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**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY AND WORK PERFORMANCE OF TEACHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS – AT A GLANCE**

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**Abstract**

*Teachers are the backbone of an educational activity. The success and failure of educational activities highly depends on their performance. Their performance is directly linked to process and product of education. Therefore, the performance of teachers is emphatic for the improvement of education. This study centered on the investigation of the relationship between professional autonomy of teachers and their job performance in higher education institutions. The study covers the HEI affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore. The descriptive research design was used. The objectives of the study were to study the relationship between the professional autonomy and job performance of teachers. It also aims at finding the institution wise professional autonomy in HEI. The study was conducted in aided and self-financing colleges affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore. 253 teachers working in aided and self-financing colleges were the samples, selected through simple random sampling. The data was collected through a questionnaire and was analyzed using Pearson's correlation and t-test. Results showed that there was a significant positive correlation between PA and JP. Teachers in self-financing institutions perceived a higher level of PA than teachers in Aided institutions.*

**KEY WORDS:***Bharathiar University, Higher education institutions (HEI), Job performance (JP), Professional Autonomy (PA).*

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY AND WORK PERFORMANCE OF TEACHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS – AT A GLANCE.**

One of the basic truths in education is that quality of education depends largely upon the quality of teachers. Enlightened, emancipated and teachers empowered with professional autonomy (PA) lead communities and nations towards better and higher quality of life. Teachers are the torch bearer in creating social cohesion, national integration in learning society. They not only disseminate knowledge but also create and generate new knowledge. They are responsible for acculturating the role of education. The educational expansion, Universalization of elementary education, Vocationalization of secondary education, higher & professional education and overall quality of education are major challenges before the country. Evidently the quality of education is a direct consequence and outcome of the quality of teachers and teacher education system. The task of bringing qualitative change in institutional officially of the teacher education system in itself is a huge and challenging one. Moreover, teachers in higher education institutions are working tirelessly but not empowered with professional autonomy and secured. Thus, there is urgent need to empower teaching faculty with professional autonomy for multifarious tasks with zero feeling of insecurity. It is also proposed that the job performance of the teachers would be high in educational institutions which offer a professionally autonomous environment with freedom to practice their teaching tasks.

It is generally believed that educational institutions perform well in the areas of teaching and research in terms of discovering and developing talent for the development of science and technology. Each institution conducts an annual review and an evaluation of faculty job performance (JP). The items for evaluation include instructional responsibility, intellectual contribution, professional service, collegiality, and professionalism. These areas are used for the determination of salary increases, qualification for promotion and tenure, reappointment of non-tenured faculty, and faculty awards. So far, some studies have been performed to investigate the relationship between JP, perceived organizational support,

women empowerment and pressure . However, the relationship between professional autonomy (PA) and JP among faculties in higher education institutions has not been investigated.

### CONCEPT OF PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY

Professional autonomy refers to the degree of independence and authority a person has to make decisions in his profession. Teacher autonomy is defined as freedom for control over teaching (Shaw, 2002) or as the promotion of student autonomy (Thavenius, 1999). Other scholars have examined the concept in a more comprehensive way. For instance, Barfield et al (2002, p.3) define teacher autonomy as “a continual process of inquiry into how teaching can best promote autonomous learning for learners” which involves, among other principles, action, negotiation, understanding of constraints, and collaborative support. On this line of thought, other academics have elaborated on the concept and described it as a multidimensional capacity associated with shared decision making based on students’ needs and interests, teachers’ self-regulation, professional competence, and freedom from externally imposed agendas (Castle & Aichele, 1994).

Autonomy refers to the teachers’ feeling that they have control over various aspects of their working life, including scheduling, curriculum development, selection of textbooks and planning instruction. This type of control enables teachers to feel free to make decisions related to their educational milieu. Impact refers to the teachers’ perception that they can affect and influence institution life.

**General professional autonomy** refers to the frames of professional work, with regard to, for example, organisation of the school system, legislation, entry requirements, teacher education, curricula, procedures and ideologies of control (such as management by objectives rather than detailed rules for the school system).

**Collegial professional autonomy** in the teaching profession concerns the teachers’ collective freedom to influence and decide on practice at local level, a form of autonomy enjoyed to varying degrees in practice.

