



Research Paper

Assessing elementary school teacher's perceptions of career autonomy

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the perception of elementary school teachers of job autonomy. The research method was descriptive-survey in nature and applied in terms of purpose. The statistical population of the study consisted of 264 elementary school teachers in Karaj city, of whom 157 were selected as a statistical sample based on the Cochran formula and using the proportional stratified random sampling method. The standard Friedman (1999) job autonomy questionnaire was used to collect data, and its validity and reliability were confirmed. The one-sample t-test was used to analyze the data using the SPSS statistical software. The research findings showed that the level of elementary school teachers' perception of job autonomy was assessed in the dimensions of creating school identity and performance, teaching and assessing progress, parental participation, and teacher professional development as desirable, and the dimensions of extracurricular subjects, curriculum change and development as undesirable.

Keywords:

Job autonomy, extracurricular subjects, curriculum change and development.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Teachers' professional autonomy refers to their ability to manage and implement educational and training programs without the need for constant supervision or direct intervention from higher authorities. This independence can be manifested in various aspects, including planning activities, dealing with challenges, and making decisions related to children and the work environment (Silva & Pushpakumari, 2023). Creating professional autonomy in teachers will not only lead to growth and improvement in the quality of their work, but will also have a positive impact on the social and cognitive development of students (Tahmasebzadeh sheikhlari et al, 2019). Teachers' professional autonomy is one of the key factors in improving the quality of teaching and learning at this critical stage of children's education. Given that primary school teachers are known as the first educators of children at an early age, their ability to make independent and creative decisions can have a profound impact on students' social, emotional, and cognitive growth and development (Ghanbari et al, 2024). Autonomy in classroom management allows teachers to tailor the learning environment to the specific needs of their students. Teachers should have the necessary opportunities to learn and update their skills, which also contributes to their professional autonomy. Independent teachers can also easily communicate with parents and the community and include their opinions and needs in the teaching and learning process (Salimi & Ghanbari, 2022). However, in many education systems, teachers face significant limitations in the field of educational and management decision-making. These limitations can result from government policies, administrative pressures, and lack of necessary support from educational institutions. The result of this situation can lead to reduced motivation, job dissatisfaction, and ultimately a decrease in the quality of education (Vahedi, 2021). This research examines the current status of teachers' job autonomy, the factors affecting it, and its effects on the quality of children's education and learning. Also, the aim of this research is to identify solutions that can help strengthen teachers' job autonomy and improve educational conditions in schools. Accordingly, this research attempts to answer the question of what is the perception of primary school teachers in Karaj city about job autonomy?

Theoretical framework

Job autonomy

Job autonomy refers to the degree of freedom, discretion, and control that an individual has in determining how to perform their job duties. This includes the ability to decide on work methods, schedule activities, prioritize tasks, and evaluate work results (Aghababaei, 2024). According to Hackman and Oldham (1976), job autonomy refers to the degree of decision-making authority that an individual has in planning and executing their job activities, in a way that evokes a sense of responsibility for job outcomes. Deci and Ryan (2000) acknowledged that within the framework of self-determination theory, autonomy refers to a sense of agency and self-control over personal actions, which is one of the fundamental psychological needs of humans (Derakhshan et al, 2020).



Dimensions of Teachers' Career Independence

Various studies have identified career independence as having various dimensions and components, which can be expressed as follows.

1) Independence in the way of doing the work: Independence in the way of doing the work means the freedom and authority of the teacher in choosing the methods, techniques, and teaching strategies that, in his or her judgment, best match the needs, characteristics, and conditions of the students. This type of independence is part of the larger "career independence" and, in the educational field, is closely linked to the professional identity, creativity, and self-efficacy of teachers (Barari et al, 2019).

2) Independence in scheduling: Independence in scheduling means that teachers have relative freedom and authority in determining how to distribute and use teaching time in their classroom (Vangrieken et al, 2017).

3) Independence in professional decision-making: Independence in professional decision-making means the ability and authority of the teacher to make independent decisions in specialized and educational areas that are directly related to student learning, classroom performance, and the teaching process (Rostami et al, 2022).

4) Independence in performance assessment: Independence in performance assessment means the relative authority and freedom of teachers to design, select, implement, and interpret methods for assessing student learning (Tahmasebzadeh sheikhlari et al, 2019).

(Sylenko, 2024) in his research examined the effects of teachers' job autonomy in the education system and concluded that specializing in educational matters and paying attention to job autonomy improves student learning, higher teacher efficiency in education, improves the education process in the country, and develops teachers' job performance in schools. (Ghanbari et al, 2024) in their research examined the effects of variables such as organizational justice and job well-being on the job autonomy of elementary school teachers in Hamedan and acknowledged that organizational justice had an indirect, positive, and significant effect on job well-being through job autonomy. (Jerrim et al, 2023) in a study they conducted on teachers working in a public school in Cameroon, they examined teachers' job autonomy and concluded that teachers' job autonomy in using teaching styles has a positive and significant effect on students' academic engagement and teachers' job satisfaction.

Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature and survey branch (field finding) and is applied in terms of purpose. The statistical population of the study was 264 teachers of public elementary schools in Karaj city. 157 people were selected as a statistical sample based on the Cochran formula and by the proportional stratified random sampling method. The data collection tool was the Friedman Teachers' Job Independence Standard Questionnaire (1999). To measure the validity of the research tool, face and content validity were used, and to measure the reliability of the research tool, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used. To analyze the collected data, descriptive statistics methods and inferential statistics methods were used by the SPSS statistical software.



Research Findings

The results of descriptive statistics analysis showed that male teachers constituted 26% (41 people) and female teachers constituted 74% (116 people) of the sample size. Teachers aged 31-40 years old with (62) percent constituted the largest number of sample members, and teachers aged 60-51 years old with (9) percent constituted the smallest number of sample members. Teachers with master's degrees constituted the largest number of sample members with (30) percent, and teachers with doctoral degrees constituted the smallest number of sample members with (2) percent. Teachers with 11-20 years of work experience constituted the largest number of sample members with (50) percent, and teachers with more than 20 years of work experience constituted the smallest number of sample members with (10) percent. The results of the descriptive statistics of the variables and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of the research variables indicate that the significance level of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for all research variables is greater than 0.05. As a result, all research variables have a normal distribution. Therefore, parametric tests were used to examine the research questions. The results of the inferential statistics indicated that the components of creating school identity and performance, teaching and assessing progress, parental involvement, professional development were desirable, and the components of extracurricular subjects, curriculum change and development were evaluated as undesirable.

Conclusion

The overall objective of the present study was to evaluate the perception of teachers in public elementary schools in Karaj city of career independence. The first question assessed teachers' career independence from the perspective of creating school identity and performance. The results indicated that the average obtained was (26.33), which was higher than the average (21). Therefore, teachers had a favorable evaluation of this component. In this regard, it can be acknowledged that explaining teachers' career independence requires examining the role of teachers in educational policy-making, professional identity, educational justice, and school governance. The participation of elementary teachers in deciding on student admission and enrollment criteria is a prominent sign of their career independence. The second question assessed teachers' career independence from the perspective of teaching and progress evaluation. The results indicated that the average obtained was (27.55), which was higher than the average (21). Therefore, teachers had a favorable evaluation of this component. In this regard, it can be acknowledged that teachers' professional autonomy in deciding on the tools and procedures for evaluating academic achievement enables teachers to design and implement more accurate, fair, and practical assessments that are in line with the needs and characteristics of students. The third question assessed teachers' professional autonomy in terms of parental involvement. The results indicated that the mean obtained was (13.17), which was higher than the average (9). Therefore, teachers had a favorable evaluation of this component. In this regard, it can be acknowledged that teachers' professional autonomy in arranging meetings with parents and discussing guidelines and academic achievement reports plays a vital role in improving the quality of school-family communication, promoting student learning, and increasing parental involvement. The fourth question assessed teachers' professional autonomy from the perspective of professional development. The results



indicated that the average obtained was (16.71), which was higher than the average (12). Therefore, teachers had a favorable evaluation of this component. In this regard, it can be acknowledged that teachers' professional autonomy in choosing in-service training topics based on the predetermined needs of the school makes their professional development process purposeful, efficient, and appropriate to the educational realities of the school. The fifth question assessed teachers' professional independence in terms of extracurricular topics. The results indicated that the average obtained was (9.17), which was lower than the average (12). Therefore, teachers had an unfavorable evaluation of this component. In this regard, it can be acknowledged that teachers' professional independence in selecting extracurricular activity topics allows teachers to select programs that meet the needs and interests of students and, as a result, promote active participation and comprehensive learning. This independence increases teachers' job satisfaction and motivation. The sixth question assessed teachers' job independence from the perspective of curriculum change and development. The results indicated that the average obtained was (11.21), which was lower than the average (18). Therefore, teachers had an unfavorable evaluation of this component. In this regard, it can be acknowledged that this independence not only improves the quality of education, but also increases teachers' professional satisfaction and motivation. Therefore, creating the necessary support mechanisms and training to strengthen this dimension of job independence is of great importance. These results are consistent with and supported by the findings of (Sylenko, 2024), (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020), and (Vangrieken et al, 2017).

Based on the above results, it is recommended that school administrators create conditions that allow teachers to attend scientific conferences, participate in collaborative projects, or conduct inter-school action research. This is because interaction with professional networks, academic institutions, teacher associations, and educational organizations enhances professional identity and transfers experiences to the school. On the other hand, it is recommended that school teachers be given the option to use new educational methods. In this regard, it is possible to create spaces for the gradual testing of new methods, including blended learning or cross-subject integrated teaching, with the support of the school principal. Given that teachers' consultative meetings with parents should go beyond disciplinary matters or grades and also include issues of psychological, social, and family development. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers can include topics such as parenting skills, children's mental health, responsible use of technology, or strengthening family literacy in meetings with parents.