

# Teachers' Self-efficacy Beliefs and the development of ESL Autonomous Teachers' in Indonesia<sup>1</sup>

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## Summary:

Decentralization of educational decision-making potentially provides teachers with power and autonomy to make decisions concerning the school and classroom teaching practices. However, especially when teachers are not ready to act on the autonomy and to deal with challenges they face, it might also create a new set of problems. There is the possibility that wider teacher autonomy might promote confusion instead of educational improvement.

This paper argues that many English teachers in Indonesia are not ready to, and perhaps are unable to act autonomously in their professional lives. Previously teachers have been used to applying whatever the central government has asked them to implement through a prescribed curriculum, Curriculum 1994. These existing cultural practices did not encourage teacher autonomy. Therefore, now that the opportunity is widely available for teachers to have the power to decide what curriculum materials to bring into the classroom, teachers are not comfortable exercising this newly found autonomy. Thus, there is no guarantee that autonomy alone will necessarily contribute to improving the quality of the teaching that teachers provide on a daily basis.

It is therefore suggested that if teachers are to act confidently and exercise their autonomy in curricular decision-making, then their self-efficacy beliefs are of importance, especially if they are to *own* the reform agenda. Self-efficacy beliefs are instrumental in affecting the effort teachers put into teaching, in setting goals, and in the aspiration teachers have for themselves and their students. Furthermore, a high sense of efficacy is influential in the teachers' level of teaching enthusiasm (Allinder, 1994; Guskey, 1984; Pajares, 2002), commitment to teaching (Coladarci, 1992), with highly efficacious teachers tending to exercise higher levels of planning and organization (Allinder, 1994). As well as being persistent in dealing with problems and being more resilient in the face of setbacks (Ashton & Webb, 1986), they are more open to new ideas and willing to experiment with new methods (Guskey, 1988; Stein & Wang, 1988; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) Thus, how to build a high sense of efficacy among English teachers and how these beliefs contribute to teachers' autonomy are important questions. (347 words)

**Key words:** self-efficacy beliefs, teachers' self efficacy beliefs, teachers' autonomy

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## **A. Introduction**

During the last decade, Education system of Indonesia has been at its important stage, more particularly in relation to the recent changes in curriculum. This stage has actually been initiated in the former *GBHN 1999* that stressed the importance of decentralization and the need for diversification in education. Efforts to distribute the authority in conducting education to local institutions are in fact not new in education system in Indonesia. Bjork (2003) indicates that the government of Indonesia, at that time the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC), had already undertaken this distribution of authority in 1994 by issuing what known as the Local Content Curriculum. This curriculum required the local institutions, in this case primary and secondary schools, to allocate 20% of the schooling hours to deal with locally-designed subject matter. Due to the curricular requirement, there were a number of school subjects that were specifically designed to fit the special local characteristics of both the geographical and cultural aspects of the society in which the schools were located.

Decentralization in education in Indonesia is even more important with the introduction and implementation of Curriculum 2004, in which there is further shifting from central control to the local context (Depdiknas, 2003). This new curriculum prescribes only the Competency Standards, Basic Competencies and the Assessment system, with the decision in the development and use of materials and learning experiences being given to schools, and teachers in particular. The roles of schools and teachers are even more crucial with the 2006 change to the curriculum with the introduction of *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan* (KTSP 2006) in which schools, in this case school principal and teachers, together with experts, have to design and develop their own curriculum. This school-specific curriculum should be developed based on the guidance with respect to the graduate competence standards and content standards issued by the National Board for Education Standards (BNSP).

Although there are still other problems with the curriculum change, changes in education systems seem to indicate the rise in the perceived central roles of teachers in relation to the formation and development of school curricula. Furthermore, with the wide mandate given to teachers, it is expected to increase the quality of education in Indonesia. On the other hand, this wide mandate also bears consequences on teachers. They are expected to have more open access in decision making and have stronger sense

of autonomy, and more importantly are able to act properly on the autonomy they have now acquired. A crucial question will soon arise; will it be enough for teachers to bring about quality education when they can exercise greater autonomy in planning and implementing curricula?