**Individual professional autonomy** may be understood as the individual’s opportunity to influence the contents, frames and controls of the teaching practice. It involves the existence of a practice-related auto-formulation of the contents, frames and controls of professional work

### CONCEPT OF JOB PERFORMANCE

The performance does not have to be directly observable actions of an individual. It can consist of mental productions such as answers or decisions. However, performance needs to be under the individual's control, regardless of whether the performance of interest is mental or behavioral. The difference between individual controlled action and outcomes is best conveyed through an example. On a sales job, a favorable outcome is a certain level of revenue generated through the sale of something (merchandise, some service, insurance etc.). Revenue can be generated or not, depending on the behaviour of employees. When the employee performs this sales job well, he is able to move more merchandise. However, certain factors other than employees' behaviour influence revenue generated. For example, sales might slump due to economic conditions, changes in customer preferences, production bottlenecks, etc. In these conditions, employee performance can be adequate, yet sales can still be low. The first is performance and the second is the effectiveness of that performance. These two can be decoupled because performance is not the same as effectiveness. Another closely related construct is productivity. This can be thought of as a comparison of the amount of effectiveness that results from a certain level of cost associated with that effectiveness. In other words, effectiveness is the ratio of outputs to inputs— those inputs being effort, monetary costs, resources, etc. Utility is another related construct which is

defined as the value of a particular level of performance, effectiveness, or productivity. Utilities of performance, effectiveness and productivity are value judgment. Another key feature of job performance is that it has to be goal relevant. Performance must be directed toward organizational goals that are relevant to the job or role. Therefore, performance does not include activities where effort is expended toward achieving peripheral goals. For example, the effort put toward the goal of getting to work in the shortest amount of time is not performance (except where it is concerned with avoiding lateness).

Despite the emphasis on defining and predicting job performance, it is not a single unified construct. There are vastly many jobs each with different performance standards. Therefore, job performance is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct consisting of more than one kind of behaviour.

Teachers are the backbone of an educational activity. The success and failure of educational activities highly depends on their performance. Their performance is directly linked to process and product of education. Therefore, the performance of teachers is emphatic for the improvement of education. According to Okunola (1990) performance may be described as "an act of accomplishing or executing a given task". It could also be described as the ability to combine skillfully the right behaviour towards the achievement of organizational goals and objectives (Olaniyan, 1999). Obilade (1999) states that teachers job performance can be described as "the duties performed by a teacher at a particular period in the school system in achieving organizational goals. Okeniyi(1995) says that it could be described as "the ability of teachers to combine relevant inputs for the enhancement of teaching and learning processes".

From educational point of view, assessment is a process that characterizes a school system. Naugle (2000) puts forward that the goal of such assessment is the determination of the presence and extent of learning among students, for which teachers are held responsible. Shymansky (1978) holds that the assessment of teachers' performance is as important as the assessment of students. Describing the need and use of assessment of teachers' job performance, Murphy and Williams quotes from Arvey(1998) that performance emulation is subtle subject.

It is mostly use to; (i) Meet the basic needs of any organization, (ii) Improve the work force and provide certain administrative functions, (iii) Identify the strength and weaknesses of individual employees, and (iv) Develop and evaluate human resources system, and(v) Harder (1989) adds that performance evaluation is also used to reward past performance and justify increments.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mathew & Smith (2005) says autonomy is an individual-level variable that has been linked to Professional Commitment .Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) sampled 1213 teachers from 78 elementary schools throughout Tennessee to determine if the level of teacher commitment was different among novice teachers ,midcareer teachers, and veteran teachers .They identified six factors that influence teachers commitment namely performance efficacy, psychic rewards or feedback, task autonomy and discretion, learning opportunities, school's management of students behavior and buffering by principals. The organizational factors considered here influence commitment through affecting both the conditions of the work itself and the teachers' interpretations of the work and of their relation to it. Results of multiple regression analysis showed that commitment of teachers at the early stages of their careers was influenced more by organizational support at the task boundaries, while experienced teachers, on the other hand, were influenced more by conditions directly associated with the core tasks such as discretion and autonomy . They also found that the midcareer teachers had a lower professional commitment and place a greater emphasis on task autonomy than the novices or veterans. This demonstrated that task

autonomy is the most powerful explanatory variable of teachers' commitment. Commitment is enhanced when principals give up their need for control and trust teachers with discretionary decisions.

Aranya (1986) proposed that highly committed professionals consider freedom to act in accordance with professional judgment as more important than less committed colleagues. They are also willing to accept situations in which professional principles are used in a manner different from that implied by the best professional judgment, Larson (1977). Such individuals consider it essential to work in a framework that allows them to fully express themselves as professionals, using autonomous thought and action.

Increased task autonomy is another organizational condition that Rosenholtz (1989) suggested can enhance teacher commitment. Professional autonomy has a strong association with teacher commitment and gives teachers a sense of making a greater contribution to the organization (Nir, 2002). Rosenholtz suggested that as people are given more autonomy and discretion to exercise judgment and choice, they become more aware of themselves as causal agents in their own job performance. Professional independence and discretion bolster motivation, responsibility, job performance and commitment, while a lack of autonomy is cited as a reason for dissatisfaction, absenteeism, and defection (Chapman & Hutcheson, 1982).

