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Subject Teachers' Perspectives on Teaching and Their Experience with Autonomy and Self-Efficacy in the Classroom²

Extended summary

In this paper, we rely on the concept of teaching perspectives which represent the blend of teachers' beliefs, intentions, and actions. We start from the idea that the actualization of teachers' beliefs about teaching, namely, what teachers actually do in practice, is influenced by factors such as their sense of autonomy and self-efficacy in different domains of work. Our aim is, therefore, to investigate whether and what kind of relationship exists between teachers' perspectives on teaching and their sense of autonomy and self-efficacy.

The research aim was operationalized through the following research tasks: 1) Examine the prevalence of different perspectives on teaching among teachers; 2) Examine teachers' sense of autonomy and self-efficacy in their work, and 3) Examine the relationship between teachers' perspectives on teaching, their sense of autonomy, and their sense of self-efficacy in different work domains. The research sample consisted of 123 subject teachers working in primary and secondary schools in Serbia. The data were collected using three instruments: the Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI), the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES), and the Teacher Autonomy Scale (TAS), all of which have proven to be satisfactorily reliable in our study, as well as in other relevant studies. For all three instruments (TPI, TSES, TAS), the total scores, as well

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as the scores for the individual subscales (in TSES - Student Engagement, Classroom Management, and Teaching Strategies; in TAS – General Autonomy and Curriculum Autonomy), were calculated following the guidelines provided by their authors. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics techniques and Pearson's correlation coefficient.

Our findings show that around 60% of teachers have one teaching perspective as dominant, with apprenticeship and nurturing perspectives being the most common among teachers. When it comes to self-efficacy, teachers expressed a high sense of self-efficacy, especially when it comes to student engagement. In addition, our findings suggest that teachers feel less autonomous when it comes to curriculum autonomy, that is, when planning teaching and learning objectives and activities, while the score for general autonomy is relatively high. Findings suggest that teachers who consider themselves more autonomous in their work in general also report higher levels of self-efficacy in various aspects of their teaching. On the other hand, the score on the subscale of curriculum autonomy positively correlates only with the score on the subscale for self-efficacy in the domain of student engagement. Regarding teaching perspectives, Pearson's correlation coefficient indicated that teachers with a higher score for transmissive approach to teaching demonstrate a heightened sense of self-efficacy in the domain of classroom management. However, these teachers scored lower on the curriculum autonomy subscale. In addition, it was observed that teachers who have higher scores for the nurturing perspective on teaching, i.e., who emphasize the holistic development of students and aim to respond to the diverse student needs, have more confidence in their ability to engage and motivate diverse learners (higher score on student engagement subscale). They also perceive their teaching and learning programs to be less restrictive in supporting these goals, that is, they have higher scores on curriculum autonomy subscale.

We concluded that there is an interconnection between teachers' perspectives on teaching and their sense of autonomy and self-efficacy in teaching. Even though we found that connections exist, a more in-depth analysis is required to understand the nature of these connections. More specifically, we still need to find out whether the perspectives of teaching are based on the perception of autonomy or whether it is the other way around. Similarly, does commitment to a particular perspective and teaching approach inherently imply a certain level of self-efficacy, or does the teaching approach change according to perceptions of one's own efficacy in different areas of work? Only through a qualitative research approach can we gain more insight into these questions.

Raising awareness and transforming teachers' perspectives on teaching is of great importance, but it must be accompanied by efforts to create conditions that facilitate these processes, including nurturing teacher autonomy in different aspects of their work. Under such conditions, teachers could experiment with different teaching approaches, experience their potential and feel successful. This could have a positive impact not only on how they organize their teaching but also on their beliefs about education. Ultimately, we can assume that by developing their teaching approaches, teachers will gradually "conquer" new areas for autonomous action.

Keywords: perspectives on teaching, teacher's autonomy, teacher's self-efficacy

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