In terms of teaching English as both second and foreign language, decentralization in education provides schools and EFL/ESL teachers –ESL teachers for practical reasons– with both opportunities and challenges. To a certain extent, decentralization provides schools and ESL teachers space in which to deal with teaching and learning practices. It also provides the teachers with freedom in making decisions that affect school practices. This freedom may eventually lead to the autonomy on the side of ESL teachers to determine what to do with their students. Decentralization, however, might also result in problems, especially when teachers are not ready to act on these new opportunities and to deal with the challenges they face. It is very possible that the greater autonomy given to teachers will end up with confusion instead of improvement in teaching practices that impact the quality of education and experiences offered to students.

The above condition seems to be a highly possible scenario to develop for the English teachers in Indonesia in particular. There is likely to be a concern that many teachers in Indonesia are not ready to be given open opportunities to determine their own classroom teaching practices. Such a concern is due to the long standing academic culture in which teachers functioned during the centralization era, when they were accustomed to implementing whatever curriculum the central government required of them. This culture was not conducive to the promotion of ESL teacher autonomy. Therefore, when such an opportunity is available, where ESL teachers have the power to decide what teaching materials and learning experiences to bring into the classroom, the result may not be what is expected and may result in creating problems.

Furthermore, acting on an autonomous state is sometimes not very easy. There are ESL teachers who in fact have enough access to power of influencing the school decisions that simply do not act on it. The problem here is not whether they have the autonomy, but whether they judge themselves able to act autonomously with respect to their autonomous state. How could this happen? The answer concerns the missing of an essential instrumental aspect needed by teachers to be able to confidently act on their autonomy. This belief of own ability in influencing outcome will be able to boost the

ability of teachers in autonomously exercising the power they have to influence practices in the school.

This paper will provide some arguments suggesting that autonomy alone is not enough to support the development of a high sense of autonomy among ESL teachers. In other words, only by providing teachers with wider autonomy will we be able to produce ESL autonomous teachers, and thus contribute much to the performance of the teachers in bringing quality education in the classroom. There must be other aspects of ESL teachers that might trigger them to be able to confidently act on the autonomy. In trying to elaborate the case, this paper will start by presenting some ideas concerning what autonomy is, followed by suggesting essential trigger that might cause teachers to be able to act autonomously. This trigger, which is believed to be instrumental in developing autonomous teachers, is known as *teachers' self-efficacy beliefs*. Finally, this paper will present a mechanism for how teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are instrumental in the development of teachers' sense of autonomy.

## **B. Teachers' Sense of Autonomy**

Researchers consider teachers' autonomy a dimension or factor of teachers' empowerment (Wilson, 1993; Short, 1994). According to Short, autonomy refers to teachers' beliefs that they can control aspects of their own work life (Short, 1994). This includes the beliefs in their control over scheduling, curriculum, textbooks, and instructional planning. The essence of teacher autonomy is teachers' sense of freedom to make decisions. Autonomous teachers, according to this view, are those who believe in their control on instructional aspects such as schedule, curriculum, textbooks and can act freely to implement their decisions in their instructional activities. Wilson, in her Self-empowerment index (SEI) to measure teacher autonomy, differentiates the items into *internal autonomy items* (9 items) and *externally expressed autonomy items* (16 items). In addition, she suggests that teachers' autonomy might refer to teachers' trust in their own perception and feeling, belief in their own internal source of power, self-rewarding and internal satisfaction (Wilson, 1993). Autonomous teachers, therefore, are those who do not act because merely of external sources of motivation but more intrinsically because they believe that they need to do them and are capable of doing them, and are satisfied when they have done them.

Pearson & Hall suggest another construct of teachers' autonomy by suggesting two sub-constructs of general teaching autonomy and curriculum autonomy, consisting of two categories respectively (Pearson & Hall, 1993). In their 20-item *Teaching Autonomy Scale*, they classify *general teaching autonomy* as autonomy related to classroom standards of conduct and personal on-the-job internal decision making; *curriculum autonomy*, on the other hand, covers the autonomy related to selection activities, materials, instructional planning and sequencing.

To give a clearer picture of what teacher autonomy is, the following are examples of items that appear in one measure of autonomy in teaching, the *Teaching Autonomy Scale* (TAS for short). In Pearson and Hall's refined version of *TAS* (Pearson & Hall, 1993), there are 20 items to which subjects are asked to rate their judgment on a 4-point Likert's scale ranging from 1 (*definitely true*) to 4 (*definitely false*). Here are five sample items taken randomly from the scale.