Autonomy is another individual-level variable that has been linked to job performance. Autonomy, or self-determination, is the extent to which individuals perceive they have a choice in initiating and continuing their work behaviors and processes (Spreitzer 1995). Employees with greater autonomy are more likely to carry out tasks in ways that are consistent with professional values and responsibilities, and thus increase their commitment to the profession. Several studies have examined the relationship between autonomy and job performance. Lee et al. (2000) reported a positive correlation between autonomy and job performance in their meta-analysis. Similarly, Wallace (1995), in studying lawyers. Commitment in professional and nonprofessional organizations, reported a positive correlation between autonomy and job performance for lawyers working in law firms. Thus, autonomy may be an antecedent to job performance.

Highly committed professionals consider freedom to act in accordance with professional judgment as more important than less committed colleagues. They are also willing to accept situations in which professional principles are used in a manner different from that implied by the best professional judgment (Larson, (1977)). Such individuals consider it essential to work in a framework that allows them to fully express themselves as professionals, using autonomous thought and action.

Much of the literature on professionals in organizations concerns whether professionals lose their authority and autonomy in performing their professional work tasks when they become salaried employees of non professional organizations (Derber, 1983; Friedson, 1984). The right of individual members to make independent decisions concerning the appropriate procedures for work tasks and activities, which is referred to in the professional literature as autonomy.

Autonomy is a critical attribute used to define professional work and refers to the degree to which professionals have control over how they carry out their work tasks (Greenwood, 1957; Hall, 1967, 1968; Engel, 1970). Autonomy is often argued to be the source of most of the conflict or tension between professionals and their place of work. (Kornhauser, 1962; Hall, 1967, 1968; Miller, 1967;). Professionals expect considerable freedom, independence and discretion in scheduling their work, determining the content of their work tasks and choosing the methods to carry it out, (Engel, 1970). When they are granted insufficient autonomy, they will be less committed to the employing organization. Results indicated that although autonomy had significant effects on professional commitment, the magnitude of these effects is somewhat weak

The first group of empirical studies attempts to examine the construct of teacher sense of autonomy, conceptualized as a personal sense of freedom to execute professional action. While some of these studies devote a lot of attention to the construction and validation of a research tool, others explore the way that teachers perceive their own autonomy in the context of school reform. They provide different research scales as tools for the investigation of teacher sense of autonomy (Charters, 1976; Chauvin & Ellett, 1993; Forsyth & Danisiewicz, 1985; Friedman, 1999; Pearson & Moomaw, 2006; Short & Rinehart, 1992; Wilson, 1993) and demonstrate the close relationship between teacher sense of autonomy and teachers' job satisfaction and commitment (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005); job position and school district size (Reyes, 1989); salary, workload, paperwork, and levels of stress (Pearson, 1995; Pearson & Hall, 1993); as well as educational policies that increase teachers' responsibilities and accountability (Archbald & Porter, 1994; Crawford, 2001; Veugelers, 2004)

According to Nhundu (1999), teachers performance is assessed for monitoring and evaluation purposes. However, in education sector there is great apprehension for the matters like who should be evaluated. Discussing the purpose of assessing teachers' performance, Tan (1998) identifies the following purposes.

(i) Teachers performance is conducted for making decisions for permanency or promotion of teachers, (ii) Collection of information about the strengths and weaknesses of teachers, so that to improve their capacity and the conditions of school. (iii) Through collection of data, one can find out a clear picture of the condition of education, and (iv) Finally, it determines the standards of an institution to meet future challenges.

Peretemode (1996) adds that job performance is determined by the worker's level of participation in the day to day running of organization. There are some factors which contribute to teacher's performance.

Some of such factors are as under; (i) Satisfying the learners through his teaching style and quality, (ii) Apart from teaching, performance of other assignments as assigned by the Principal and the department, (iii) Management of class discipline, students' motivation and improvement of their achievement, (iv) Performance of his duties in a regular way, and (v) Interaction with students, parents, colleagues and high officials.

### **NEED FOR THE STUDY**

In recent years, teacher autonomy has become a major point of discussion and debate in Indian education, largely as a result of educational policies that, some argue, limit the professionalism, authority, responsiveness, creativity, or effectiveness of teachers. Teacher autonomy refers to the professional independence of teachers in schools, especially the degree to which they can make autonomous decisions about what they teach to students and how they teach it. Educationalists argue that infringing on teacher autonomy in the classroom undermines the professional status and expertise of teachers. In this view, attempts to micromanage teaching strategies or teachers' professional autonomy through more prescriptive policies, greater administrative oversight, or strict curriculum requirements will undermine their job performance or the perception that teachers are skilled professionals who have earned a degree of public trust in their abilities. Teachers' job performance is the way in which a teacher behaves in the process of teaching and it is known to be related to teachers' effectiveness. It is said that good performance of students depends upon effective teaching of their teachers. Thus, it is important to examine the relationship between professional autonomy and teachers' job performance in higher education institutions. Lots of work has already done on different area of job performance but researcher could hardly find a study on professional autonomy with job performance. So, an attempt has been made

to investigate professional autonomy in relation to job performance of teachers in higher education institutions.

