

Teacher Autonomy : Key to Teaching success

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Abstract:

Teacher autonomy refers to freedom of study, learn & teach. The teacher is the controlling figure of educational process and also play critical role in the power of social change. National Policy of Education (1986) also says that teachers should have the freedom of innovate, to device appropriate methods of communication and activities relevant to the needs & capabilities of the concern of the community. If a teacher has good habits or qualities, he can transfer it in his students and can play an important role in good nation formation. The present paper tries to focus on the different aspects of need and importance of teacher's autonomy and professional independence in our education system as laid down in NCF 2005.

Key Words: Teacher Autonomy, Professional Independence, NCF 2005,

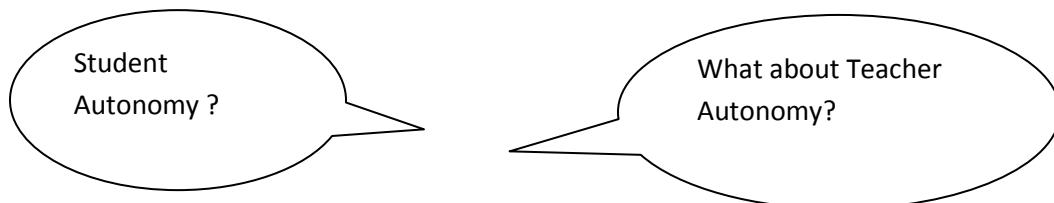
*Give a man a fish, Feed him for a day.
Teach a man to fish, Feed him for a lifetime.*

Education is a most potent source of achieving the desired goals. Education is a tri-polar process including teacher, learner and environment (teaching material). As Secondary Education Commission or Mudaliar Commission (1954) says "The most important factor in the contemplated educational reconstruction is the teacher, his personal qualities, his educational qualifications, his professional training and the place, he occupies in the school as well as in the communication. The reputation of a school and its influence on the life of community invariably depend on the kind of teacher working in it".

According to NPE (1986), "The status of the teacher reflects the socio-cultural ethos of a society. It is said that no people can rise above the level of its teachers. The government and the community should endeavor to create conditions which will help motivate and inspire teachers on constructive and creative lines."

Teacher autonomy is essential for ensuring a learning environment that addresses children's diverse needs. As much as the learner requires space, freedom, flexibility and respect, the teacher also requires the same. There is need to encourage an atmosphere that facilitates collaborative efforts among teachers. Teacher autonomy is driven by a need for personal and professional improvement, so that an autonomous teacher may seek out opportunities over the course of his or her career to develop further. Teacher autonomy and professional independence is a socially

constructed process, where teacher support & develop groups that can act as teacher-learner pools of diverse knowledge, experience, equal power & autonomous learning. If teachers are professionals then autonomy is an important element in confirming the status of teacher's work.



The comment above is overheard in a teacher staffroom and made by teachers who felt they had very little control in their working life.

Meaning and definition of Teacher Autonomy:

Teacher autonomy is defined by “the capacity to take control of one’s own teaching”. Teacher autonomy means freedom of study, learn and teach. There should not be too much interference in the work of teacher by higher authorities so that teacher may perform his duty without any fear.

Little (1995) first defines teacher autonomy as the teachers’ capacity to engage in self-directed teaching. After that, scholars have been trying to define teacher autonomy from different aspects. Aoki (2000) offers an explicit definition of teacher autonomy, suggesting that this involves the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one’s own teaching. According to Richard Smith (2000), teacher autonomy refers to “the ability to develop appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes for oneself as a teacher, in cooperation with others.” Benson (2000) argues that teacher autonomy can be seen as “a right to freedom from control (or an ability to exercise this right) as well as actual freedom from control”.

According to Huang (2005), “ Teacher’s willingness, capacity and freedom to take control of their own teaching and learning are known as teacher autonomy.

McGrath (2000) illustrates the characteristics of teacher autonomy from two dimensions, “as self-directed action or development; as freedom from control by others.” When teachers act in a self-directed manner, they are not guaranteed to learn from the experience. Because their professional development of autonomy could be considered as one form of professional action, but their action and development of autonomy do not necessarily mean the same thing. When teachers make use of their freedom, allowance needs to be made for a distinction between capacity for and/or willingness to engage in self-direction and actual self-directed behavior. In

China, for example, some college teachers have the capacity to engage in self-directed activity but refuse to do so for the sake of personal responsibility.