1. I am free to be creative in my teaching approach (Item No 1 in TAS)
2. The selection of student-learning activities in my class is under my control (2)
3. The scheduling of use of time in my classroom is under my control (10)
4. In my situation, I have only limited latitude in how major problems are resolved (13)
5. The evaluation and assessment activities used in my class are selected by people other than myself (17)

### **C. Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs**

#### **Self-efficacy, self-concept and self esteem**

It is very possible that self-efficacy beliefs are confused with self-concepts or self esteem. Not like self-concepts and self-esteem which are more global constructs, self efficacy beliefs are context-specific assessments of oneself competence or ability to perform a specific task (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1997). While self-concept consists of many perceptions about self, including self-efficacy beliefs, and is developed partially from the comparison of self with others, self efficacy is more of individuals' ability in accomplishing context-specific tasks (Hoy, 2004). Self efficacy beliefs are about the future, about what someone will be able to do in a particular situation, not what someone already accomplished in the past. It is true to say that past time achievement has a strong

support to the development of self-efficacy beliefs since experience of mastery is one of the main and most important sources of self-efficacy beliefs. It is, however, worth noting that efficacy is not the same as past achievement.

In further differentiating self-efficacy from self-esteem, Hoy states that self-esteem concerns more with judgments of self-worth. It is not necessarily that people with low self-efficacy beliefs in a certain task will have self-esteem as far as the task in which she is not highly efficacious does not directly related with the judgment of his or her self-worth.

### **What are self-efficacy beliefs?**

Before talking further about what teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are, it is important to see Goddard's warning about using correct terms to refer to this concept. He states that:

The distinction between perception of competence and actual competence or performance is particularly important when considering teachers' sense of efficacy. The shorthand form often used is 'teachers' efficacy'. Using this term, however, can be misleading because the readers may make the logical mistakes by assuming that teachers' efficacy is the same as teacher effectiveness or successful teaching (Goddard, et. al. 2004).

Instead of using the term teacher efficacy, Goddard, Hoy & Hoy suggest the use of terms like perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Pajares, 1997), efficacy judgments, sense of efficacy, and efficacy beliefs which all refer to judgment about capabilities to accomplish a task.

Although this paper tends to agree with Goddard, it is in fact a bit more flexible in the use of the terms. This is due to the wide range of terminology differences in the existing studies. It might, therefore, be found in this paper the interchangeable use of the above terms. What it tries to hold is that although there is no direct connection between teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and successful teaching because there are still other aspects affecting teachers' performance in the classroom, these beliefs are crucially needed by teachers in order to act confidently on their autonomy.

Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce pre-determined levels of performance that exercise influence over events that effect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine the ways people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave (Bandura, 1997). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy defines teachers' self efficacy beliefs as teachers' judgment of their ability to affect learning outcome in

terms of students' involvement and learning. This judgment of ability does not only apply to students with regular ability but also to those experiencing with difficulties and/or lack of motivation (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; cf. Armor, 1976; Bandura, 1977).

There have been a great number of research studies related to the search for self-efficacy constructs. The search of self-efficacy beliefs dates back to the 1960s with the work of Rotter that initiated the RAND researchers to evaluate the beliefs of teachers in their own capability in controlling the reinforcement of their actions (Armor et al., 1976 in Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). This then stimulated many researchers to investigate these beliefs. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) has proposed that the teachers' self-efficacy construct consists of three areas; efficacy for instructional strategies, students' engagement, and classroom management. When teachers have a high sense of efficacy in all three areas, they will have the potential for being able to act on their power to influence school decisions. This, in turn, will boost the sense of autonomy of the teachers. Teachers with a higher sense of efficacy will be very confident in acting on their autonomy in making decisions and take the responsibility of the decisions they have made. Teachers with a low sense of efficacy, on the other hand, will end up in a state of confusion when they are expected to act autonomously.