### OBJECTIVES

- To study the relationship between Professional autonomy and Job Performance of teachers in higher education institutions.
- To find the institution wise professional autonomy in aided and self-financing colleges affiliated to Bharathiar university

### HYPOTHESIS

1. There is a significant positive relationship between Professional autonomy and Job Performance of teachers in higher education institutions.
2. There is no significant difference in the institution wise professional autonomy of teachers in higher education institutions.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Research design

The present study is a descriptive research.

#### Population

Teachers working in the Aided and Self-financing colleges affiliated to Bharathiar University form the population of this study.

#### Sampling technique

Simple random sampling technique was used to collect data from the respondents.

#### Sample

The sample consisted of 253 teachers working in the colleges affiliated to Bharathiar University. When the questionnaire was distributed to 300 teachers, 268 were returned and rejecting the invalid questionnaires, 253 was the sample size.

### TOOLS USED

#### Professional Autonomy scale

In this study, professional autonomy was measured using Rosenholtz (1990) scale. It consists of 8 items which describe the freedom of teachers to exercise their tasks at general, collegial and individual levels. It is a 5-point scale measure ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). It has an alpha coefficient of 0.61. Its item to item scale correlations = 0.25 to 0.48.

#### Job performance scale

The five-item job performance scale was developed by Williams and Anderson in 1991 and was initially used to measure individuals' overall performance level, task completion, and competency. This job performance scale was based on participants' self-reports. Sample items include 'I can competently

complete assigned work', 'I can perform the duties of my job description', and 'I never neglect my job responsibilities'.

### STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED

To test the hypothesis, Karl Pearson's Coefficient of Correlation and t-test were employed.

### ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

**Table 1 Correlation between Professional Autonomy and Job Performance of Teachers( N=253)**

Professional Autonomy	Job Performance	
	r values	Significance
General	0.392	**
Collegial	0.472	**
Individual	0.453	**
Overall score	0.533	**

**\*\* Significant at 0.01 level of significance**

It is evident from the Table 1 that the obtained coefficient correlation 'r'- values between Professional Autonomy and Job Performance were found to be 0.392 for general autonomy, 0.472 for collegial autonomy, 0.453 for individual autonomy, and 0.533 for Overall Professional Autonomy. These values are significant at 0.01 level of significance. This means that Professional Autonomy along with its components and Job Performance has positive and significance relationship among teachers in higher education institutions. Further, we can say that as Professional Autonomy in items of general, collegial and individual increases/ enhanced the Job Performance of Teachers will automatically be raised. Thus, Professional Autonomy among teachers in colleges affiliated to Bharathiar University is directly proportional to their Job Performance. Hence, the research hypothesis that, "There is a significant positive relationship between Professional Autonomy and Job Performance of Teachers in higher education institutions" is accepted.

**TABLE 2 Professional Autonomy -'t'-Test**

	Mean score		Mean difference	Std.error	't' value (df: 253)	Sig
	Aided	Self-finance				
General	3.059	3.202	-.143	.057	-2.526	*
Collegial	3.031	3.213	-.183	.043	-4.221	*
Individual	3.031	3.641	-.223	.030	-5.387	*

From the above table 2, it can be inferred that there is a significant difference between the Professional Autonomy of teachers in aided colleges and the teachers in self-financing colleges. Teachers in the self-financing colleges have higher general professional autonomy than the teachers in aided colleges ( $3.20 > 3.05$ ). The teachers in self-financing colleges have higher collegial professional autonomy than the teachers in aided colleges ( $3.21 > 3.03$ ). It is also seen that the teachers in self-financing colleges have higher individual professional autonomy than the teachers in aided colleges ( $3.64 > 3.03$ ). The results reveal that there is a significance difference between the teachers of aided and self-financing institutions in the interpretation of institutional variable, professional autonomy. Hence the hypothesis 2, that "There is no

significant difference in the institution wise professional autonomy of teachers in higher education institutions" is rejected.

## FINDINGS

A significant and positive correlation was found between overall professional autonomy along with its components and job performance of the teachers in higher education institutions. There is a significant difference in the professional autonomy of teachers in self-financing colleges with that of the teachers in aided colleges. It is inferred that the self-financing institutions offer an environment with professional autonomy to the teachers.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from the above study that higher education institutions need to formulate strategies and norms to establish an institutional culture which will encourage professional autonomy of the teachers. As teachers are the key players of the institution, the policy makers should realize that the job performance of the teachers will be enhanced if the teachers perceive professional autonomy in their institution.

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