Smith (2001) summarizes six very comprehensive characteristics of teacher autonomy as follows:

- A. Self-directed professional action
- B. Capacity for self-directed professional action
- C. Freedom from control over professional action
- D. Self-directed professional development
- E. Capacity for self-directed professional development
- F. Freedom from control over professional development

Teacher autonomy is also known as academic freedom. Autonomy is also being described as a capacity to take charge of, or take responsibility for, or control over your own learning. It involves ability and attitudes that people possess, and can develop to various degrees. The ability to self-assess for the sake of his/her learners, the capacity to develop certain skills for oneself as a teacher, the tendency to criticize oneself, self development, self observation, self awareness of his own teaching, continuous reflection, sustainable development, self control taking responsibilities for his learners, being open to change through co-operation with others, questioning oneself in particular position improving oneself so as to keep up with changing condition of the century, an attempt to compensate for what he lacks as a teacher.

Dimensions of teacher autonomy:

The dimensions identified by Mac Grath (2000) are as follows:

- Teacher autonomy as self directed action or development.
- Teacher autonomy as freedom from control by others.

In relation to professional action, dimensions of teacher autonomy are-

- i. Self-directed professional action (self-directed teaching).
- ii. Capacity for self-directed professional action.
- iii. Freedom from control over professional action.

Table : Degree of teacher autonomy and areas of responsibility

Degree of Teacher Autonomy	Area of Responsibility
High degree of autonomy	-Teacher/Student interaction in class

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Type of activities used in class -Pace, timing and total time allocation -timing of tests
Shared autonomy with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - O b j e c t i v e s - Curriculum material - Teaching Strategies
Low - decisions dominated by principals and staff groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Global concepts and outline of curriculum - Criteria for assessing students

Table above is based on Leithwood *et al's*(1997) review of research into teachers' curriculum decision making. Looking at the areas of teacher autonomy in more detail, they identify four main areas where an individual teacher's autonomy may be high.

What Teacher autonomy is not?

- Teacher autonomy is not an independence or isolation.
- Teacher autonomy cannot be explained as an exclusive psychological, technical or political issue.
- Teacher autonomy is not a static entity that some people possess and other does not.
- Teacher autonomy cannot be interpreted as additional responsibilities given to the teacher.
- Teacher autonomy does not refer to an absolute state of freedom constraint.

Why is Autonomy important?

In National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986: “Teacher should have the freedom of innovate to device appropriate methods of communication and activities relevant to the needs and capabilities of the concerns of the community. The pay and service conditions of a teacher have to be commensurate with their social and professional responsibilities and with the needs of attract talent to the profession.” Many reasons can be given as to why autonomy is important and most of them are related to the question of teachers’ work. Are teachers technicians who implement other people’s decisions or are teachers ‘professionals’, people capable of deciding for themselves? The answer to this question affects how teachers’ work is designed and what tasks teachers are expected to do. These expectations in turn can influence teachers’ performance and their perceptions of their work.

Needs of Teacher Autonomy:

- Teacher autonomy is essential for ensuring a learning environment that addresses children’s diverse needs.
- Teacher autonomy is driven by a need for personal and professional improvement, so that an autonomous teacher may seek out opportunities over the course of his/her career to develop further.
- An autonomous teacher feels personal responsibilities, attends workshops & come up with new classroom ideas.
- Teacher autonomy refers to the ability to develop appropriate skills, knowledge & attitude for oneself as a teacher, in cooperation with other.
- The teacher should have the freedom to innovate, to devise appropriate methods of communication & activities relevant to the need & capabilities of the concerns of the community.
- Autonomous teacher feel more confident with virtual learning environment.
- Teacher autonomy is necessary in order to be able to respond to student needs, interests & motivation and individualize our approach.

NCF (2005) states “Teacher autonomy is essential for ensuring a learning environment that addresses children’s diverse needs. As much as the learner requires space, freedom, flexibility, and respect, the teacher also requires the same. Currently, the system of administrative hierarchies and control, examinations, and centralized planning for curriculum reform, all constrain the autonomy of the headmaster and teacher.

