feels they have autonomy over the planning and implementing the lesson. But teachers have little say over the use of curriculum because the centralised nature of the curriculum. However teachers do demand more autonomy to fulfil their students need. Being a teacher, assessing students progress is part of their job. This study on the relationship between the level of autonomy and assessment practices do show significant correlation indicating that autonomous teacher has positive assessment practices in the T&L process. The value teachers hold about assessment also shows positive and significant correlation in their assessment practices. It shows that teachers view of assessment determines their assessment practices in the T&L process. As stated earlier, one important aspect of the T&L process is assessment. AfL which is integrated in the T&L process would produce well balanced lesson and students progress in the lesson (Airasian, 1997; Black and William, 1998a; 1998b). Teachers who perceive highly of the assessment would take a positive approach to see the students learning and address their problems immediately if any. This on the other hand would not go well with teachers who do not have a positive value about assessment. This study shows that teachers in general have positive view about assessment and coincides with their practice in the classroom. Further analysis shows that there is significant effect of autonomy on teachers assessment practice. Curriculum autonomy is positively effects on teachers assessment practices and contributes greatly in the T&L process. Other than assessment during T&L process and student participation in the T&L process, curriculum autonomy also has great contributon and effect in the students explicit learning. As can be seen that the factors like assessment in the T&L process and student's active participation enhance students explicit learning, teachers autonomy is seen as main factor that contributes to the students explicit learning. This is because the role of teachers in the T&L process would be an encouragement for the students active participation. Curriculum autonomy is also seen as factors that contribute in promoting students explicit learning, student autonomy and student performance. It can be concluded that teacher autonomy especially curriculum autonomy has become an integral part of teacher professionalism. Like other professionals, teachers are the best person to identify and remedy students learning problem. The outcome of the study reveals that teachers are aware of their autonomy and their professional right in carrying out their duty. However, further study should be conducted to identify the underlying factors that contributes to the sense of curriculum autonomy among teachers. Further study could also be carried out to identify the independent nature of teachers job and collaboration factors that could enhance the sense of professionalism attribute and indpendence among teachers.

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