In terms of aspects of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, some researchers come up with different classifications. Bandura (1997) categorizes teachers' self-efficacy beliefs into seven categories as 1) efficacy to influence the decision making, 2) efficacy to influence school resources 3) instructional efficacy, 4) disciplinary efficacy, 5) efficacy to enlist parental involvement, 6) efficacy to enlist community involvement, and 7) efficacy to create a positive school climate. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) classify three aspects in their Teacher Self Efficacy Scale, as efficacy for instructional strategies, efficacy for classroom management, and efficacy for student engagement. Some other researchers name the aspects differently (Rotter, 1966; Guskey, 1981; Ashton, et. al., 1982; Gibson and Dembo, 1984 in Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

### **Sources of self-efficacy beliefs**

Although there are variations in the constructs of self-efficacy beliefs among researchers, it seems that there is an agreement in terms of sources of efficacy. Bandura

suggests four sources of self-efficacy beliefs. Those are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion and somatic and emotional states (Bandura, 1997).

According to Hoy, most of the time mastery is the most important source of self-efficacy (Hoy, 2004). Past time mastery of a certain task, especially when the accomplishment is attributed to own efforts and ability, will help build sense of efficacy. People with a good mastery experience will normally have a high sense of efficacy because such mastery experience robusts their judgment of their ability in doing the same tasks. Another source of efficacy relates the experiences of a certain model that people identify themselves with. This is what is referred to as vicarious experiences (Bandura; 1997, Pajares, 1997, Hoy, 2004). The more closely they identify themselves with the model, the greater the effect of their models' success. Social persuasion is another source of self-efficacy beliefs. It is in the form of performance feedback from other people. Although it is weaker than the first two sources (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1997), social persuasion can help counter setbacks that might instill doubt and interrupt persistence (Hoy, 2004). The last source of sense of self-efficacy is the psychological state. Anxiety, stress, arousal, fatigue, and mood states provide information about efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1997).

### **Self-efficacy beliefs and ESL teachers' autonomy**

In relation to the development of teachers' autonomy, teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are believed to affect the efforts teacher put in teaching, the goal setting, and the aspiration teachers have. Highly efficacious teachers tend to exercise higher levels of planning and organization (Allinder, 1994), more open to new ideas and are more willing to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs of the students (Guskey, 1988; Stein & Wang 1988, in Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 2001). Teachers with a higher sense of efficacy will also be more persistent to problems they face and more resilient when facing setbacks. When teachers are highly efficacious, they tend to act confidently because they believe in what they do and the consequences of what they do.

Although teachers' self efficacy beliefs are very important for teachers in their professional life, it is not necessarily that highly efficacious teachers will perform high quality teaching. It may be that highly efficacious teachers have problems in undertaking their teaching practices. One possible reason is that because there is not enough space and

support to exercise their sense of efficacy. It is, therefore, essential for teachers to be highly efficacious as well as supported by teacher colleagues, administrative staff members, school principal and parents. There has been research on the support of teacher colleagues and schools in a broad sense in the development of teachers' sense of efficacy. Most research suggests that there is a need for strong teacher collective efficacy to help develop teachers' individual self-efficacy beliefs or vice versa (Bandura, 1997; Goddard, R.D, et.al, 2004; Kurz, 2000). It is, therefore, suggested that the higher sense of teachers' individual efficacy together with collective efficacy and support from the schools will enhance the sense of autonomy among teachers.

#### **D. The effect of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs on ESL teachers' sense of autonomy.**

Block (1987 in Wilson, 1993) theorized that the focus of empowerment is on the need for individual within a certain institution to have a sense of autonomy and the ability to express such autonomy to others. However, he also suggests that in order for empowerment to occur, individuals should be first of all self-empowered. To become self-empowered, individuals should have internal beliefs that they have the ability to produce the designated levels of performance (Wilson, 1993). This is actually what self-efficacy belief means. The question is how such beliefs can be so instrumental in realizing the sense of autonomy.

Bandura (1997) states that self-efficacy beliefs affect human functioning through four major psychological processes –cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes. In terms of cognitive processes, the effect of self-efficacy beliefs might take in various forms. Among others, he suggests that the stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal challenges people set for themselves and the firmer is their commitment to the goals. Efficacy beliefs also shape the types of anticipatory scenarios they construct and rehearse.