Even when there is curricular freedom, teachers do not feel confident that they can exercise it without being taken to task by the administration for doing things differently. It is therefore essential to enable and support them in exercising choice. As much as the classroom needs to nurture a democratic, flexible and accepting culture, so also the school institution and the bureaucratic structure need to do the same. Not only should the teacher receive orders and information, but equally the voice of the teacher should be

heard by those higher up, who often take decisions that affect the immediate classroom life and culture in the school. Relationships between teachers and their heads and principals must be informed by equality and mutual respect, and decision making must be on the basis of dialogue and discussion. The annual, monthly and weekly calendars of activities need to provide time for such staff interactions for reviewing and planning. There is need to encourage an atmosphere that facilitates collaborative efforts among teachers. There must also be mechanisms for conflict resolution.

Often technologies such as radio and TV are introduced into their classrooms without consulting teachers on whether they would like to have these and what they would like these to do for them. Once these there in the classroom, teachers are expected to use them, when they have no control over what will be delivered, or how it will integrate with their own teaching plans.

Time for Reflection and Planning:

- On a daily basis (at least 45 minutes) to review the day, make notes on children to follow up the next day, and organize materials for the next day's lessons (this is in addition to the time that they may need to correct homework).
- On a weekly basis (at least two/three hours) to take stock of learning, to work out details of activities and projects proposed, and to plan a group of lessons (unit) for the coming week.
- On a monthly/term basis (minimum of one day) to review their own work, children's learning, and map the contours of the learning activities planned for the groups they teach.
- At the beginning and the end of the year, two or three days each need to be allocated to evolve an annual plan for the school, in which they locate activities such as local holidays, annual events (national events, sports day, cultural events) and days for parent-teacher meeting that would involve the whole school. They would also plan excursions and field trips for their class groups, and for any projects that two or more classes would do together. They would also be involved in activities of preparing the school and class environment, putting up and changing posters and displays, organizing children's work, etc. such planning time is also essential for the school to review its relationship with the community, and identify points of focused action in the year such as enrolment, retention, school attendance and school achievement.
- Current in-service training-related time allocation (compulsory 20 days per year) could be partly diverted towards making time available for such reviewing, reflecting and planning.

- Monthly meetings organized for teachers at the cluster level could be based on groups of teachers teaching similar subjects and grade levels, so that they can share ideas and plan teaching for the forthcoming month together.

Teacher's role in promotion of own autonomy:

The teacher can promote his autonomy himself. Some suggestions to promote the autonomy of teacher are as follows:

- He/ she should read a lot to be familiar with current subjects.
- Teacher should be able to observe himself.
- They should co-operate with others'
- It is really necessary to be open to criticism.
- Teacher should make notes at the end of lesson and evaluate them.
- Feedback by students may be given to the teacher.
- They should be given the opportunity to develop his own autonomy.
- Teacher should observe each other to give feedback (peer observation).
- A very careful lesson plan is required.
- One should be aware of his good and bad points or qualities.

Personal experience as both a classroom teacher and an administrator suggests that teachers need a great deal of autonomy if they are going to be life-long learners, and effective in the classroom if they are to be life-long learners, decision makers, leaders, and are to provide effective instruction for all students. However, in allowing autonomy, leaders must be cautious, constantly monitoring whether teachers are using their autonomy for the good of their students, or if teachers are hiding behind autonomy---using it as a shield from progress. What is intriguing about teacher autonomy is not the belief that it is necessary, but that it is a double-edged sword. In allowing and providing autonomy for teachers, one must be certain those who desire autonomy have good intentions. As important as autonomy is, there is the potential for teachers to misuse it.

Conclusion:

Teacher autonomy is driven by a need for personal and professional improvement, so that an autonomous teachers may seek out opportunities over the course of his or her career to develop further. If the teacher possesses these qualities then he will be autonomous and studies show that the autonomous teacher teaches very effectively and conveniently than non autonomous teachers. There should be some professional independence among the teachers because when they are free to teach, they teach more efficiently.

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