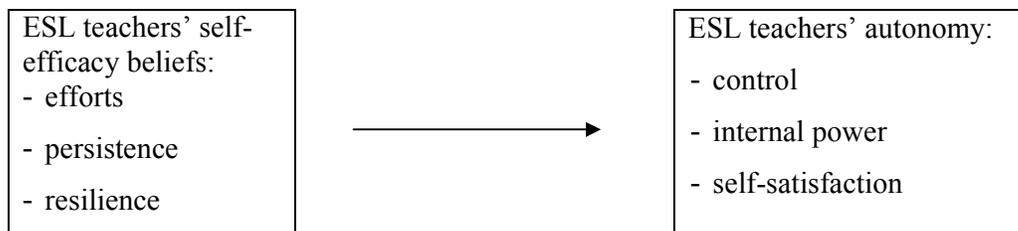
As mentioned previously, to be autonomous means believing in their own control and internal power to do certain tasks. It also means believing that they are capable of providing satisfaction in relation to their own accomplishments. To this extent, it seems that granting autonomy is the right answer for ESL teachers to bring their aspirations into their own classroom practices. This once again will be effective once the teachers are highly efficacious in terms of their beliefs in their capability of doing the teaching tasks.

The problem is that not many ESL teachers in Indonesia feel that they have the capability of acting on their autonomous professional life. If that is the case, then developing ESL teachers' self efficacy beliefs seems to be the most logical thing to do to help develop autonomous ESL teachers.

ESL autonomous teachers should be capable of acting autonomously to conduct English teaching in the classroom, starting from the preparation to the assessment to the students' achievement. To be autonomous, ESL teachers need high sense of efficacy specifically in terms of efficacy for both spoken and written English, efficacy for instructional strategy, efficacy for classroom management and efficacy for student engagement. Furthermore, in the context of teaching English in Indonesia there is a context-specific sense of efficacy that ESL teachers in Indonesia need to have. This is the efficacy-beliefs related to the implementation of Curriculum 2004 and/or KTSP 2006. It means that high-sense of efficacy for curriculum implementation is a crucial aspect for Indonesia ESL teachers.

When Indonesia ESL teachers are highly efficacious, they are expected to be able to prepare for the school curriculum –designing syllabuses, lesson plans, teaching materials and learning experiences-, conducting teaching of English based on the curriculum, and doing the assessment on the students' achievement. Being highly efficacious in all aspects of English teaching hopefully autonomous teachers will not be difficult to develop. The remaining question will be how self-efficacy really support the development of EFL teachers in Indonesia?

Here is a chart showing the possible effects of self-efficacy beliefs on teachers' sense of autonomy.



Looking at the chart, it can be said that an improvement in ESL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs will improve the ESL teachers in terms of putting more effort into doing certain English teaching tasks, becoming more persistent when faced with problems, and becoming more resilient when faced with different situations. When ESL teachers have

already developed such high self-efficacy beliefs they will hopefully be able to act on the autonomy they have been given. They will put more effort into and seek for alternative solutions, instead of easily giving up when they faced with difficulties and problems. Highly efficacious ESL teachers will also think that the control over the level of accomplishment of certain ESL teaching tasks depends on themselves, on how they approach the tasks and how much effort they put in. Furthermore, when ESL teachers have greater beliefs in their own ability of doing certain tasks and they believe that they have internal power to do the tasks, they will be able to act on their autonomy. By putting more effort, being persistent when faced with problems and resilient in searching for alternative solutions, ESL teachers will eventually arrive at maximum performance that provides them with maximum self-satisfaction.

#### **E. Conclusion and further direction for future teacher development program**

The movement of granting autonomy to ESL teachers could present a major issue related to whether the teachers will be able to bring about a quality English teaching in the classroom. There might be two possible answers to the issue. They could certainly be *yes* when ESL teachers are ready to act on the autonomy, but *no* when they are not ready to act on it. One predictor of whether ESL teachers will be able to act autonomously is the level of their self-efficacy beliefs. High efficacious ESL teachers will confidently do their teaching-related tasks autonomously, while low efficacious teachers will not.

Regarding the above issue, professional development programs to develop ESL autonomous teachers need to pay attention to the efforts of investigating the level of ESL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs as a basis of program development. By having a careful look at the teacher-self efficacy beliefs, it is expected that the development program will address appropriate professional needs of the ESL teachers. When autonomous ESL teachers are the aim of the teacher future development, developing self-efficacy beliefs will certainly be worth doing.

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